

GAZA DEMANDS MORE THAN A CEASEFIRE

Three years ago, on October 7, 2023, when Hamas-led gunmen killed about 1,200 Israelis and took 251 hostages, the massacre changed the politics of the region. That massacre was a crime, and no grievance excuses it. For the first time, no Israeli hostage remains in Gaza on this anniversary. But what followed was not justice. It was the near-annihilation of Gaza and its people.

The numbers are hard to hold in the mind. Roughly 74,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza’s health ministry. About 80 per cent of structures are damaged. Most of the enclave’s two million-plus residents have been displaced and squeezed into less than half the Strip. A UN commission of inquiry has found that acts of genocide were committed.

Fewer than half of Gaza’s health facilities function even partially, and the World Health Organization says none has been restored to full capacity since the ceasefire. That ceasefire, imposed last October under Donald Trump’s 20-point plan, has stopped the big offensives, not the dying.

The ministry counts 1,467 deaths since it began. The International Stabilisation Force has yet to deploy. The Palestinian technocratic committee meant to run Gaza has not taken charge. Israel says its troops hold about 64 per cent of the territory, and humanitarian access remains tightly restricted. The war did not stay in Gaza. It has spread to Lebanon, Syria and a wider confrontation with Iran that still grinds on, rattling energy markets and fuelling global anger at Israel.

Meanwhile, world attention has drifted, and with it the pressure that forced the truce. The real test comes after Israel’s election, when the ceasefire’s next phase will either move or quietly die. Gaza desperately needs help, not just help but a complete plan to reconstruct and rehabilitate the people who have endured a lot in the last three years.

The way forward is not mysterious, only unglamorous. Deploy the stabilisation force. Put Gaza’s administration in Palestinian technocratic hands. Open the crossings fully and fund reconstruction at scale, not at leisure. Sequence Hamas’s disarmament with Israeli withdrawal. Above all, restore a political horizon: without a credible path to Palestinian statehood, every ceasefire is an intermission. And accountability must cut both ways, for the October 7 atrocities and for Gaza’s destruction.

India has real stakes in West Asia: millions of citizens working in the Gulf, its energy supply and the IMEC corridor, which needs a calm region. New Delhi formally backs a two-state solution and welcomed the Trump plan.

But friendship with Israel does not require silence on Gaza. New Delhi has access in Jerusalem that few capitals enjoy. It should use it to press for unhindered aid, an end to strikes and a political track, and offer the reconstruction help it can afford. A civilisational power cannot be seen to grieve for only one side.

Anil Anand

These are troubled times for the Election Commission of India (ECI). For decades, the body has been the standard-bearer of impartial polling, embracing new technology and earning international acclaim as a guide to other democracies on free and fair elections. That reputation now faces its sternest test.

According to an investigative report in The Indian Express on September 23, 2026, two of the three members of the Commission, Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, came close to open revolt against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, only to return to the same table and project normalcy. Their grievance was procedural. They recorded objections 14 times in 10 months to decisions and orders taken without their knowledge. The charge against the CEC is that he has sought to centralise the Commission’s functioning, a direct affront to the democratic spirit of a collegiate body.

Controversy is not new to Nirvachan Sadan. The biggest turmoil before this came under T N Seshan, when the poll panel was converted from a solo-driven vehicle into a three-member body. Seshan went to court against the government’s decision and made his fellow Election Commissioners, G V G Krishnamurthy and Manohar Singh Gill, parties to the case. Later, CEC N Gopalaswami wrote to the government seeking the removal of Election Commissioner Navin Chawla. The government of the day rejected the plea, and Chawla, who had close links with the Gandhi family, ultimately retired as CEC himself.

In nearly two decades of covering the ECI, I have watched professional and personal rivalries between commissioners play out, sometimes in the open. This is different. An Election Commissioner dissenting from the other two, or the reverse, is one thing. Here, the majority of the Commission says it was bypassed by a minority.

