

HISTORIC CHANGE

Kashmir is changing for good as people are embracing peace and trying to forget the 30 years of terrorism and disruption of normal life as a bad dream. However the most celebrated and impactful change is about the ever falling levels of violence and recruitment of local youth into terrorist groups. While we all welcome peace and development it goes without saying that the scars three decades of terrorism and upsurge are still raw and hurtful. Despite all this, many areas remain yet to be covered for total restoration of peace – one of these remains the rehabilitation of the Kashmiri Pandits. It’s a big challenge for both the government and the people – Hindus and Muslims – to address this issue. However, small yet significant steps are being taken in that direction. The reopening of the 5000 year old Vichar Nag Temple in Srinagar is one such major step. The temple has been a seat of Hindu scholarship and the traditional birthplace of the Kashmiri Panchang. It’s reopening after 36 years is thus a significant moment for the revival of Kashmiri Pandit heritage.

MINERVA ACADEMY

A Football coach Ranjit Bajaj saw a dream of nurturing a formidable Indian team. The Chandigarh-based footballer sets Minerva Academy as a multi-sports and education institution and gets going with young children brought from all over India. Within 10 years, these young footballers have emerged as winners of most major Football titles in the junior category in the world. The latest is it defending their Gothia Cup (World Youth Cup) title in Sweden. The Minerva Academy team have just capped off a historic European tour that also included winning the Helsinki Cup. The success of Minerva Football team on the global stage shows that dreams if pursued in right earners and self belief are realized. Bajaj today has created a team which has the potential to stage major upsets in the world in the coming years and decades.

Reimagining urban resilience through labour codes and women's livelihoods

Chaitanya K Prasad

The expansion of urban population and growth of cities in India has contributed in making India as one of the largest urban agglomerations. A recent report of the World Bank and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs titled “Towards Resilient and Prosperous Cities in India” in 2025 had stated that Indian cities hold tremendous potential as centres of economic growth with 70 percent of new jobs coming from cities by 2030. With these developments, one of the biggest challenges the cities are grappling with is the problem of informality. As Indian cities increasingly depend on workers in the informal sector, particularly contract, self-employed, migrant, domestic workers, gig, platform workers, etc to sustain urban economies, protecting these workers and strengthening social protection and resilience for urban workers, including women workers, has remained a challenge. The protection of livelihoods in urban areas is perhaps one of the most important questions facing India’s urban transformation today.

Women’s employment and social protection in urban India

While reflecting on women’s employment in urban areas, it is observed that women are mostly engaged in sectors like services, retail, hospitality, healthcare, manufacturing, etc. Also, one of the pressing demands for women workers has been domestic work and the emerging gig economy. While reflecting on the urban employment situation, the estimates from the Periodic Labour Force Survey show a grim picture with only a 3 percent increase in labour force for women from 24.7 percent in 2022 to 27.7 percent participation in 2025. It is evident from the PLFS data that a large majority of urban women, i.e., 40.9 percent, are engaged in other services, 21.7 percent in manufacturing, and 16.1 percent in trade, hotel and restaurant. Further, there has been a dearth of long-term job contracts for women, with only 16 percent having contracts for more than 3 years, while a large proportion, i.e., 77 percent women in the 15-59 age group did not have written job contracts.



Now, a question which arises here is how far these sectors are protected by legislative provisions and whether women are entitled to social security? In fact, most of these workers are in informal arrangements with lack of employment contracts and access to social security. Apart from protection under labour legislations, urban livelihood protection also includes access to basic infrastructure facilities like housing, drinking amenities water, health, sanitation, safety, etc. The Economic Survey 2025-26, while recognising the importance of informal sector, has emphasised on the need for revisiting urban planning strategies to promote a more integrative and inclusive approach for the informal workers for a more resilient urban transition. People& Society

What do the labour codes offer?

While the announcement of the new labour codes on November 21st, 2025, has been a historic and opens up plethora of opportunities for protecting the livelihoods of urban women. However, the concern is how far these provisions will strengthen livelihood protection and well-being of urban women workers? The introduction of fixed term contracts under the Industrial Relations Code 2020 includes employment contracts that promote better access to social security. Workers are eligible for propor-

tionate gratuity after completion of one year of continuous service based on the length of their service and are also entitled to maternity benefit.

These new provisions can contribute in regularising employment contracts in the sectors where women are engaged in urban areas. It is a significant step towards formalisation of employment towards promoting better social security.

Another important development under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020 has been the introduction of a ‘common creche facility’ which allows a cluster of establishments to pool resources to provide childcare facilities for workers. These provisions will undoubtedly contribute in reducing the unpaid care burden of women, which has remained a significant barrier for them to participate in employment. <

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the OSH Code in 2020 had suggested for the provisioning of creche facilities for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which will boost female employment and resilience of the urban economy. For urban economies to thrive, greater investment and access to affordable care services is important to retain women’s employment and upward career mobility.

However, the implementation of these provisions will require interventions like the issuing of guidelines to MSMEs or industrial clusters for compliance of these gender sensitive provisions. The State governments have a larger role in terms of issuing appropriate guidelines to these clusters and also streamlining the enforcement machinery for ensuring compliance.

