

NAXAL FREE INDIA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks often set the Indians thinking. On Tuesday he addressed a private channel's summit in Delhi where he spoke from the heart. Besides his pitch for how a self-confident India is growing and attracting global interest, he spoke about the massive change that government policy can bring in the lives of common people. He spoke about his government's policy to end decades of naxal militancy and free ten crore people living in these areas from lack of development and neglect. Early this year, the Ministry of Home Affairs had announced end of naxalism with elimination of top leadership by security forces and the mass surrender by the cadres and even remaining leaders. Mostly people in the cities often fail to empathise with the plight of the scheduled tribe communities who had been living under the terror of naxal groups with their infamous stories of revenge and violence. They made sure that development did not touch the lives of the tribal communities. This is why Prime Minister spoke about this. The nation had almost decided to live with the low key insurgency of these groups and forgot about the right of development of the communities kept hostage by these groups through the narrative and the real violence. None of the previous regimes felt the urgency to change this. He reminded the country men that the naxal violence did not end in a jiffy. It takes a policy, a determination towards public good and lots of sacrifices by the people and the security forces to end militancy. He made two profound points for the people of India to think about. First was when government take strong decisions for public good, it works. Second, a change begins with the sense of the cause. In This case, the future of 10 crore Indians – tribal communities – was at stake, and it was a cause worth fighting for.

Factionalism, drift and decline: Congress's J&K challenge

Anil Anand

Picking up from what one had written months back in this column on the endangered but truly portrayed Nehruvian model, based on plurality, secularism and multiculturalism, in demoted and disintegrated erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, the developing circumstances warrant further delving into the matter. There is a circumstantial transition, from then to now, with shifting of roles from the Narendra Modi government authoring the shake-up in the constitutional scheme of things, in fulfillment of their political and ideological agenda, to focus on the misdeemeanours of Congress.

The Grand-Old-Party (GOP), which should have stood ground to safeguard the Nehruvian model in the sensitive and strategic Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, has not only dithered, faltered and fallen flat. The All India Congress Committee and its spearheads are much to be blamed alongside the PCC leadership of time to time. Significance of J & K was much high in the Nehruvian scheme of things, which despite having some grey areas and controversial aspects saw democracy strengthening in the ultra-diverse state with three distinct regions- Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

Right from the 1975 Indira Gandhi-Sheikh Abdullah accord, which led to the rehabilitation of the Sher-e-Kashmir (as the Sheikh is popularly called in Kashmir) with Congress pulling down its own government, chief minister Syed Mir Qasim resigned to make way for a Sheikh-led government of National Conference, has no parallel in the history of Indian democracy. No doubt, the national interest under the gaze of the Nehruvian model, must have been the guiding force behind rehabilitation of the Sheikh, without any doubt the tallest leader of Jammu and Kashmir. It spelt disaster for Congress, which the party strategists not only failed to contain



but followed it up with a disastrous approach coupled with fueling factionalism, egged on from New Delhi.

Even the tallest of the leaders such as Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, who subsequently parted ways with the party as result of factionalism, and Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, despite their towering stature, turned a blind eye towards protecting the Nehruvian model or arresting the factionalism. Instead, the leaders played their games to achieve personal milestones. The Congress suffered all this while and is continuing to do so. After the 1975 model, the two developments taking place three decades later, were a direct reflection of the mindset of the decision makers in the Congress's higher echelons and exposed the inner weaknesses of the party in terms of leadership.

First, the appointment of Prof Saif-ud-Din Soz, who had his political roots in National Conference, as PCC chief, and more recently, Mr Tariq Hamid Karra, who came from Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The results are for everyone to see with Congress having lost its grassroots character, in Jammu to BJP and in Kashmir to National Conference and PDP. The lack of credible leadership, either due to over-arching influence of the veteran leaders of the yore who checked this growth, or attempts by a coterie to dominate and not give space to new leadership, has become the Congress's bane. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Mr Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra evoked a tremendous

response among the people cutting across regions. It kindled a hope for the Congress's revival not only in Jammu, where it still has pockets of influence and following, but also Kashmir. The subsequent mishandling of the party affairs and total lack of interest by the AICC in containing factionalism, has pushed the Congress in J & K to the crossroads. Both Mr Soz and Mr Karra, coming from different political backgrounds and without any mass-base of their own, thrived on the backing of the Gandhi family.