The law is clear. Section 18(2) of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Ap-

pointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, says all business of the Commission shall, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously. Where the CEC and the Election Commissioners differ, the matter “shall be decided according to the opinion of the majority”. Even the procedure for transacting and allocating business can be regulated only by unanimous decision. The principle is older than the statute. In T N Seshan vs Union of India (1995), the Supreme Court stressed that Article 324 entrusts elections to the Commission, not to an individual.

The two Election Commissioners then wrote to the Cabinet Secretary about happenings in an autonomous constitutional body. The step is puzzling, though it conveys the gravity of the situation, since the proper authority was the President of India. The ECI has since said the letters concerned an officer on deputation and no policy matter.

At the heart of the row is the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls. A storm was already brewing around it. Former CEC S Y

Qureshi has described the SIR in its present form as “illegal and unconstitutional”. Now it emerges that much of it was done without the knowledge of two of the three commissioners. As reported, Sandhu and Joshi objected repeatedly to procedural flaws and to being kept out of the loop on adding new voters and deleting names. They described the steps on new voters as “unauthorised, illegal”, warned against access to the voter database being centralised in Delhi while bypassing state officials, and flagged concerns over the integrity of the voter software. They also objected to IT department heads becoming super-heads on changes to the rolls while senior ECI officials were kept out. The full Commission did not meet between May and August 2026, which points to a deeper malady in the poll panel.

Did Kumar act on his own? Or is he part of a wider net, controlled from above, as Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi alleges? Gandhi sees the report as vindication of his earlier charge that electoral manipulation helped the ruling dispen-

sation win. At his press conference after the exposé, he tried to link the CEC to the top hierarchy of the Central government. Kumar can hardly feel comfortable after a former Kerala Chief Secretary claimed that Kumar, then a serving officer, had sounded him out about contesting the Lok Sabha election on a BJP ticket. Was he bidding on behalf of the saffron party bosses?

Surprisingly, the ruling BJP seems to have walked willingly into Gandhi’s trap. The ECI’s own rebuttal was guarded and deadpan, steering clear of the contentious issues. The BJP was more upfront, pressing its spokespersons into service “to defend the ECI”. That drew a sharp remark from columnist Tavleen Singh, no one’s idea of a critic of the right, in an X post: “Is the BJP not embarrassed that their party spokesmen are speaking on behalf of the Election Commission? Is that not in itself a giveaway?”

In an official statement, the Commission played down the leaks, saying “differing views and observations are a normal part of deliberation”. It conceded that members held differing

opinions but insisted these did not reflect its official position. On September 26, the three commissioners met together and promised that agendas would be circulated in advance and minutes recorded. That is an indirect admission of what was missing.

The government’s role will come under scrutiny because Kumar is the first CEC appointed under the controversial 2023 Selection Act, which gave the executive a clear advantage on the selection panel by removing the Chief Justice of India. The exposé has revived the allegation that a centralised poll panel is being used to the government’s advantage. Handled badly, it can have serious repercussions for the government, though it rises above party lines.

An institution whose only real currency is public trust cannot let that trust be settled through press notes and spokespersons. The way back lies in transparency: let the record of who decided what, and when, speak for itself.

*The writer is a commentator on socio-political issues; Views presented are personal.*

The new-age policing: Smarter, faster, more humane

Ajay Singhal

In the 1990s, when I first walked into a police station as a trainee IPS officer, policing was largely a race to catch up with crime. The tools were modest: a handwritten ‘Rojnamcha’, a temperamental black rotary-dial telephone, and the institutional memory of the MHC and beat constable. Success was measured by how quickly the police reached the scene, arrested the accused and restored order.

Three decades later, that paradigm is changing fundamentally. Technology, data and intelligence are enabling the police to move from reacting to crime to anticipating and preventing it. The critical question is no longer merely, “What happened?” but “What is likely to happen - and what can we do before it does?”

This is the essence of new-age policing: using technology not as an end in itself, but as an instrument to prevent crime, accelerate justice, protect the vulnerable and make policing more accessible, accountable and humane. In Haryana, this transformation is already visible - from Dial 112 and women’s safety initiatives to cybercrime intervention, AI-assisted investigation, digital evidence and real-time intelligence. Based on more than five million calls each year, the average response time stays below seven minutes, whether in cities or the countryside. Motorbikes can navigate market streets where four-wheelers would get stuck.

