HORRORS OF PARTITION

The world remembers the horrors of holocaust, but nobody even speaks about the tragedy of partition of India which led to riots, killings, rapes, hatred and displacement of lakhs of people across the newly laid border. The reason is not too far, as the Indian leadership chose to ignore it as a colossal tragedy that was preventable. The British were insensitive and had least regard for the lives of Indians,. Out stalwarts who fought for the country's freedom were tired and rushed through the final stages of the British leaving us free. After the partition, while the government of Jawahar Lal Nehru got busy with rebuilding the nation and settling refugees from Pakistan, it never even wanted to acknowledge the tragedy of partition leave alone commemorating it for the future generations. In Pakistan, where traumatized people had come from the Indian mainland as refugees, the founder M A Jinnah did not even bother to visit the refugee camps. The refugees of partition on both sides picked the threads of their lives in new lands, but the tragedy was never given a burial. It was ignored or at the best put under the carpet. The hate the partition generated continues to impact the India-Pakistan relations. Ideally the two countries could have set up a join museum or commemorative memorial for the partition victims. Given the trajectory of the India-Pakistan relations it was not even thought about. So when Prime Minister Narendra Modi designated August 14 as the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day, it was mistaken for an anti-Pakistan posturing. The purpose behind this was to honour the memory of those who died or were dispossessed of their land, homes, family just because of their religion. The day would eventually lead to a lot of catharsis and closure for the victims' families. Right now the partition museums are being set up across India by private players and it's good. Unless we honour our tragedies, the world will never understand and respect us.

Finance reforms: From inclusion to continuity

Anuradha PS

India has transformed the way its citizens access and use the banking system — from Jan Dhan accounts and UPI to the RBI's UDGAM platform for tracing unclaimed deposits. But the next banking reform must address a quieter problem: ensuring that savings remain connected to their rightful owners and reach their nominees or legal heirs .

India's banking story over the past decade has been one of remarkable transformation. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has helped millions enter the formal financial system. Payments through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) were a game-changer in the digital payment landscape. The Reserve Bank of India's UDGAM (Unclaimed Deposits-Gateway to Access Information) has also been a recent addition that allows customers and legal heirs to track down the deposits that they have forgotten in various banks.

The reforms have enhanced financial inclusion. But they also reveal a more muted problem that must not be overlooked when it comes to policy decisions - and it is one that needs to be addressed on a par: the lack of disconnect between savings and their proper owners.

The banks in the public sector transferred Rs 60,518 crore in unclaimed deposits to the RBI's Depositor Education and Awareness (DEA) Fund as of January 2026. The regulators have made the recovery procedure possible during the 'Your Money Your Right' campaign, with Rs 5,777 crore recovered through 22.95 lakh claims across the country, showing that it can work if institutions coordinate well. This is a great achievement and deserves credit. They also pose a more basic question, however. So many deposits are going unclaimed; why is that? The solution goes beyond banking.

An unclaimed deposit isn't a deposit that's simply put into the memory hole. It can usually be traced back to the interplay of demographic, family fragmentation, migration, lack of nominee information, financial illiteracy, and sluggish succession processes. Typically, senior customers outlive their financial plan and legal beneficiaries do not know of their accounts or may have trouble accessing paperwork after the customer's death. India's financial reforms have been mainly directed towards facilitating access for people to the banking system. The next step will be to make sure that financial assets are not separated from their owners throughout their lives and that they pass on to their nominees or legal heirs.

This is the shift from financial inclusion to financial continuity.

Financial inclusion is asking the question, "Can everyone have a bank account?" Financial continuity asks: "Is there a continuity of financial assets, and do they continue as identifiable, accessible and transferable assets?"

