

NEED MORE TUKARAM MUNDHES

One honest and conscientious officer is enough to bring balance in the system. Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe is an example. Singlehandedly, this honest officer exposed the adulteration in food and which is being served from highly respected places. In many countries food adulteration conviction attracts death penalty since it amounts to playing with the human lives for profiteering. Indian system is not sensitive to such levels but common people are wary of adulterated food though for the lack of knowledge they do end up consuming sub-standard foods which cause harm to the body. In Uttar Pradesh, the unscrupulous dealers have used detergent and urea to manufacture artificial milk and it was found to being sold in the markets. Vegetables were found to be injected with liquids and what not to fatten them and to speed up their growth. Tukaram Mundhe's relentless campaign against sub standard food and unhygienic conditions of the kitchens of even reputed restaurants and eateries including the canteen of the High Court of Maharashtra has raised public awareness about dangerous foods being served to unsuspecting consumers. The latest is that based on this brave IAS officer finding the State government has banned the sale of loose and unpacked spice powders and mixed spices, making packaging and sealing at the place of production mandatory to prevent adulteration, contamination and ensure traceability. The food safety regulator has also prohibited the use of ethylene oxide, a flammable and colourless gas, for spice sterilisation. The red chilly power that we consume unsuspectingly is said to be mixed with brick powder, and other masala with chalk, sawdust, foreign starch and other unauthorised substances to increase the weight or quantity of spices, blending inferior-quality raw material. Under his guidance Maharashtra has raised the standards for food packaging and sale. The other states too must follow this regimen. One wishes there were more IAS officers like Tukaram Mundhe who would not just work from their cosy air-conditioned officers but be out there in the field and deal with real issue.

Navita Srikant

The Nepali Congress is not merely another political party; it is part of Nepal's democratic heritage, shaped by decades of political struggle, sacrifice, imprisonment and democratic movements. Its history is inseparable from Nepal's democratic journey. What is unfolding therefore deserves examination beyond an ordinary contest among leaders and factions. Can a country's democratic journey be overwritten by the politics of the algorithm? The Nepali Congress must renew itself. Democratic institutions cannot remain frozen in time; generational change is necessary, leadership must be accountable, and parties must respond to changing aspirations. But renewal is not erasure. Sher Bahadur Deuba cannot constitutionally seek a third term as party president. Any capable leader, from any generation, who believes they can lead the party forward should make their case. Constitutional processes and party representatives must determine its future, not the personalisation of generational transition. The question is not which leader should remain or make way, but whether leadership claims are judged

by institutional merit, democratic principles and the capacity to serve Nepal's future. Change must be judged by what it improves, not simply by whom it replaces. The question goes beyond the Nepali Congress. Are we renewing institutions, or simply replacing the people inside them? Nepal's proposed changes to the bureaucracy, lateral entry into specialised positions, retirement and service tenure, and diplomatic appointments may legitimately seek expertise and fresh thinking. But public servants need leaders who respect experience, invest in human capital and give them space to speak up. If the State demands agency, it must provide the authority and institutional space it requires. Merit must prevail over conflicts of interest. Wider expertise in diplomacy can be valuable, just as deploying the Army in a genuine emergency may be necessary. But emergency deployment does not automatically justify permanent military management of civilian economic functions. Wider diplomatic recruitment should expand competence without weakening professional standards. Put the right institution, expertise and accountability behind every pub-

lic responsibility. Institutional Signalling: A test of institutional renewal Institutional accountability also depends on how State power is exercised when consequential questions are sub judice. Court proceedings do not automatically freeze political or organisational action, but the eventual judicial outcome cannot be ignored. Where the Supreme Court remains seized of a consequential question, those involved must recognise that their actions may have implications for the judicial process. The reported incident of former Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana being taken from his residence at midnight raises a broader question: how should State power be exercised when institutional confidence is at stake? The Executive exercises power, the Legislature scrutinises it, the Judiciary independently reviews it, while the media and civil society expose matters requiring public scrutiny. No one is above the law, but the exercise of State power must preserve institutional confidence and judicial independence. Democracy is protected when each of its pillars can perform its constitutional function without fear of the oth-

ers. And then comes the algorithm Institutional accountability depends not only on how power is exercised, but also on how political responsibility is assigned. Nepal's post-September 2025 political discourse deserves closer examination. A reading of Nepali media before and after the upheaval reveals a pattern worth questioning: the demand for generational change became increasingly associated with Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba. This is not to suggest that Deuba was the only senior leader criticised, or that criticism of him lacked justification. The September uprising challenged an established political generation represented by Deuba, KP Sharma Oli, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and Dr Baburam Bhattarai. Yet subsequent discourse increasingly concentrated political renewal on the Nepali Congress and, more specifically, Deuba. Prachanda, Oli and other established leaders remained part of the political process around the March 2026 general election. Dr Bhattarai initially filed his nomination but subsequently withdrew it. Why, then, did the wider burden of decades of political governance appear increasingly concentrated on one

party and one individual? This is where the algorithm matters. Digital platforms do not create every grievance, nor does their influence invalidate genuine public anger. But amplification can determine which grievances dominate, whose accountability receives sustained attention and which complexities disappear. "Old leader must go" is easily circulated; examining institutional failures, multiple political actors' responsibilities and the reforms needed to prevent recurrence is harder. The danger is not criticism of established leaders, but the narrowing of accountability into a personalised narrative: one leader represents an era, one party the establishment, and one generation the explanation for failures with multiple political authors. Visibility is not proof of representativeness; repetition is not evidence of consensus. Political responsibility must be assessed against conduct, decisions and outcomes-not the intensity with which a narrative is amplified. Nepal is neither anti-youth nor anti-reform, and it should not be anti-technology. Young leadership can bring new ideas, institutional reform can correct outdated systems, and digital platforms can widen participation.