When a woman is in danger, she presses one button on the Durga Shakti app, and her current location is sent to the same command centre. A woman who is travelling alone at night can register her journey and be effectively looked after until she gets home. This is not a reactive action; it is accompaniment.

The previous system largely failed to cope with cybercrime because criminals could be based in another country and money could vanish within minutes. The helpline 1930,



connected to Dial 112 and manned by bank representatives who work with police officers, gets about 5,000 calls every day and freezes suspicious transfers before mule accounts can drain them.

Haryana leads the nation in preventing fraudulent transfers and has recovered about 40 per cent of funds defrauded within the state. Since June, any complaint (online) involving a loss of more than Rs 1 lakh has automatically resulted in an e-Zero FIR. Prevention is now taking steps even further upstream; the ‘Abhedya’ app enables unknown international extortion calls to be kept from reaching the victim, and the Dual OTP pilot allows a trusted contact of a senior citizen to block a suspicious large transaction, providing a small amount of protection against the ‘digital arrest’ scam. The basic beat has also been reconsidered. With the Eagle app, an on-duty police officer can immediately compare a detainee’s face with a database of offenders, exposing impersonators and avoiding lengthy detentions for law-abiding citizens. The National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) can match a blurred fingerprint recovered at a crime scene with entries in the national records in just a few seconds. Smart E-Beat records patrols using GPS,

and the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and System (CCTNS) links police stations to courts, jails and forensic facilities. Meanwhile, e-Sakshya ensures that crime-scene evidence is preserved in an unchangeable form.

The reforms go beyond the streets to affect the fundamental machinery of the justice system. When evidence parcels move from the police station to the forensic laboratory, a barcode is assigned to each one, creating a chain of custody that can withstand judicial scrutiny. Instead of making long, risky journeys, prisoners now attend court through secure video links.

Even people with no name are now being given one: an AI-assisted system matches the faces and fingerprints of unidentified bodies with those in the missing persons database, giving closure to families who have been waiting for years. Similarly, internal tools matter; complaint dashboards show where complaints go unaddressed, so accountability does not rely entirely on goodwill.

Crash data is converted into heat maps that show engineers where to redesign a curve, and cashless trauma care helps shorten the important golden hour. On motorways, number-plate recognition cameras

WHAT PATIENCE TEACHES US ABOUT PROGRESS



bearing elements must perform together over time. Similarly, a new law, institution or economic reform requires testing, adjustment and public acceptance. A policy may be announced in a day, but its consequences can take years to reveal themselves.

The impatience to demonstrate results can encourage governments to privilege what is measurable immediately over what becomes valuable eventually.

The same principle applies to cities. Roads can be widened quickly, buildings can rise rapidly and new infrastructure can

be inaugurated on schedule. Yet urban resilience depends on things less visible: drainage capacity, maintenance systems, open spaces, ecological buffers and institutional coordination. These cannot be improvised after a crisis. They require patient investment before the crisis arrives. The absence of visible progress does not mean the absence of progress.

There is also a personal lesson. Education, expertise, trust and character resemble concrete more than software. They cannot simply be downloaded. A student needs years of reading and failure; a pro-

fessional needs experience; trust requires repeated proof. Attempts to accelerate these processes may produce impressive appearances without corresponding depth.

Patience, however, should not become an excuse for inefficiency. Concrete is cured according to scientific requirements, not left indefinitely. Good engineering is not slow for the sake of being slow; it is deliberate where time affects performance. The wisdom lies in knowing what can be accelerated and what cannot.

Perhaps modern society needs this distinction more urgently than ever. We have become remarkably good at reducing waiting, but less skilled at understanding its purpose. Yet some forms of waiting are productive. They allow systems to settle, weaknesses to emerge and strength to develop.

Engineers know that a structure designed only for immediate performance may fail under tomorrow’s load. The same is true of societies. Sustainable progress is not always the fastest progress. Sometimes, the most responsible thing we can do is build carefully, protect what is still developing, and give true strength the one resource no technology can manufacture: time, patience, discipline, attention, humility and care.

EC divide raises questions over autonomy