From this perspective, UDGAM is not the end goal, but rather an important step. It aids citizens in reclaiming their lost savings. The next step along the line should be to cut down on the amount of deposits which are forgotten in the first place. Hence, India requires a Financial Continuity Framework comprising four complementary pillars. SavingsAccounts

The first pillar is Continuous Ownership. Nominations should not be a one-off and should be done once an account is opened. Know Your Customer (KYC) verification is already being done at regular intervals by banks. A similar 'Know Your Nominee' review every five years or after significant life changes (marriage, divorce, moving, death of a nominee) would keep the ownership information up to date. This is an important basis to approach with the Banking Laws (Amendment) Act 2025, which introduced the idea of 'multiple nominees'.

Predictive Outreach is the second pillar. Advanced analytics have become a common practice for banks when it comes to fraud detection, tracking cyber risks and evaluating credit quality. The same capabilities can be used to recognise unclaimed accounts. Customers who have not received a nomination for their particular needs, repetitive communication failures, many years of no contact or inaction, or no changes to the nomination of old customers or on ageing fixed deposits can result in proactive reminder messages being sent via SMS, email, telephone or face-to-face at a branch before the deposits go into dormancy.

Integrated Succession Support is the third. One of the main reasons that unclaimed deposits come about is because the legal heirs go through a great deal of hassle. In this regard, the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) has already adopted a common application form and standard operating procedure for the settlement of claims. This should develop into a safe and technically advanced system, which makes claims easy to process, whilst maintaining privacy and legal checks. The goal isn't to undermine protections, but to eliminate needless procedural bumps.

The fourth pillar is called Financial Legacy Awareness. Generally, financial literacy campaigns emphasise saving and investing among citizens. They don't often stress the need to keep nominees up to date, tell family about financial possessions or succession planning. They should be part and parcel of financial education in an ageing society. It's important that each depositor understands that saving their money isn't the only thing they're protecting - they're also protecting access to the money by the proper beneficiaries.

There are valuable lessons to be learned from international experience. There are a number of jurisdictions that have enhanced proactive tracing, made claims procedures easier and made greater investments in public awareness prior to assets becoming dormant. The challenge faced by India is unique due to its size, diversity, and rate of demographic change, but the rule remains the same: Prevention is better than recovery.

The RBI has already repeatedly stressed the rise in unclaimed deposits, and has recommended banks to conduct 'periodic drives' to find out who the depositors, their nominees and legal heirs are. The updated operational guidelines for the DEA Fund Scheme and directions on responsible business conduct have also enhanced the regulatory framework. Such efforts are a sign that policymakers are coming to understand the importance of proactive rather than passive engagement. PublicFinance This is one more reason for this issue to be more talked about. Unclaimed deposits are starting to be seen as a measure of social change. A changing way of life with longer life expectancy, greater migration, scattered families and a growing reliance on technology are transforming wealth management and wealth transfer. Even with the advances in technology, the number of unclaimed assets will continue to grow if financial systems do not change.

India's banking reforms have evolved through distinct stages. The first expanded access. The second transformed transactions. The third is improving recovery through platforms such as UDGAM. The fourth should be related to continuity - the continuity of financial assets to the owners throughout the life cycle. How quickly a well-developed financial system restores lost savings is not a good indicator of its maturity. Failure to forget can be considered to be the extent to which it prevents the forgetfulness of savings. UDGAM has revealed to India how to locate lost deposits. Banking reform should be done so that deposits will not be lost in the first place.

A fitting response to Mecca pact

Sathosh Mathew

The new defence pact between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye has opened a new chapter in West Asian geopolitics. It is already being called an "Islamic NATO", though that description may be premature. The three countries bring different strengths to the table. Pakistan is a nuclear-armed state with a large military, Türkiye is a NATO member with a growing defence industry, and Saudi Arabia is an oil-rich power with enormous financial resources and influence in the Muslim world. Their closer security cooperation is significant because it comes at a time when the old security architecture of the Gulf is changing rapidly. For India, Pakistan's role in this new arrangement makes the development particularly important.