But democratic renewal requires scrutiny of political narratives as well as political actors. Who shapes Nepal's political memory: institutions that carry democratic experience across generations, or narratives that digital platforms amplify today? Factional politics and the weight of history These questions are especially consequential within the Nepali Congress. Its democratic inheritance is not threatened by internal competition alone, but by the possibility that factional advantage may take precedence over institutional renewal. Factional politics is not new to the party. Its history includes divisions, rival leadership claims and competing political agendas. Such contestation is not inherently undemocratic; factions can challenge entrenched leadership and offer alternatives. The test is whether they strengthen internal democracy or reduce the institution to a contest for control. Uncertainty surrounds the competing factions, their claims and the eventual course of their conventions. The question is not simply who prevails, but whether the process strengthens the party's credibility, respects democratic procedures and prepares it to serve Nepal's future.

Politics of protest: The Opposition's dangerous drift

Tuhin A Sinha

India is witnessing an unsettling contest in which political opposition increasingly risks being reduced to a competition in disruption. The Congress and the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) appear to be converging on a common strategy of street mobilisation, confrontation with constitutional institutions and relentless amplification of allegations. The question is no longer merely whether the Opposition can challenge the government, but whether it is willing to respect the democratic processes through which governments are elected and disputes are resolved. The BJP's recent by-election victories in Assam and West Bengal, including in minority-dominated constituencies, have challenged entrenched political assumptions. These results reaffirm that voters cannot be taken for granted. Faced with a BJP that continues to demonstrate electoral resilience, the Opposition appears increasingly tempted to substitute street spectacle for a persuasive political alternative. The examples of Nepal and Bangladesh offer a cautionary tale. Rahul Gandhi has previously invoked youth-led upheavals abroad while addressing young Indians. But India is a constitutional democracy with an elected Parliament, an independent judiciary and established mechanisms for peaceful political change. Importing the vocabulary of street-driven regime change into Indian politics risks blurring the distinction between democratic protest and destabilisation. Disruption cannot become a substitute for democratic persuasion. Consider Rahul Gandhi's reported remarks following his interaction with the President. Expressing surprise that the President had not rebutted his allegations of vote theft after receiving a memorandum betrays a fundamental distinction: receiving a representation is not the same as endorsing its contents. Constitutional office-holders routinely receive memoranda without certifying the claims they contain. The President's courtesy cannot be converted into an implied admission of the Opposition's allegations.



This is not the first controversy involving Rahul Gandhi's interpretation of constitutional institutions. His earlier remarks concerning the Supreme Court's Rafale proceedings led to an apology. Political leaders have a responsibility to distinguish between allegations, demonstrable facts and what constitutional authorities have actually said. Repeating an accusation does not make it true. The present protests raise another troubling question: why escalate street mobilisation when the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is already under the Supreme Court's scrutiny? If the Opposition possesses compelling evidence of electoral wrongdoing, it should present it before the Court. If the Election Commission's explanations are inadequate, the shortcomings must be demonstrated. The judicial process must be allowed to run its course. By seeking to amplify political pressure while proceedings are under way, the Opposition risks creating the impression that it is more interested in shaping the public narrative than awaiting judicial findings. A courtroom is where evidence is tested; the street cannot become an alternative route to a judicial outcome. Constitutional institutions must be permitted to function without being overshadowed by political brinkmanship. The Modi government was justified in taking firm action to prevent demonstrations from degenerating into a law-and-or-

der crisis in the national capital. Governance requires prevention, not merely a response after disorder erupts. When protesters threaten to breach barricades, obstruct essential routes or disrupt public institutions, the administration cannot remain a passive spectator. Delhi is not an open-air political theatre available for indefinite occupation by any party seeking confrontation. It is the capital of the Republic, where hospitals, courts, schools, offices, transport networks and diplomatic missions must continue to function. Millions of ordinary citizens cannot be made collateral damage in a partisan political contest. The police have a duty to maintain public order, enforce lawful restrictions and prevent foreseeable escalation. The claim that every firm police response constitutes an assault on democracy distorts the relationship between liberty and responsibility. The right to protest is not a licence to paralyse public life, disregard lawful orders or compel constitutional institutions to submit to street pressure. Peaceful democratic engagement is welcome; disorder and unlawful obstruction must invite firm, lawful action. Social media has made this challenge more acute. Viral videos, slogans and short-form content can create an impression of certainty long before evidence is examined. From the Citizenship Amendment Act to reservation policies and now electoral-roll revision, complex issues have repeatedly

