

WEST ASIA ESCALATES

While Iran's entire leadership was travelling with the coffin of former Supreme leader ayatollah Ali Khamenei to Iraq before the final burial, the US hit at one of its military bases ending what was already a fragile truce. US President Donald Trump used harsh words against Iran after resuming the war at a time when the country was in a state of mourning. Iran too never choose to deescalate the anti-US rhetoric or work on peace and reconciliation. Tehran has since threatened to retaliate, not directly against the US but its Gulf allies which were a bad news for the peace of the world and the oil prices. The interim truce did not lead to both sides calming down and working on reconciliation; it seemed more out of calculated cessation of hostilities and goaded by short term interests of the countries involved. As the Indian spokesperson said the conflict resolution needs good diplomacy. The quick fix solutions will not help. Also the mediation must be done by some serious and credible force than a country like Pakistan.

BRAHMOS FOR INDONESIA
Indonesia has become the third country in the Red China sea also called the backyard of China to purchase the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles from India. The deal to this effect was finalized during the just concluded three day visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the country with which India shares a rich past, history and culture. While PM Modi signed several pacts the one on defence sales raised eyebrows in the developed world. The BrahMos missile is a tested one. Indonesia's neighbours like Vietnam and the Philippines have already purchased it. Both Vietnam and the Philippines have a maritime border dispute with China and this missile can give these countries a terrific deterrence for China to desist from aggressive posturing. Looking from India, India has come to be recognized as a rising defence exporter and it's good for the economy.

Restoring trust in India's examination system

JS Rajput

The successful conduct of the rescheduled NEET-2026 examination offered India a moment of relief after weeks of uncertainty triggered by a devastating paper leak. Yet the crisis, followed by the CBSE Class XII evaluation controversy and the tragic coaching centre fire in Lucknow, has exposed deeper structural flaws that extend far beyond administrative lapses.

India heaved a great sigh of relief in the evening of June 21 of 2026, as the media splashed reports of the successful conduct of the rescheduled NEET-2026 exam. Its earlier cancellation on account of the paper leak had cast a pall of widespread gloom not only on the young aspirants and their families but throughout the nation. It cast serious aspersions on our examination management systems, institutions and the expertise generated over several decades. The community of teachers felt greatly let down as details of the modus operandi used by the mafia and the anti-social elements emerged. The needle of suspicion moved swiftly to the paper setters, to teachers, academics and educators. The coaching centres were obviously there as the usual suspects. The union education minister has lately called it a great betrayal and one fully endorses his assessment. When a paper-setter in an examination of any level stoops to the level of leaking the paper, becoming a shameful part and parcel of the mafia involved in corrupting the education and examination system, the nation must get alerted and ponder over the inadequacies in preparing and recruiting its teachers at every stage. The system in spite of its vast magnitude, just can't afford to have even a single teacher bereft of moral and ethical conduct.

Consequently, India must also seriously audit its systems of teacher preparation, recruitment and procedures of ascertaining their continuous academic advancement and professional growth along with the critical contours of personality development. Teachers are supposed to nurture moral, ethical and humanistic values

in their wards. They are supposed to scrupulously adhere to an exemplary work culture, which is quietly internalised by their students. Every teacher is a partner in preparing the future of India. They are the role models with whom the child interacts as the child transitions to school. Others come only at a later stage.

As the nation was slowly coming out of the anguish and anxiety inflicted by the postponement of the NEET exam, the CBSE announced its Class XII results, and that created an unprecedented situation of gloom and despair. For the first time, the CBSE opted for the digital marking system popularly known as OSM (On-Screen Marking). It chose Class XII for it, a stage that determines the individual-specific future course of studies that the learner would like to pursue. The CBSE claims to have taken all the necessary steps to prepare its own system and train its evaluators to perform their job efficiently. The technical glitches, and probably also deficiencies, on the part of the outsourced agency let down the CBSE. The sufferings inflicted on the enthusiastic yet highly sensitive young people disrupted their future plans in numerous instances, as the results they received were far below their expectations.

One expects the CBSE would be better equipped with technical expertise and conduct all of its future exams successfully. When even a single young person commits suicide, due to the inefficiency and greed of others, the entire nation needs to take note of the factors responsible for it. Responsibility must be fixed and stern actions taken wherever necessary. Unfortunately, it has not been the case in the past, the guilty are not behind bars.