For decades, the United States provided the main military shield for the Gulf. American bases, naval forces, aircraft and missile-defence systems offered protection to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Recent conflicts involving Iran, Israel and the United States have exposed the limitations of depending entirely on an external power for regional security. Gulf countries are increasingly looking for their own partnerships and security arrangements. The Mecca pact reflects this wider search for strategic independence. It does not have NATO's permanent command structure or integrated military forces, but the direction is clear: West Asia is moving towards a more complicated system of regional security partnerships.

India cannot ignore this change. A stronger Pakistan-Saudi military relationship, combined with Türkiye's defence capabilities, could give Islamabad greater strategic and diplomatic space. At the same time, India has enormous interests in the Gulf. Millions of Indians live and work there, the region is crucial for India's energy security, and the Strait of Hormuz remains vital for global trade and oil supplies. Any major military confrontation in the Gulf can quickly affect India's economy, energy prices and maritime trade. India therefore needs to watch the new security equation carefully without treating it as an immediate military threat. The biggest danger would be a wider regional conflict in which Pakistan becomes directly involved.

India's answer should not be to create another military bloc. New Delhi's greatest advantage is its ability to maintain relationships with competing powers. India has strong partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, strategic relations with the United States and Israel, and important ties with Iran and other West Asian states. This diplomatic flexibility should become a strategic asset. SouthAsians & Diaspora

The American experience also provides a lesson: decades of military protection did not eliminate instability in the Gulf. India should therefore strengthen its own capabilities rather than depend on another country's security umbrella. Dharma diplomacy, understood as responsible, balanced and dialogue-oriented statecraft, can complement India's traditional strategic autonomy.

The most natural arena for India's growing influence is the Indian Ocean. India's movement from SAGAR-Security and Growth for All in the Region-to MAHASAGAR-Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions-should become the centre of its maritime strategy.

The Arabian Sea links India directly with the Gulf, while the wider Indian Ocean connects India with Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe. India can strengthen maritime surveillance, protect commercial shipping, expand naval cooperation, conduct humanitarian operations and help smaller countries build their maritime capabilities. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the idea that the world is one family, can give this strategy a wider diplomatic purpose: India's security need not depend on permanent confrontation with another country.

India also has another strategic opportunity-artificial intelligence. The future balance of power will not be decided only by nuclear weapons, fighter aircraft and naval fleets. AI, semiconductors, data, cyber technology and advanced computing will increasingly determine national power. India's MANAV approach, centred on moral and ethical systems, accountable governance, national sovereignty, accessibility, inclusion, validity and legitimacy, can provide a distinctly Indian voice in the global AI race.

Pakistan may have nuclear weapons, Türkiye may have advanced defence technology, and Saudi Arabia may possess immense financial power. India's answer can be a combination of technology, economic strength, maritime power and diplomacy. The message from Mecca should therefore push India towards MAHASAGAR-not towards another military alliance, but towards becoming a stronger maritime, technological and diplomatic power.

Freedom at Midnight: The astrological twist behind India's tryst with destiny

BP Acharya

As we celebrate the 79th anniversary of our Independence, one is inevitably reminded of the grand festivities during the Golden Jubilee [2.0]. I fondly recall the numerous midnight functions organised to mark our "Freedom at Midnight", along with the concomitant inconveniences of participating with groggy eyes! Mercifully, this time around, we are spared such nocturnal celebrations. Yet, a question continues to linger in our minds: why on earth did we choose to be free at such an unearthly hour? Was it by choice or by compulsion? What was so special about that midnight hour for our "tryst with destiny"? If you have ever wondered, there hangs a fascinating, lesser-known tale that I recount below.

To answer these questions, I must jog my memory back to the 1980s, when I had a gap year as a research scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Having completed my M Phil coursework with a high grade-point average, I was eligible to fast-track directly into a PhD programme. I registered for it, though it was not my immediate priority, simply because I was still underage to appear for the Civil Services Examination.

Since I was relatively free, my professor and research guide asked me to assist the internationally celebrated authors Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre - of Freedom at Midnight fame. They needed help editing a vast archive of personal papers and private documents belonging to Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, which they had gathered for their bestseller.