However, both of them failed to command the organisation for different reasons and capping the factionalism. This led to, as is the case under current PCC chief, Mr Karra despite full backing of the top leadership, total demoralisation in the organisation. What has made the matter worst is approach of the central leadership, including the AICC in-charges appointed from time to time, to perpetuate the ineffective system and not disturb the incumbent UT PCC chief so as not to antagonise his source of power in Delhi. Least the present AICC in charge, Syed Naseer Hussain, could have done was to convince the PCC chief to carry everyone along. The vested interest in the Jammu and Kashmir Congress have thrived.

A fresh round of "open-war" has ensued between factions claiming to be in the vanguard of saving the Congress ideology based on the Nehruvian spirit, and those far removed from it. The sudden appointment of Mr Karra, on the eve of the 2024 assembly elections replacing Mr Vikar Rasool Wani, who has since launched the latest tirade seeking central intervention, wrong selection of candidates (allegedly at the behest of some influential local Congress leaders with the patronage of the then AICC in-charge Mr Bharat Singh Solanki) and mishandling, has pushed the UT Congress to the throes of serious cri-

sis. The one big fallout is that despite being a partner in the ruling alliance with National Conference, though giving outside support, Congress is not in the reckoning of the Omar Abdullah government. Latest example of this was the convening of a meeting of the ruling alliance MLAs to which the Congress legislators were not invited. At stake in Jammu and Kashmir is the core of the Nehruvian ideology and model. And the Congress is morally bound to protect whatever of it is left by seriously taking its organisational matters.

There is no space for further experimentation as it has, coupled with personal whims and fancies of the leaders, already considerably harmed the party, which has an important role to play not only nationally but in Jammu and Kashmir, as it is the only party with a pan-J and K spread. Since a perceived Rahul Gandhi-acolyte is in the centre of the storm, and perhaps no one dare advise him on J & K Congress affairs, he must come out and act decisively. The vested interests seem to be using his name as a shield to allow the system to perpetuate. It is not too late for Mr Gandhi to order an internal probe into the ticket distribution during the 2024 Lok Sabha and later J & K assembly elections, which might give him interesting insights. More importantly, the AICC in-charges should be appointed, in all states and UTs, with a strong message of accountability.

Congress has a vital role to play in Jammu and Kashmir to balance the current mode of politics based on BJP's (with its ever expanding but frustratingly saturated domain) communally divisive framework, and unabashed fanatical regionalism of the regional parties such as National Conference and PDP. No scope for delay or else new and more-divisive and regional forces are threatening to raise their ugly head.

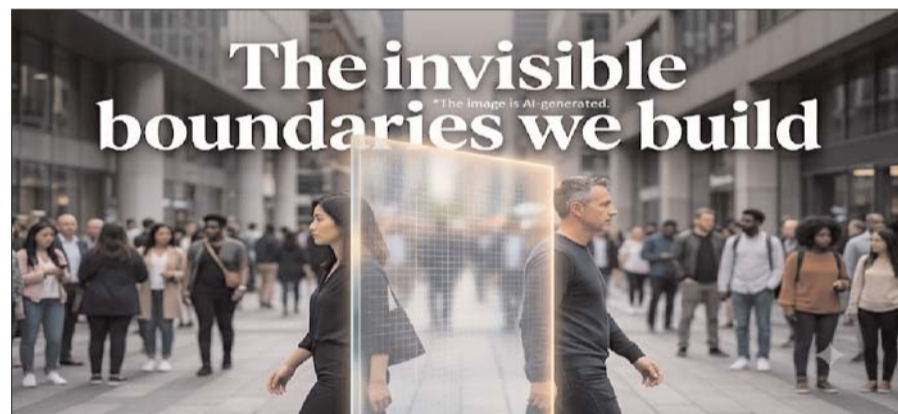
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THE INVISIBLE BOUNDARIES WE BUILD