As if the two exam fiascos referred to above were not enough to give a wake-up call to all concerned, the Lucknow coaching center fire that snatched away fifteen young lives comes as a thundering wake-up call. The Uttar Pradesh Government has responded swiftly, 18 engineers booked, four more arrested. Coaching Centers are being inspected throughout

the state! It is well established that every fire tragedy is invariably a consequence of total neglect of fire safety norms, classes conducted in structures that brutally ignore the structural building norms. One wonders why these basic essentials are not checked at regular intervals. Extraordinary arrangements were made to ensure the proper conduct of the NEET re-examination on June 21. There were no reports of impersonators or solvers even making an attempt to trespass.

The planning worked, and the successful conduct brought a sigh of relief. One fervently hopes that the systems will gear themselves afresh, and in the coming years, no young individual shall encounter situations that could plunge him/her in continuous anxiety, uncertainty, a sense of fear, and underperformance. Every human being is touched to the core when the reports of the suicide note of a teenager: 'I just can't bear the tension already undergone once again'. One's heart goes out to the bereaved families; every sensitive soul mourns with them.

This probably does not include the mafia, and also the parents who encourage the purchase of 'leaked papers', spend vulgar amounts, and commit the sin of throwing away millions of other young people and their families in immeasurable agony and pain.

When even a single suicide takes place consequent upon anti-social and immoral machinations of rogue elements, the entire nation must stand up to ensure that it's not repeated again. In a humane world, everyone who believes in "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" has a role to perform. The social system must take a serious note, expose them as the culprits who damage lives, kill young aspirations, and commit heinous social sacrilege.

Apart from putting all our expectations of strict action against the mafia solely on government action, which have been mostly inadequate, lethargic and inefficient, time has come when institutions, teachers and academics, and non-political social activists also accept their role in

bringing back the moral order in the world of education.

It is common knowledge that when it comes to the preparation of a child in the family for examinations like CBSE, NEET, JEE and others, it is the entire family that gears up to assist and inspire. No disturbance or distractions could be permitted. Think of the anxiety and hope of the parents of a brilliant child, educated in a government school, from a family with scant earnings, how life-transforming could be the success in such examinations.

The challenge before the nation is to restore the reputation of its schools and higher education organisations in their competence and capability to maintain the purity of the system of examinations and assessment at each stage. The uncertainty, anxiety and the tension must not be permitted to retard the enthusiasm and self-confidence of even a single child getting ready to compete. The community of teachers must come forward as one unit to keep the miscreants out.

The NEP-2020 has prominently assured the nation, "The teacher shall be at the centre of the fundamental reforms in education system." It commits to making teachers "as the most respected and essential members of our society. The teachers must feel empowered and enabled to perform their duty effectively." The present position of teachers is well known to the system and society. It would require Herculean efforts to bring it to the appropriate level indicated above. There is no escape but to strive hard as the system has to be reformed and transformed effectively.

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The author is an educationist, a Padma Shri awardee, and works in religious unity and social cohesion; Views presented are personal.

GET EMPOWERED NOW NOT LATER

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

It is sad for me to see people around where I live falling sick in old age and getting restricted to their bedrooms, served by servants. All the pleasures of life have gone except watching serials endlessly. It is somehow passing time waiting for the inevitable death. Has God left us so helpless?

The answer is a big No with a capital N. What kind of system has God set for us? There are two kinds of acts we can do, which are spiritual and material. Most people, including the rich and powerful, limit themselves to material acts now and have done so in the past.

These acts have long fruition periods. Generally, what we have done in the past lives bring fruits in this life, and what we do in the present life brings fruits in future lives. Spiritual acts are different. They come to fruition almost immediately.

The following examples should convince you. Swami Vivekananda turned a devotee at a young age. He desired to attend the Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago in 1893.

Everything was arranged by God. Not



only was he allowed to speak there, but when he spoke, he thrilled the delegates to such an extent that they could not stop cheering. Swamiji had been empowered by God to speak.

Goswami Tulsidas was an orphan. What did he do, which changed everything? He became a devotee. He was so overcome

with emotion when he was writing the epic Ramcharitmanas that he thanked his worshipable Lord Ramachandra from his heart for empowering him to write such a spiritual text. If his love was overflowing, Meerabai's love knew no bounds. She was given a choice between stopping worshipping her Giridhar Gopal and getting pun-

ished by drinking poison. We all know what she chose. And we also know what her Giridhar Gopal did? He made the poison harmless.

I can go on with these famous examples, but I have plenty of personal experiences as well to convince me about God's unlimited 'kripa' (mercy) on His devotees. I am an engineer by education. I am a businessman by profession. So what has my Lord empowered me to do? To write spiritual texts. Is it believable? To my credit, I had desired writing and I took shelter of God.