The new labour codes align well with the global perspectives on resilient cities that focusses on childcare, housing, infrastructure, etc especially for workers, particularly migrant workers in the informal sector. The OSHWC codes also include portability of benefits like the public distribution system, either in native or destination state, which will impact the migrant women workers significantly. Further, provisions like setting up a toll-free helpline for inter-state migrant workers, study on migrant workers, etc are important for addressing challenges faced by migrant workers and promoting evidence-based research for policy formulation. Apart for this, the Eshram portal one of the largest databases on unorganised workers, links them to plethora of welfare schemes. While E-shram registrations are ongoing, it is important to promote awareness about the benefits of the portal to the workers and also facilitate registrations under the portal so the workers can avail the social security benefits. Work& Labor Issues

Way forward

For implementation of these facilities, inter-ministerial convergences are important, particularly with regard to dissemination of welfare facilities like housing, health, education and other social security benefits to women workers in urban areas. There is a need to promote portable and universal social security benefits along with affordable childcare, transportation, etc. The E-Shram data needs to be leveraged to identify migrant status and integrate State-level labour welfare schemes so that workers are not deprived of social security benefits when they migrate. Urban resilience for women can only be achieved by combining social protection rights under labour codes with investments in gender responsive infrastructure that encourage women to work.

CHINA'S LAW OF ONE IDENTITY

Nilantha Ilangamuwa

Before the Dalai Lama celebrated his 91st birthday on July 6, China marked another anniversary that carries enormous symbolic weight for the Communist Party, July 1, the founding anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party and the date Hong Kong was handed back to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. In another era, July 1 in Hong Kong was synonymous with hundreds of thousands of people marching through the streets demanding democracy, judicial independence and political freedoms. This year too, the streets that once displayed one of Asia’s most visible democratic movements remained largely silent. Since 2020, as several key political leaders in Hong Kong have told this writer, Beijing’s National Security Law has effectively dismantled the city’s mass pro-democracy movement, making large-scale dissent increasingly hazardous. In today’s China, and increasingly among Chinese communities abroad, the cost of openly challenging Beijing’s political narrative has risen dramatically.

On that same day, Beijing’s new Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law came into force, a legislation that may become

one of the defining documents of Xi Jinping’s era. While Chinese authorities describe it as a measure to protect harmony among China’s 56 ethnic groups, critics argue that it represents something far more consequential. It is the legal transformation of ethnic integration from a political objective into a state obligation. The law arrives at a moment when China’s confidence on the world stage appears to be expanding rapidly. The International Monetary Fund has revised China’s 2026 economic growth forecast upwards to 4.6 percent while lowering the global growth outlook. China’s financial institutions have continued their extraordinary rise, with seven Chinese banks reportedly occupying positions among the world’s ten largest banks by tier-one capital, including the four largest positions held by state-owned lenders. At sea, China and Russia have conducted live-fire maritime exercises near Qingdao, while Beijing continues to expand its nuclear capabilities, including efforts to strengthen its sea-based deterrent. A China that is economically stronger, militarily more capable and diplomatically more assertive is simultaneously tightening its definition of what it means to belong to the Chinese nation.

That is why the ethnic unity law deserves attention beyond the borders of Tibet, Xinjiang or Inner Mongolia. It is not merely a domestic administrative measure. It represents a fundamental question about the future structure of China itself. For decades, the Chinese state maintained a formal bargain with ethnic minorities, political unity in exchange for recognition of cultural distinctiveness.

The existence of autonomous regions, minority language protections and preferential policies were presented as evidence that China could remain one country while accommodating different historical identities. The new law appears to shift that balance. It does not remove autonomous regions from the constitution, but it changes the ideological foundation upon which autonomy was originally justified.

The most important phrase in the new legislation is the requirement to “forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation”. To Beijing, this phrase represents national solidarity. To critics, it represents the final stage of a long transformation from recognising diversity to managing diversity. The distinction is not semantic. It determines whether Tibetans, Uyghurs and

Mongols are viewed as distinct communities contributing to China’s civilisation or simply as cultural variations expected to merge into a dominant national identity defined by the state.

The Chinese government insists that this interpretation is unfair. Beijing argues that the law protects all ethnic groups equally, prohibits discrimination and guarantees cultural rights. Chinese officials point to poverty reduction, infrastructure development, improved education and economic opportunities in minority regions as proof that integration has benefited ethnic communities. They argue that a shared language and shared national identity do not destroy culture but provide minorities with greater opportunities within a modern state.

However, critics point to a historical pattern that cannot be ignored. Across many empires and nation-states, assimilation rarely begins with an announcement that cultures will disappear. It usually begins with language reform, educational restructuring and a new definition of citizenship. The most significant battles are often not fought over flags or borders but over classrooms, textbooks and the language spoken by children.