Sanjay Chandra

Urban India has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Our cities are more prosperous, our homes more comfortable, and our lifestyles more modern than those of previous generations. Yet beneath this visible progress, some older attitudes continue to survive in ways that are often difficult to acknowledge. A few recent discussions within my own residential society brought this reality into sharp focus. One discussion centred around a domestic worker who had left a part-time arrangement to accept a full-time position elsewhere. The response from some residents was revealing. There was an expectation that the community should somehow regulate such movement, as though the worker's freedom to choose a better opportunity was negotiable.

The same discussion produced another suggestion that was even more troubling. Some residents argued that domestic workers should not use the same lifts as apartment owners. The argument was presented as practicality and convenience. Yet beneath it lay an assumption that certain people, despite working there every day, somehow belonged to a different category. Another discussion arose when a resident discovered that the husbands of certain domestic workers employed in the society



had criminal records. The concern for safety was understandable. What puzzled me, however, was the assumption that the actions of those men somehow cast suspicion upon the women themselves. We routinely argue that individuals should be judged on their own merits, yet that principle often appears to weaken when applied across social and economic boundaries.

What struck me was not the existence of such views, but the fact that they were expressed by educated, successful, and professionally accomplished individuals. Economic progress, it seems, does not automatically eliminate social prejudice. Perhaps this is because many forms of discrimination no longer present themselves openly. They survive in subtler ways-in as-

sumptions about status, in expectations about who belongs where, and in beliefs about whose choices deserve respect and whose do not.

The irony is difficult to miss. Many of us rightly expect dignity, fairness, and equal opportunity in our own professional lives. We resist discrimination when it affects us. Yet we sometimes struggle to extend the same principles to those whose lives intersect with ours through work and service. What makes this particularly significant is that such attitudes are no longer confined to inherited social structures. They increasingly appear within gated residential complexes that pride themselves on education, professionalism, and progressive values. The physical distance between peo-

ple may have narrowed as they live within the same gated complexes, use common facilities, and participate in community events. Yet social distance often remains intact. Old assumptions continue to survive beneath the veneer of modernity and progress. We may share addresses without sharing perspectives. We may inhabit the same community while unconsciously maintaining invisible boundaries between those who belong and those who merely serve. The challenge before urban India is not merely to build better infrastructure, but to build more inclusive communities. Modern urban spaces bring together people from vastly different social and economic backgrounds.

The real test is not the quality of their infrastructure, but their capacity to treat every individual with dignity. Progress is not measured only by rising incomes or professional success. It is also measured by our willingness to recognise the humanity of those whom society has traditionally placed on the other side of invisible social boundaries. Modern buildings can bring people closer together, but only mutual respect can make them a truly inclusive and compassionate community.

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New India moves from suspicion to trust, from fear to freedom

Shri Piyush Goyal

For decades, India's regulatory architecture dealt with citizens with deep mistrust, and regarded them as criminals for minor, procedural violations, or mere suspicion by a person in authority. In a refreshing change, the Modi government has made policies rooted in trust and compassion for the common man.

PM Modi has taken significant steps towards improving India's legislative landscape to support citizens and businesses, simplify compliances, and acknowledge the practical difficulties businesses face. Whether through reducing compliance burdens, digitisation, or single-window clearances, the broader shift has been towards making governance more reasonable and efficient.

The PM's mantra of governance based on trust and compassion is clearly visible in the Jan Vishwas Act, 2026, and a similar law in 2023.