been reduced to inflammatory narratives. Young Indians deserve facts and context, not to be mobilised through misinformation for the political ambitions of others. The costs of perpetual agitation extend beyond law and order. India is investing in infrastructure, manufacturing, energy security and technological competitiveness. Where is the Opposition's credible roadmap for employment, economic growth and preparing young Indians for an economy transformed by artificial intelligence? When every institutional disagreement becomes a conspiracy and every administrative action is portrayed as repression, substantive debate is crowded out by manufactured outrage. Public patience, too, has limits. Citizens have jobs to reach, schools to attend, businesses to run and families to care for. Public spaces belong to everyone, not exclusively to professional political protesters. When agitation becomes an end in itself, it ceases to serve the public and begins imposing costs upon it. India needs an Opposition that scrutinises the government, exposes wrongdoing and offers credible alternatives. But criticism must be backed by evidence, allegations must be established and political mobilisation must remain within the boundaries of democratic responsibility. No party can claim a monopoly over democracy or demand that constitutional rules be suspended whenever they become inconvenient. India stands at a decisive inflection point. The Viksit Bharat mission requires institutional confidence, sustained economic momentum and a national focus on the opportunities ahead. The country cannot afford to have its aspirations derailed by a politics of perpetual confrontation. The choice before India is between democratic competition that strengthens institutions and a politics that risks weakening them through relentless disruption. A confident democracy accommodates dissent while enforcing the law. It does not confuse anarchy with accountability. Viksit Bharat cannot be built by paralysing the present. It must be built by debating the future-and refusing to let the politics of anarchy derail the aspirations of a nation.

NAGA PEACE IN PERIL

and diverted to Manipur. In despair, Muivah sought third-party intervention for the first time, though he and his people met Mishra in perfunctory, closed-door meetings between 2022 and October 2025 to ensure there was no 'breakdown' in talks. The Nagas declared an insurgency in 1955, drawing Indian troops into the then Tuensang and Naga Hills, with PM Nehru's message to soldiers to 'win hearts of the people, not to frighten or terrify them'. The shooting down of an IAF Dakota in 1960 escalated the insurgency as I joined pacification operations with my battalion. The Indian Army fought one of the most intense insurgencies of all time, even after the Shillong Accord (1975) with the Naga National Council, which Muivah opposed, until the Ceasefire Agreement (1997), which, after 80 rounds of talks, culminated in the FA with NSCN (IM). Muivah points to the earlier Amsterdam Joint Communiqué with the Vajpayee Government in 2002, which recognised Naga sovereignty. In 2017, Ravi signed the Agreed Position with the seven Naga groups called the National Naga Peoples Group (NNPG), which Chairman of NSCN (IM) Q Tuccu called the 'Centre's deceitful agreement, created as a counterweight to the FA to divide the Nagas'. Recall that the FA was signed only with NSCN (IM) and not with NNPG, which was an afterthought. The GoI has said that both groups have to agree for the FA to be consummated, thereby changing the goalposts. People in Somdal said, 'Muivah must apologise for coming back empty-handed after 55 years.' A stalemate has existed since Ravi resigned as interlocutor. The FA's failure can be attributed to the absence of a full-time negotiator and the lack of a peace process focused on addressing political and administrative autonomy. Ravi was in a hurry to provide the

Government with the FA, for which he allegedly ran roughshod over the NSCN (IM), creating distrust. He was unable, or more unwilling, to accommodate the constitutional issue of shared sovereignty, even as including Naga sovereignty in the Indian Constitution and accepting the Naga flag as a cultural symbol did not satisfy Muivah. He insisted on a Naga constitution and flag, which became impossible after the abrogation of Article 370, when the Nagas began to fear that even the constitutional safeguard of special status under Article 371A might be withdrawn. The Neiphiu Rio-led Nagaland Government is today opposition-less and aligned with the BJP. Rio has sought Home Minister Amit Shah's help to catalyse the FA. Muivah was deeply hurt when Ravi, as Governor, asked legislators to call NSCN (IM) 'lawless gangs' and accused Ravi of closing down talks at the behest of the RSS and NNPG. The NSCN (IM) says the Centre is using the Kuki and People's Defence Force against its camps in Myanmar's Sagaing region. The blame game goes on, even as 25 MPs urged Shah in February 2025 to disclose the FA's status in Parliament. Twenty-five years of the CFA were celebrated in 2023, with Lt Gen Bedi (ret'd), who headed the Ceasefire Monitoring Group (CFMG), in attendance. NSCN (IM) sent long-range patrols to its camps in Myanmar and to one camp in Bangladesh. It has approached the International Court of Justice in The Hague and hired the services of legal luminary Michael Van Valt, who also represents the Free Tibet cause. Nearly 100 rounds of talks have failed to untangle the Naga issue. On the contrary, positions have hardened, and trust has become the biggest casualty. 3 Corps, which is in operational command of the North-East, is prepared for various inimical contingencies involving NSCN (IM).