

# The Tribune

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## EU–India ties

Tightrope as Russia's shadow looms

THE European Union has sent a clear signal of intent: it wants to deepen its strategic and trade ties with India. On the face of it, this is a natural progression. India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies, a major Indo-Pacific player, and a potential counterweight to China. Yet the road ahead is far from smooth, for India's longstanding ties with Russia cast a long shadow over the New Delhi-Brussels equation. India's relationship with Russia has been defined by decades of defence cooperation and, more recently, discounted oil imports that helped cushion inflationary shocks. At the same time, India has been expanding cooperation with Europe — France on fighter jets and submarines, Germany on green hydrogen and the EU bloc on trade negotiations. The challenge lies in balancing these axes without being forced into choosing one over the other.

The economic case for closer EU partnership is compelling. The EU is India's third largest trading partner, offering access to high-end tech, investment and regulatory frameworks that could help modernise Indian industries. Collaborations in digital trade, green energy and pharmaceuticals align with India's own development priorities. On the geopolitical front, Europe's growing interest in Indo-Pacific security dovetails with India's concerns about China's assertiveness.

But tensions are inevitable. Europe's discomfort with India's neutral stance on Ukraine will not fade quickly. For Brussels, human rights and political values are often embedded in trade and security discussions, while for India, sovereignty and strategic autonomy remain paramount. Over-dependence on either Russia or Europe carries risks: the former risks technological stagnation, the latter political pressures. The essence of Indian diplomacy has been its ability to navigate multi-polar complexities — from the Non-Aligned Movement to today's multi-alignment. The EU partnership should not be seen as a replacement for Moscow, but as an expansion of India's options.

## Stubble challenge

Incentivising farmers is a viable option

THE onset of paddy procurement in Punjab has drawn the attention of various stakeholders to a seasonal problem — stubble burning. The Supreme Court has asked the state government to take a call on arresting some erring farmers for indulging in this practice, which is a key contributor to air pollution in October-November every year. The court has acknowledged that "farmers are special and we are eating because of them", but it has urged the state to invoke penal provisions to send a stern message about safeguarding the environment. Punjab and Haryana, both food-bowl states, have occasionally put farmers behind bars for setting stubble ablaze, but this drastic step has not proved to be an effective deterrent.

Arrests and hefty penalties over the years have incurred the wrath of the region's farming community, which has not shied away from upping the ante against the Central and state governments. Criminal prosecution of farmers is regarded as a politically risky move as they constitute an influential vote bank, particularly in Punjab. With the paddy crop having suffered extensive damage during the recent floods in the border state, the authorities are likely to play it safe, avoiding punitive action that can worsen the farmers' ordeal.

It is imperative to prioritise collaboration over confrontation. The carrot should work better than the stick. The key is to encourage and empower farmers to manage stubble, which can be used productively as biofuel by industries. The push for biomass utilisation in energy production can make a difference on the ground. The capital subsidy to incentivise industries shifting to stubble-based boilers is a laudable initiative. Eco-friendly steps that ensure environmental protection as well as the wellbeing of farmers are a must to prevent the great winter choke.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

# The Tribune.

LAHORE, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1925

## Government's double defeat

ON Wednesday, the Government of India sustained a double defeat in the Legislative Assembly. In both cases, the defeat was perfectly well deserved. In the first case, the issue before the House was whether the present rule by which persons against whom a conviction by a criminal court involving a sentence of transportation or imprisonment for a period of more than one year is subsisting are disqualified for election to Indian and provincial legislatures should or should not continue to exist. It was not a matter in which there was any difference of opinion among educated and politically minded Indians. Not only was it repugnant to common sense and to all considerations of fairness that a man who had already served his sentence should be debarred from offering himself as a candidate for election, but the example of England, from which our laws and institutions are claimed to be derived, was entirely against the rule. Further, it was perfectly obvious that such a rule amounted in intention and in effect to a serious interference with the legitimate right of the electorate to determine who should represent it. Lastly, apart from the question of principle, there was the undeniable fact that many of the best men in the country had at one time or another been sent to prison for no other reason than the intensity of their love of the country, and not a few of these men were disqualified under the rule. The legislatures themselves, Indian and provincial, had joined in the general demand for its abolition. What had been the Government's response to this unanimous public demand? Nothing except a small concession raising the disqualifying period from six months to one year.

# OPINION

## Speaking truth to Pawar

A young IPS officer has set an example by standing firm against Maharashtra Deputy CM



TRYSTS AND TURNS  
JULIO RIBEIRO

MAHARASHTRA Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar is like the proverbial cat with nine lives. The BJP-Shiv Sena government (2014-19) accused him of siphoning off funds when the Congress-NCP (Nationalist Congress Party) alliance was in power. Pawar had served as the state Water Resources and Irrigation Minister from 1999 to 2009. Later, he was given the clean chit in the irrigation scam.

In 2023, he jumped ship with some of his supporters, originally from the NCP, and formed a splinter group that extended support to the BJP.