That was how I found myself swamped with huge loads of primary historical material. My task was to ferret out insights for new publications, which were later brought out in two separate volumes: Mountbatten and the Partition of India and Mountbatten and Independent India.

It was during this deep archival dive that I stumbled upon a fascinating interview with Lord Mountbatten, conducted by the authors during their research for Freedom at Midnight. This recorded interview was published in the first volume of Mountbatten and the Partition of India. Characterised by his trademark arrogance and insouciance, the story is best heard straight from the horse's mouth, as Mountbatten recollects the events in these interview excerpts:

Question: The ceremony of August 15 had no precedent. Who invented and engineered it?

Answer: Well, I discussed it with Nehru. The first and most amusing thing, of course, is that I had selected August 15 because it was the date of the Japanese surrender to me as the Commander of the Allied forces in Singapore - which, don't forget, had taken place only two years prior. However, I had not consulted the astrologers.

As you know, Indians are deeply invested in astrology. I did not realise it at the time, but on an inauspicious day, they would do nothing. While Nehru himself did not believe in astrology, he mentioned that so many others did, and that I had chosen an unpropitious day. I suppose it was silly of me not to consult the astrologers, but it had slipped my mind.

He then suggested, "Never mind. If you agree, we can hold a midnight meeting. Just before the clock strikes midnight, we will transfer power, which will make it all the more auspicious."

I thought to myself - what a marvellous, dramatic idea, to hold a midnight meeting while the rest of the world sleeps! As you will remember, this was done not because we deliberately sought a dramatic moment, but simply because I had chosen the wrong day! It happened entirely because the astrologers insisted the date was not propitious.

So, there you have it. That is how we were permanently saddled with freedom at midnight — an uncomfortable compromise between Viceregal arrogance and an astrological adjustment, or upay, as it is often called. While the date was fixed arbitrarily by an egotistical Viceroy, what remains surprising is that the Indian leaders rather meekly submitted to his whims and fancies. WebSeries

When Nehru broached the subject with other leaders, there was apparently stiff resistance, particularly from Sardar Patel and JB Kripalani, both of whom wanted to avoid the inauspicious day. Ultimately, it was left to an ingenious astrological subterfuge to resolve this conundrum. This is how it was done.

As per the Hindu calendar, tithis (days calculated based on the solar/lunar cycle) begin at sunrise, whereas the Western (Gregorian) calendar dictates that a new date commences at midnight. This crucial difference afforded a slim window of opportunity to work out an astrological solution (upay) to a difficult dilemma.

According to astrologers, August 15, 1947, was a day to be avoided at all costs. It fell on the 14th day (Chaturdashi) of the dark fortnight (Krishna Paksha), with the most inauspicious new moon day (Amavasya) also setting in.

Thus, an innovative compromise formula was struck: by scheduling the transfer before the sunrise of August 15, they successfully avoided the inauspicious dark Chaturdashi and Amavasya under Hindu reckoning. Meanwhile, under the Gregorian calendar, August 15 would technically begin immediately after midnight. It was this ingenious tightrope walk that necessitated the midnight ceremony, and the rest is history.

This apparently win-win formula was actually a difficult compromise born out of compulsion rather than choice. We had no option when confronted by a supercilious Viceroy's arbitrary choice of date, which smacked of scant regard for the people's sentiments.

However, what was indeed disappointing was the meek submission of Indian leaders to his whims and fancies, going out of their way to accommodate his peccadilloes. Thus, Freedom at Midnight became our "tryst with destiny" and, over time, a celebrated symbol of a dramatic transfer of power, later emulated in other colonial transitions like that of Hong Kong. For us, however, it remains a story of a queer compromise that defined the dilemmas of our country during the initial years after independence — dilemmas that linger on in more ways than one.

The writer is a retired Special Chief Secretary of Telangana; Views presented are personal.