Citizen friendly - To create a citizen-friendly regulatory environment

and encourage compliance, the new law deals with minor offences with clear principles: Warning before punishment, making penalties proportional to the severity of the offence, swift and transparent resolution, and a dynamic penalty framework with periodic revision to ensure that enforcement remains effective, relevant, and responsive over time.

This represents a major shift in regulatory approach, compliance, and enforcement in line with the PM's view that India's 21st-century aspirations cannot be realised through governance tools of the bygone colonial era.

The scale of the reform is unprecedented. The Jan Vishwas Act amends 784 provisions across 79 Central Acts administered by 23 Ministries. It decriminalises 717 provisions and rationalises another 67 to improve ease of living. It is the largest decriminalisation exercise in independent India's legislative history.

It rationalises more than 1,000 offences, removes outdated and redundant provisions, omits obsolete colo-

nial-era offences, and strengthens adjudication and appeal mechanisms outside criminal courts.

Welcome Changes - Earlier, anybody could be imprisoned for three months for merely being present in a house, building, or vehicle between sunset and sunrise without a "satisfactory explanation". This reflected the colonial-era, suspicion-based approach that treated ordinary movement as potentially criminal. The reform abolishes this offence altogether, aligning the law with modern principles.

Under the previous framework, if a person's driving license expired, the next day a driver faced criminal charges for being on the road. The new law provides a 30-day grace period.

Consider also a small manufacturer who fails to update registration details under the Apprentices Act. Earlier, this was a criminal lapse but now strong action is allowed only for repeated non-compliance.

Similarly, a procedural lapse in documentation by a mining company

could earlier lead to imprisonment. Today, such cases attract civil penalties. Criminal liability remains for illegal mining, fraud, wilful harm, and serious violations of public interest; not for paperwork.

12 Years of gains for all - The Jan Vishwas legislation is a symbol of PM Modi's effort to ease life for all our citizens. This has been the key mission of PM Modi in his 12 years of service to the nation as Prime Minister, and earlier as Chief Minister of Gujarat.

Jan Vishwas 2026 builds on an important foundation. In 2023, India decriminalised 183 provisions across 42 Acts through the first Jan Vishwas Act. That effort demonstrated that decriminalisation could improve governance without weakening enforcement. The 2026 legislation expands the exercise nearly fourfold, signalling that this is not a one-time initiative but a continuing reform direction.

Larger mission - The new law is actually a part of the larger mission of PM Modi to improve the lives of Indians. In this mission, the PM has

strived to provide roti, kapda aur makaan to every citizen and ensured that welfare expenditure is transferred directly to beneficiaries, unlike the days of Congress rule when the then PM Rajiv Gandhi said that only 15% of the money spent on welfare actually reached the poor.

Replacing low-value criminal provisions with administrative and monetary frameworks is a welcome move not just for the ordinary citizen, it also helps small businesses. It allows enforcement agencies to focus on serious violations rather than routine technical breaches. Courts can devote their attention to cases that genuinely require judicial intervention.

Economy and Investment - The benefits extend beyond governance. In an increasingly competitive global economy, regulatory credibility matters. For years, concerns about criminal prosecution for technical lapses were among the most frequently cited deterrents to investment. India has witnessed a 143 per cent increase in FDI between 2014 and 2025, and the trend of increasing FDI continues.

Regulatory reform has been an important part of this growth

Jan Vishwas 2026 is designed to strengthen that momentum by making India a more predictable and reliable destination for investment and enterprise.

The reform also offers relief to the justice system. Many of the more than 5.5 crore pending cases, including approximately 4.9 crore in district and subordinate courts, involve minor regulatory matters, which are now decriminalised. Moving such cases to administrative adjudication is not merely a business reform, it is a judicial reform that allows courts to focus their limited time and resources on serious disputes and questions of justice.

Serious violations will continue to attract serious consequences. The law remains firm where firmness is necessary. What changes is the approach. Governance has moved from suspicion to trust, from prosecution to correction, and from fear to freedom.

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