Recently, the Deputy CM found himself in trouble after a young IPS officer, Anjana Krishna, posted as SDPO (Sub-Divisional Police Officer) at Karmala in Solapur district, got the better of him. She recorded her conversation with Pawar, showing him in an extremely poor light. He tried to squirm out of the spider's web but got inextricably entangled.

The Mahayuti government, led by Devendra Fadnis, had ordered that sand mining of riverbeds in the state would not be permitted without the written nod of the designated district revenue officer. Pawar's faithful followers, like those of other important politicians in the state, presumed that all laws and rules framed by parties in power could be broken by those who owed allegiance to the ruling alliance.

As the Police Commissioner of Thane in 1981, I was 'requested' by a Congress



ONE-UP: Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar's attempt to bully IPS officer Anjana Krishna backfired. PTI



MLA close to then Chief Minister, AR Antulay, to desist from raiding distilleries manufacturing illicit liquor! I politely pointed out to the gentleman that the laws were enacted by his own party and not by the police. If his party wanted the illicit liquor business to flourish for whatever reason, he needed to approach his own party bosses to abolish the prohibition law that required the police to prevent distillation in the interest of people's health.

As the Police Commissioner, I was duty-bound to implement the government's policies. After leaving my office, the MLA told anxious police inspectors awaiting his signal that they had been saddled with an 'insane' boss who believed that laws instituted by legislators were sacrosanct!

Ajit is not the only senior politician to browbeat 'government' servants, who are actually 'public' servants. There were fewer upstarts among the politicians in the early years of my service. In fact, the very first one I encountered was in my 11th year of service when I was given the charge of Superin-

If Anjana Krishna continues to uphold justice and rule of law, she would do a great service to the IPS and the people of India.

tendent of Police, Poona city. A year later, a commissionerate was formed in Poona (Pune). The state's Home Minister, Balasaheb Desai, issued verbal orders to the Commissioner "not to fire" at miscreants who had resorted to looting and burning during a communal clash.

That order conveyed down

the line was ignored by me on the second day of the clashes when the riots escalated. That was what finally saved the police from ignominy. When an inquiry into the riots was instituted, the minister, of course, was not prepared to admit to his verbal instructions. His first instinct was to protect his own skin.

Anjana Krishna was very polite while talking to the Deputy CM on the phone of one of his supporters, who had got in touch with him. She asked Pawar to call her on her own mobile phone so that she could be sure that it was the Deputy CM himself who was ordering her to permit sand mining of riverbeds, thus ignoring written orders of the government.

Ironically, the state government is encouraging builders to redevelop even well-constructed and perfectly safe buildings as part of its development agenda. The fact is that 'eviction' of residents, even those like me who are awaiting passage to the next world, is a cruel act, based sometimes on the needs of larger families, but more often on sheer greed. The

neglect of the old and infirm is intrinsic to this mad rush to redevelop buildings which do not call for such a step.

The state government does not seem to care for the health of citizens, especially the very young, the very old and the sick, who have to endure the steep rise in pollution levels caused by the razing of buildings and the construction activity that follows. It does not think about nature's revenge when sand is mined indiscriminately from riverbeds. If regulations are in place to prevent such sand mining, loopholes are left by empowering lesser officials to bypass the rules.

Coming back to the young officer who bested a powerful politician, I must give her credit for turning the spotlight on a disturbing phenomenon. Powerful politicians force 'meek' bureaucrats and police officers to disregard the laws which they themselves have passed to lull gullible people into believing that they have public health and safety uppermost in their minds. Actually, what they really seek is an avenue to generate funds needed to get the votes that will keep them in power as long as possible.

Anjana seems to have her wits about her. I would never have thought of recording the conversation with any politician, high or low. I do not know how she managed that, but whatever people may say about her methods, the end in this case did justify the means. Politicians seeking to bully officials will now be put on notice.

Anjana's career must be followed closely. If she continues to adhere to the Constitution and worship at the altar of justice and rule of law, keeping away from the temptations that are bound to come her way in the police service, she would do a great service to the IPS and the people of this great country.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Public officers are the servants and agents of the people. —Grover Cleveland

## Seamless continuity of footsteps

VINOD KHANNA

NOSTALGIA is an old man's best friend, and lack of sleep his worst enemy. I knew it because when my old parents came to live with us for a few months, I could hear the voices emanating from their room well past midnight.

They had a whole world left behind in Pakistan to talk about. Pakpattan Sharif, the place where Baba Farid resided, was also the place where my mother was born and brought up. She had a strong religious instinct, maybe due to the proximity of the Sufi saint's *dargah* to her home. However, it was my father who often recited the saint's poetry during their conversations because he had studied it while preparing for an examination.

Some of the couplets that I used to overhear have stayed with me. My favourite: "*Farida je tu aqal lateef hain tan kaale likh na lekhi, Apne girebaan mein munh neewan kar dekh*" (O Farid, if you are really intelligent, don't write negatively about others, you must look within and see your own faults first).