Ukraine war: NATO's proxy war against Russia hurts India's interests

Vladimir Ladanov

A summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) from 7-8 July in Ankara has delivered an expected outcome: the allies reaffirmed their commitment to continuing their campaign against Russia in Ukraine. It was too much to hope that they would learn from their past mistakes of provoking that conflict in the first place by never-stopping NATO’s eastward expansion contrary to earlier understandings, supporting a bloody coup d’état in Kyiv in February 2014 and the toppling of Ukraine’s legitimate President Viktor Yanukovich — all in an ongoing effort to turn Ukraine into a Western bulwark against Russia. NATO’s ambition to dominate the security space in Europe and its blatant disregard for Russia’s vital interests in its near abroad are at the heart of the current geopolitical conflagration. Described as “brain dead” by French President Emmanuel Macron as recently as 2019, NATO has now found a new lease on life in its confrontation with Russia. But is this moment sustainable or a contrived unity of allies in

Ankara is only fleeting? Military

After WWII, the first Secretary General of NATO, an India-born British General Hastings Ismay, anecdotally formulated the alliance’s purpose as “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down”. While his dictum had been respected in the past, nowadays all of its three pillars are being challenged.

When the Cold War ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union, the then US Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, one of the leading neocons of his time, developed a policy which came to be known as the Wolfowitz doctrine. In no uncertain terms, it advised that to preserve America’s hegemony, Russia should never be allowed to rise again. Earnestly engaging with Moscow and integrating it with the West, like it was done before with the former American adversaries, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, was ruled out of the question. Yet Russia has re-emerged from the ruin of the Soviet collapse and re-joined the ranks of the great powers. It is evidenced by the fact that for over four years of the Ukraine conflict, Russia has been tackling the combined might of the entire Western coalition and countering all its at-

tempts at achieving escalation dominance. It is a fair assessment that after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, NATO had squandered an historic opportunity to re-engage with Moscow on equal terms. And since then, by crossing the reddest of Russia’s geopolitical red lines, it has now found itself embroiled in a proxy war against it in Ukraine. Instead of ensuring security in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO’s leaders, in their folly, have provoked the bloodiest military conflict on the continent since WWII.

Having become entangled in a giant mess of their own creation, NATO’s leadership are now facing a real prospect of their alliance breaking up - not only because US President Donald Trump wants to take over Denmark’s Greenland but also because he seeks a radical redistribution of burden sharing in NATO by ending a long-standing European habit of free-loading at American expense. It is not unreasonable to imagine that President Trump may choose to hold in abeyance America’s defence commitment to those NATO countries that he considers underdelivering or politically at odds with Washington.

A relevant example of the latter case is the suspension of the US’s obligation to New Zealand under the ANZUS security treaty after Wellington annoyed the Reagan administration with its anti-nuclear policy. The Trump administration is no longer convinced in continuing its sizeable European military commitment and would like to be rid of the European problems irrelevant to America’s core interests.

The European force posture review now conducted by US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth will likely result in the reduction of American troops stationed there. Ultimately, the Trump administration wants to geopolitically pivot to the Pacific and for that, it needs to release the capabilities currently assigned to NATO and other resources wasted in the conflict in Ukraine. Worse still for the Europeans, Donald Trump favours negotiating a deal with Russia to end the bloodshed. European warmongers are aghast at this prospect because, absent US support, their own position vis-à-vis Russia becomes weak - America has traditionally provided a vital structural strength to NATO through its command and staff element, strategic enablers such as intelli-

gence, surveillance and reconnaissance, precision deep strike, and extended nuclear deterrence. Deprived of these strategic assets, the Europeans will likely have to accommodate Russia. Military

Finally, what about keeping the Germans down? For the first time since the end of WWII, Germany’s massive investment in its military outpaces both Britain’s and France’s expenditure: in the four years since 2022, the German defence budget has risen twofold and by 2030 it is projected to again double to nearly 160 billion euros, which will be almost as much as what London and Paris spend combined. Should this happen, redistribution of power in Europe will inevitably follow.

There is already an emerging discussion in the West about the long-term implications of Germany’s rapid rearmament. This question should be of particular interest to Germany’s neighbours, some of which are still harbouring grievances dating back to WWII, such as Warsaw’s demand (rejected by Berlin) of paying wartime reparations. For the time being, the European elites mostly welcome Germany’s military buildup in the hope of directing it against

Russia. Yet they tried the same tack in the 1930s and it blew up in their face. They have to be careful what they wish for.

There are two India-relevant observations arising from the geopolitical drama playing out in Europe.

First, with European states heavily committed to confronting Russia, they make poor security partners for India because their capabilities are tied down thousands of miles away with little to nothing to spare for upholding balance in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Their continental strategy, as the British historian Michael Howard would have put it, is likely to have implications similar to what happened to the British Empire before WWII when it chose to bolster the defence of Europe at the expense of cutting back on its deployments in the Pacific. With the Ukraine conflict raging on, unfunded and unsubstantiated European Indo-Pacific strategies bring little of real value to India’s table.

Secondly, it is broadly accepted among India’s foreign policy and national security community that a strong, independent and prosperous Russia is vital for maintaining a balance of power favourable to India in Eurasia.