What are we waiting for? God is waiting not for one but all of us. He has so much to give. Isn't God the owner of everything we see or don't even see? Nothing is lost. What God has asked us to do in a spiritual text like the Bhagavad-Gita is entirely practical. Why lament about the present and fear the worst? Aren't we parts of God (15.7) connected eternally with Him? We may ignore Him, but His door is always open for us. Walk in and begin experiencing what God has promised: "I will provide what you need, and protect what you have." (9.22) This includes health in old age. Ask me?

Collaborative effort can make the difference between life and death

Swapna Majumdar

Four in ten children are underweight in Madhya Pradesh, according to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6). Parvati Bhabhar, a resident of Ratlam's Ghodkedha village in Madhya Pradesh, is relieved her son is no longer one of them. However, she knows that he had a lucky escape.

Had she not registered with Sneha, an initiative to improve the health and nutrition of women and children, implemented by the Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA), a non-profit, she would have remained ignorant about her anaemia and its impact on her underweight newborn. Neither would she have known how to turn their health conditions around.

Parvati had returned to work as a daily wage labourer soon after giving birth, just as she had done in the cases of her previous two children, without paying much attention to either her own nutrition or that of her third child. She had neither time nor the energy, as she always felt tired, for exclusive breastfeeding for his first six months, an imperative for his well-being and growth, particularly as he was an underweight baby.

One of the reasons identified by NFHS for

the increase in the percentage of underweight children in MP from 33 per cent to 39.7 per cent is the weak focus on the first 1000 days beginning from pregnancy to the child's second birthday, vital to the both physical and cognitive development. Further, NFHS-6 found that exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months had fallen to 56.4 per cent compared to 74 per cent (NFHS-5) and only 12 per cent of children aged six to 23 months received a minimum acceptable diet.

Fortunately for Parvati and her son, CHETNA was conducting a survey on nutritional anaemia in her village as a part of their Sneha initiative, focusing on improving maternal and child nutrition in the first 1000 days from conception to a child's second birthday in 25 villages in Ratlam district. While assessing the health and nutrition of pregnant, lactating and newly married women as well as children in the 0-2 age group, they found Parvati anaemic with her haemoglobin at just 9.5g/dL and her one-year-old son showing early signs of malnutrition, weighing just 6.8 kg.

Evidence indicates that infants born to anaemic mothers often have lower iron stores at birth. According to NFHS-6, only 39.6 per cent of women took iron-folic acid tablets for 180 days or more during pregnancy, indicating inadequate maternal nu-



trition. Maternal malnutrition and poor breastfeeding practices contribute to adverse pregnancy outcomes and have lasting effects on a child's growth and cognitive development.

But focused attention can make a difference, as shown by CHETNA. Using its four decades of experience on working on the health and nutrition of women and adolescents. CHETNA was able to develop strategies to improve both Parvati's and her child's health using targeted interventions in collab-

oration with the local frontline health workers (AWWs, ASHAs and ANMs) and sustained follow-up efforts by its committed Sneha team.

One of the reasons why the programme has been able to reach out and impact so many women and their young children is because it has smartly used multi-pronged strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in CHETNA's earlier nutritional interventions.

These include early identification of nutritional risks and, timely monitoring, including arranging for blood transfusions and follow-up of pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children under two years of age.

Organising regular health check-up and growth monitoring camps for children less than two years to enable early detection of growth faltering and anaemia risk helped facilitate timely referrals, iron supplementation, and nutrition counselling, contributing to the prevention of anaemia during early childhood.

By conducting structured home visits and group meetings to promote early antenatal care registration, adherence to iron folic acid supplementation, they were able to make families, especially women and their mothers-in-law, aware of good breastfeeding practices, appropriate complementary feeding,

and dietary diversity.

Importantly, the rapport built enabled counselling and integration of gender-sensitive messaging to address traditional practices of women eating last and the least. To support improved nutrition at home, CHETNA distributed nutrition kits to mothers.

These kits included dates, ghee pouches, peanuts, and drumstick leaves. Mothers were also given demonstrations and iron-rich recipes using these ingredients to improve nutrition.

The good news is that Parvati and her child are not the only ones to benefit. Over 375 pregnant women and 1000 lactating mothers with children in the 0-2 age group registered under the Sneha programme are learning about their nutritional anaemia and how they can improve their health and that of their young children with simple behavioural and dietary changes and better feeding practices. Englishnews publication

Many of the women are, like Parvati, no longer anaemic and their children have shown steady weight gain and growth, underlining how a collaborative effort can make the difference between life and death.

The writer is journalist writing on development and gender; Views presented are personal.