Then they talked of relatives who vanished during the Partition and those who survived. They also talked of gold and silver buried in the courtyard while leaving the house in a hurry, hoping that one day they would come back to retrieve it — as and when things settled down. Alas, it was not to be.

While witnessing them getting older, losing their teeth, upgrading their specs and piling more and more medicines on the bedside, I pitied their condition, hardly realising that a subtle change had been in the offing. Their eventual departure was only a matter of time.

The actors have changed now. Approaching their age, my wife and I have slowly cast ourselves in their roles. Sleep often plays truant, and after uselessly tossing and turning in bed, we are left with nothing but to relive the memories of our youthful days and childhood. When there is a brief lull in our conversation, I sometimes hear the voices coming from the room where my late parents used to talk and sleep. I often wonder if it is a *fait accompli* for every human to follow in the footsteps of his or her forbears.

We often hear that age is just a number, but having seen old age from close quarters, I can say that all numbers are not the same. Robert Stach's *The Ice Age Cometh*, a sci-fi novel set in 2125, is a case in point. Even the years are numbers, but 2125 will never be 2025.

Poet Nida Fazli has beautifully summed up this continuity of relationships in his poem '*Walid ki wafat par*' (Upon the death of a father):

"...tumhari qabr par jis ne tumhara naam likha hai  
Voh jhootha hai, voh jhootha hai  
Tumhari qabr mein main dafn hun, tum mujh mein zinda ho  
Kabhi fursat miley to fatiha padhne chale aana..."  
(The one who has written your name on your grave is a liar, I am buried in your grave, you are alive in me  
If you ever get free time, come and offer the ritual prayer).

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Unemployment a stark reality

Refer to 'Despair, desperation over jobs in Bihar'; the problem of unemployment is severe in populous states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. These two states account for most of the inter-state migration in India. The economy of Bihar, historically one of India's poorest states, is heavily dependent on agriculture. But small landholdings, coupled with inadequate irrigation, provide less dividends and render land unproductive. The state's industrial sector is underdeveloped. The hapless villagers have no alternative except to work in farms and industries in other states. Educated youths hanker after government jobs. The recruitment process is slow in the state and paper leaks add to the misery. Results of exams get delayed for years. If no timely correction in the system is done, the consequences can be disastrous.

KR BHARTI, SHIMLA

#### Countries protect their farmers

With reference to 'Punjab farmers need a crop insurance cover'; a lack of political will across parties has led to inadequate, politically motivated compensations instead of providing real solutions. In contrast, countries like Australia, the US, Canada, China and Japan protect their farmers by providing strong crop insurance schemes. The government must learn from the current flood crisis and introduce a comprehensive crop insurance policy in Punjab, alongside strategies for sustainable management of natural resources.

RAJESH JALOTA, BY MAIL

#### Academic freedom curtailed

Apropos of 'When university professors stop questioning power'; if the academia shifts to self-censorship, truth begins to lose its meaning. A nation's history must be based on people's struggles instead of a focus on State policies in order to reveal its democratic credentials. These days, academic freedom is being curtailed in the name of fostering nationalism. It is essential for the intellectual, as Edward Said argues, "to speak truth to power, often at the risk of being deemed unpatriotic or subversive".

ASHIMA GUPTA, PATIALA

#### Varsities must align with truth

Refer to 'When university professors stop questioning power'; it is a clarion call to the academia of the world to wake up from its deep slumber before it is too late. Professional ambition resulting in complicity is one of the stumbling blocks in the way of the academician playing an objective role. The writer has aptly observed that universities must align not with state power or capital but with the struggle for freedom, justice and truth. He has raised pertinent questions about the purpose and function of higher education in a democratic society and its role in the welfare of the State. Universities must rise to the occasion to play a significant part in ushering a humane, amiable and harmonious world order.

PK SHARMA, BARNALA

#### Protect RTI activists

The editorial 'RTI woes' underscores how vacancies and delays have weakened the RTI framework. However, another grave concern often overlooked is the safety of those who dare to use this Act. Since its enactment, scores of RTI activists have been harassed, assaulted or even killed, with the tragic case of Shehla Masood standing out as a stark reminder. The Whistleblower Protection Act, which was intended to safeguard truth-seekers, remains toothless in practice — diluted by amendments and crippled by poor enforcement. Unless the state ensures robust protection for whistleblowers and RTI activists, transparency will remain a promise only on paper.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

#### Taking development forward

Apropos of 'Modi at 75': Narendra Modi's premiership has altered India's image in the eyes of the world. The prime minister has carried forward the work of his predecessors to newer heights. While the foundation of India's space programme was largely laid down by Indira Gandhi, Modi's tenure has propelled the country to the forefront of space exploration. The momentum of economic reforms laid down by Manmohan Singh has continued with renewed zeal as India integrates with the global economy. However, the biggest challenge is to create jobs for the teeming youth.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR