

A Budget of Consolidation in an Uncertain World

By Uday Kumar Varma

Author is a former Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, GOI

The Union Budget 2026–27 has been presented at a moment when the global economic and political environment remains deeply unsettled. Wars continue to disrupt trade routes, financial markets remain sensitive to interest rate movements in advanced economies, and supply chains are increasingly shaped by geopolitics rather than efficiency alone. For an economy like India—integrated with global capital markets yet still addressing domestic development imperatives—this context matters as much as the numbers themselves.

Against this backdrop, the Budget is best understood as a continuity and consolidation Budget. It is neither flamboyant nor populist. It avoids dramatic departures and resists the temptation of short-term giveaways. Instead, it reflects confidence in the broad stability of the Indian economy and a deliberate decision to stay the course.

That choice, in today's circumstances, is itself significant.

Fiscal discipline as a structural imperative

Perhaps the most important signal comes from the fiscal stance. The fiscal deficit for FY 2026–27 has been pegged at 4.3 per cent of GDP, marginally better than the previous year. This improvement may appear modest, but its significance is substantial.

Fiscal discipline today is no longer merely a matter of political intent; it has become a structural constraint. India's government bonds are now part of global indices. International investors track fiscal numbers closely. Any slippage would immediately reflect in borrowing costs, interest rates, and ultimately in the cost of capital across the economy—from infrastructure projects to housing loans.

By choosing restraint even in a politically sensitive period, the Budget underscores that credibility with markets and lenders is being prioritised over short-term populism. In an era of volatile capital flows, credibility is not an abstract virtue; it is an economic asset.

No fresh tax concessions—and the logic behind it

There were, unsurprisingly, no sweeping reductions in either direct or indirect taxes. While this may disappoint some expectations, it reflects sound economic reasoning. Tax collections—both income tax and GST—are projected to grow at a slightly more moderate pace. In such a situation, additional concessions would either widen the deficit or force spending cuts elsewhere.

Instead, the Budget focuses on tax simplification rather than tax reduction: a new Income Tax Act to come into effect from April 2026, rationalisation of penalties and prosecutions, streamlined compliance, and relief in specific hardship cases. These measures reduce friction without undermining revenue.

This approach recognises a basic but often overlooked truth: aggressive tax cuts without corresponding expenditure restraint tend to raise borrowing, push up interest rates, and ultimately dampen growth. Prudence here is not ideological—it is practical.

Capital expenditure remains the main growth engine

Public capital expenditure has been raised from ₹11.2 lakh crore to ₹12.2 lakh crore, reaffirming that infrastructure-led growth is no longer a temporary stimulus strategy but the core economic model.

Capex performs a triple function: it creates productive assets, lowers transaction and logistics costs, and crowds in private investment. It may be slow and unglamorous, but it is structurally powerful. The government's consistent commitment to capex reflects an understanding that durable growth depends less on consumption spurts and more on capacity creation.

The announcement of seven high-speed rail corridors, described as “growth connectors”, illustrates a maturing infrastructure philosophy. This is not merely about construction activity; it is about integrating labour markets, reducing travel times between industrial clusters, and increasing economic density. Infrastructure policy is moving from asset creation to regional integration.

Manufacturing as a strategic capability

Across announcements on semiconductors, electronics, biopharma, textiles, and advanced manufacturing, a clear theme emerges: manufacturing is being treated not as a cyclical sector but as a strategic capability.

Initiatives such as Semiconductor Mission 2.0, tax holidays for data centres till 2047, customs duty exemptions for capital goods used in lithium-ion batteries and critical minerals, and the ₹10,000 crore BioPharma Shakti programme point to a long-term industrial vision.

Manufacturing matters because it creates large-scale employment, supports exports, and stabilises the currency. Services stabilise the economy; manufacturing transforms it. The Budget reflects that distinction clearly.

Rare earths, critical minerals, and supply chain realism

One of the least flashy but most consequential moves is the focus on rare earths and critical minerals. In a world where supply chains are increasingly weaponised, access to minerals such as lithium, nickel, and rare earth elements is no longer a technical issue—it is a strategic one.

By treating mining, processing, and mineral logistics as national economic infrastructure, the government is acknowledging a key constraint that has long limited manufacturing ambitions. This is not about extracting more; it is about owning value chains, particularly the midstream segments where strategic leverage lies.

MSMEs: from survival to scale

The proposed ₹10,000 crore MSME Growth Fund signals a shift in MSME policy—from survival to scale. Along with liquidity support and compliance rationalisation, the emphasis is now on equity, governance, and integration into larger supply chains.

This marks a move away from protection towards productivity. Supporting MSMEs as future champions rather than perpetual dependents is a welcome evolution.

Stability as strategy

There are no headline-grabbing reforms in this Budget. Instead, there are process reforms: simplified compliance, clearer rules, predictable policies. These may not excite markets overnight, but they matter deeply to businesses and investors planning over decades.

Taken together, the Budget rests on a simple but coherent logic: stability enables investment; investment builds capacity; capacity reinforces credibility.

Taken as a whole, the Budget follows a clear and disciplined logic: stability enables investment, investment builds capacity, and capacity underwrites credibility. In a world marked by geopolitical fractures, volatile capital flows, and economic uncertainty, credibility is not an abstract virtue; it directly shapes borrowing costs, investment decisions, and growth prospects. By choosing consolidation over spectacle and discipline over short-term populism, the Budget signals how India intends to navigate this moment. It may not generate instant applause, but it strengthens the foundations on which durable growth must rest.

If You Kill a Language, You Silence a Civilization

By - Dr. Santhosh Mathew

The author is a Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University.

On February 21, the world pauses to remember a truth written in blood and ink—that language is not merely a tool of communication, but the soul of a people. International Mother Language Day is not an abstract cultural celebration. It is rooted in sacrifice, in the streets of what was then East Pakistan, where young students laid down their lives defending the right to speak Bengali. Their resistance shaped not only the destiny of Bangladesh, but also the global conscience on linguistic justice. The origins of this day trace back to 1952, when Pakistan’s founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, declared in 1948 that “Urdu and Urdu alone” would be the state language of Pakistan. It was a decision that ignored demographic reality: the majority of Pakistan’s population spoke Bengali. The imposition of Urdu was seen as cultural domination by West Pakistan over East Pakistan. On February 21, 1952, students of the University of Dhaka defied Section 144 and marched in protest. Police opened fire. Several students were killed. Their martyrdom became the seed of the Bengali Language Movement, which later nourished the liberation struggle of 1971, when the Mukti Bahini—Bangladesh’s liberation fighters—took up arms for political and cultural freedom.

Language was at the heart of that struggle. The fight was not merely about vocabulary; it was about dignity, identity, and the right to exist as a distinct people. In recognition of this sacrifice, UNESCO declared February 21 as International Mother Language Day in 1999. Today, the Shaheed Minar in Dhaka stands not just as a monument to fallen students but as a global symbol of linguistic rights. The Bengali Language Movement teaches a timeless lesson: unity cannot be built on linguistic uniformity. Diversity is not a weakness but a strength. This principle resonates deeply in India, a country often described as a linguistic civilization rather than a monolithic nation-state. India officially recognizes 22 languages in its Eighth Schedule, yet it is home to hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects.

Scholars generally classify Indian languages into four major families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Austroasiatic. Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and Punjabi dominate northern and central India. Dravidian languages—Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam—flourish in the south. Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken across the north-eastern hills, while Austroasiatic tongues survive among tribal communities in central and eastern India. This mosaic is not accidental; it is the cumulative result of millennia of migration, interaction, and coexistence.

India’s post-independence leaders understood that linguistic aspirations could not be ignored. The linguistic reorganization of states in 1956 was a landmark in democratic accommodation. States like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Gujarat emerged on linguistic lines,

not as acts of division, but as acknowledgments of cultural identity within the framework of national unity. The formula was simple yet profound: respect diversity to preserve unity. But linguistic harmony has never been automatic. Colonial India witnessed its own battles over language. In 1878, the British passed the Vernacular Press Act to curb Indian-language newspapers that criticized colonial rule. English publications were spared, but vernacular presses were targeted. The Act revealed the colonial anxiety that native languages could mobilize political resistance. And they did. Newspapers in Bengali, Marathi, Urdu, and Tamil became platforms for nationalist awakening. Language became liberation's ally.

Even today, the vernacular press remains the lifeblood of Indian democracy. While English media often dominates elite discourse, regional newspapers and television channels shape public opinion in rural and semi-urban India. Yet print journalism in all languages faces existential challenges. Digital disruption, declining readership, and shrinking advertisement revenues threaten newspapers across the spectrum. For classical languages like Sanskrit, the struggle is even starker. India is perhaps the only country where a classical language like Sanskrit still has newspapers and journals, but their circulation is limited, and survival depends largely on institutional support. At the same time, India has demonstrated innovative ways to celebrate linguistic plurality. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's radio program *Mann Ki Baat* is translated into numerous Indian languages and dialects, ensuring that the message reaches citizens in their mother tongues. From All India Radio's regional services to community radio stations in remote villages, the effort to communicate in native languages reinforces democratic inclusion. Language is access; language is empowerment.

Globally, however, the story is not always hopeful. UNESCO estimates that nearly 40 percent of the world's 7,000 languages are endangered. India, despite its linguistic wealth, is not immune. Many tribal languages in the Andaman Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, and central India have already disappeared, taking with them unique worldviews, oral traditions, and ecological knowledge. When a language dies, an entire intellectual universe vanishes. Vocabulary encodes culture; grammar reflects patterns of thought; proverbs carry ancestral wisdom. Extinction is not merely linguistic—it is civilizational. This is why mother language education is vital. Children learn concepts best in the language they speak at home. Studies consistently show that primary education in the mother tongue improves comprehension, retention, and cognitive development. The National Education Policy 2020 in India emphasizes teaching in the mother tongue at least until Grade 5, reflecting global pedagogical consensus. This approach is not parochial; it is practical and humane.

Consider Tamil, often described as one of the world's oldest continuously used classical languages. Tamil boasts a literary tradition spanning over two millennia, from Sangam poetry to modern novels. Its antiquity is not merely a matter of pride for Tamils; it is a testament to India's civilizational depth. Likewise, Sanskrit, though no longer widely spoken as a mother tongue, continues to influence philosophy, ritual, and vocabulary across the subcontinent. Both languages illustrate different models of linguistic endurance—one thriving as a living vernacular, the other preserved as a liturgical and scholarly medium. Across the border in Bangladesh, the memory of the language martyrs remains vibrant. The Mukti Bahini fighters of 1971 did not forget that their liberation struggle began with the assertion of Bengali identity. International Mother Language Day, therefore, is also a tribute to them. It reminds us that cultural rights are inseparable from political freedom.

In a world increasingly dominated by global languages such as English, Mandarin, and Spanish, smaller languages often feel pressured to retreat. Yet multilingualism need not be a zero-sum game. One can be proficient in English for global mobility while remaining rooted in one's mother tongue for cultural continuity. The challenge is not choosing one over the other, but ensuring that globalization does not become homogenization.

India's strength lies in its ability to say "unity in diversity" not as a slogan but as lived reality. Walk through a railway station, and you hear announcements in multiple languages. Look at Indian currency notes, and you see denominations printed in numerous scripts. Watch parliamentary debates, and members speak in different tongues, relying on simultaneous translation. Diversity is institutionalized, not merely tolerated.

As February 21 approaches, the message from Dhaka's martyrs' echoes across the subcontinent: language is identity, memory, resistance, and hope. The bullets fired in 1952 could not silence Bengali. Instead, they amplified it, eventually birthing a nation. International Mother Language Day is thus more than a commemorative date. It is a reminder that linguistic justice sustains democratic justice. It urges governments to protect endangered languages, educators to prioritize mother tongue instruction, media houses to nurture vernacular journalism, and citizens to cherish the language spoken at their hearth. For in the lullabies of our mothers, in the idioms of our villages, in the poetry of our ancestors, lies a truth no decree can erase: a people live as long as their language lives. And when we honour our mother tongue, we honour not only our past but also our future.

Military Tanks

By Om Dubey

The author is student of Political Science and Economics of V.G. Vaze College, Mumbai, who completed internship at FINS

Introduction.

Military tanks are armoured vehicles with firepower, essential for penetrating fortified enemy positions and carving pathways for broader advances into hostile territory, additionally serving the crucial purpose of reconnaissance activities. The utility of these mechanical mammoths are judged on the basis of their firepower, mobility, armour strength, and technology integration—including advanced communication systems.

Coming to their classification, the major distinction between 3rd and the upcoming 4th generation tanks apart from unmanned turrets is the integration of advanced communication technologies for efficient reconnaissance, surveillance and coordination. The upgradation in engine and firepower capabilities is insignificant.

Tanks being essential for territorial mechanised warfare are heavily stocked in every major military force. According to World Population Review the top 5 countries with largest tank fleets are, China (6,800), Russia (5,750), USA (4,640), N.Korea (4,344), and India (4,201). Moreover, our neighbour adversaries— China and Pakistan have a combined fleet of over 8,500 military tanks. Therefore, India's tanks fleet and robust indigenous development capabilities are necessary for maintaining regional deterrence.

Indian Arsenal

India's Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) fleet is formed by Russian T-72 Ajeya and T-90 Bhisma, with the Indian Arjun Mk1a increasing in number. India has secured Transfer of Technology agreements from Russia to assemble and produce the Ajeya and Bhisma tanks in India itself. This work is carried out by Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (AVNL—a defence PSU) which is located in Avadi, Chennai. In 2025, India signed a deal with Russia's Rosoboronexport for the procurement of a more powerful engine of 1000 horsepower for the T-72 Ajeya which is at present fitted with 780 HP engines. This deal includes the ToT to the AVNL for licensed engine manufacturing.

| Parameter | Arjun MBT | T-90 Bhishma | T-72 Ajeya |
|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Weight | 68 Tonnes | 46.5 Tonnes | 43 Tonnes |
| Crew | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Maximum Road Speed | 65-70 kmph | 60 kmph | 60 kmph |
| Engine Power | ~1500 HP | 1000 HP | 780 HP |
| Power-to-Weight Ratio | 20.59 HP/T | 21.5 HP/T | 19 HP/T |
| Gun Bore | 120 mm (Rifled) | 125 mm (Smoothbore) | 125 mm (Smoothbore) |
| Rate of Fire | 6–8 rounds/min | 8 rounds/min | 8 rounds/min |

India's Indigenisation Efforts

India is the largest importer of defence equipment and technology in the world, only Ukraine was able to eclipse it in the year 2025– only because of the ongoing war. This exacerbates the fact that India has been experiencing multiple issues pertaining to delivery of critical defence products due to supply chain disruptions, geopolitical considerations, and because its largest weapons supplier— Russia is itself in war. This has resulted in New Delhi realising that in times of crisis, countries will always prioritise domestic needs over international agreements and promises. This underscores the importance of developing indigenous capabilities for defence products, especially for something as fundamental as a tank.

The effort for indigenous development of a MBT was initiated by DRDO's Combat Vehicles Research & Development Establishment (CVRDE) in the 1970s. After around four decades of work Arjun tank's production began. The major issue for Arjun's manufacturing was our inability to design and produce the 1500 hp engine which it required. We relied on the MTU Friedrichshafen 1400hp diesel engine to drive this massive 68 tonnes machine. After recurrent delays citing supply chain issues since 2021, "the German engine manufacturers communicated that they would require around 48 months to restart the production of the engines used by the Arjun Mark 1A tanks to be used by the Indian Army for deployment mainly in the defence sector," defence source told ANI.

This accelerated the development and incorporation of the indigenous DATRAN 1500 hp diesel engine. This engine is developed collectively by Indian private and public defence manufacturers including DRDO, Bharat Earth Movers Limited, Bharat Electronics Limited, Mahindra & Mahindra, Kirloskar Oil Engines, Larsen & Toubro, amongst others. DRDO is developing 1500 hp engine for Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFVs). During 2024, manufacturing of components, assembly and firing of first engine prototype have been completed. One Prototype engine has been cranked and fatigue / endurance testing of engine components have been completed. The cooling system components have been developed and assembly of two prototypes is under progress.

Moreover, AVNL already manufactures the T-72 Ajeya and T-90 Bhishma indigenously under licensed production agreements. In 2024, AVNL rolled out the first batch of 10 Bhishma T-90 Mark 3 tanks which boasts major upgrades in digital fire control, automatic target tracking, and Mid-Wave Infrared (MWIR) sight developed by DRDO and BEL. In 2025, AVNL reported of achieving more than 90% indigenisation of T-90 tanks).

India's defense industry has achieved a significant milestone in 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative by manufacturing the Arjun MBT, along with developing critical technologies in-house such as the 1500 HP DATRAN engine, Kanchan composite armour, INVAR anti-tank guided missiles, MWIR sighting systems, and uprating the existing T-series tank fleet. All these accomplishments corroborates India's promising future in defence capabilities— particularly in Armoured Fighting Vehicles.

This achievement is particularly important given the geopolitical milieu consisting of supply chain issues, delayed deliveries, and protectionist policies. Indigenous manufacturing additionally provides with more assured procurement, as weapons manufacturers always prioritise delivery to their parent country over the contracts with other countries.

The 'PRAHAAR' Architecture, India's New Counter-Terrorism Doctrine

By Vipul Tamhane

Author is an anti-money Laundering and combating terrorist financing specialist and provides legal and commercial advice to businesses, governments, and law enforcement organisations.

For decades, India's counter-terrorism posture followed a familiar and frustrating rhythm. An attack would occur. Investigations would follow. Agencies would scramble. Coordination failures would surface in post-mortems. And the cycle would begin again. Successive governments pledged zero tolerance. Yet the institutional architecture to back that pledge remained conspicuously absent, a promise without a spine.

PRAHAAR changes that calculus entirely

India's newly unveiled National Counter Terrorism Policy, PRAHAAR, meaning “strike”, is an eight-page document prepared by the Home Ministry. Deceptively compact in form, it is sweeping in ambition. Its seven-layer framework, i.e. Prevention, Response, Aggregating Capacities, Human Rights, Attenuating Radicalisation, Aligning Global Efforts, and Recovery, signals something more profound than a bureaucratic checklist. It signals strategic maturity. And more than that, it signals a decisive shift from episodic response to permanent disruption.

From Fire-Brigade to Persistent Interdiction

The old model was essentially a fire-brigade operation: wait for the fire, then respond. India's intelligence and security apparatus, despite housing world-class professionals across the IB, NIA, NSG, and state ATSS, operated as fragmented units often racing to share information faster than bureaucratic silos allowed. Terrorists, ironically, enjoyed better operational coordination in some respects, their handlers across the border maintained clear command lines while India's responders navigated jurisdictional turf.

PRAHAAR dismantles that asymmetry at its root. By making the Multi-Agency Centre and the Joint Task Force on Intelligence the national command backbone of counter-terror operations, the doctrine converts India's disparate security apparatus into a single synchronised network. State police, central forces, intelligence agencies, and financial enforcement bodies now function, in theory and increasingly in practice, as nodes in one persistent surveillance and interdiction grid. The doctrine does not wait for a plot to mature. It targets the ecosystem that makes plotting possible in the first place.

This is the conceptual revolution at PRAHAAR's core: counter-terrorism reframed not as incident management, but as continuous systemic attrition against the terror value chain.

Destroying the Five Pillars

Each terror group, regardless of belief system or geography, operates through five core elements: recruitment, funding, communication, logistics, and leadership movement. Historically, India's CT operations would damage one or two of these pillars after an attack before momentum dissipated. PRAHAAR targets all five simultaneously, persistently, and in coordination.

Working against recruitment happens before extremism takes hold, tracking how individuals get drawn into extremist beliefs, challenging the spread of harmful narratives online and offline, while weakening local support systems linking foreign handlers to those acting locally. Such efforts match PRAHAAR's fifth component, reducing environments where terrorism can grow. Officials stress involving faith-based groups, grassroots bodies, and neighborhood actors to spot at-risk young people sooner, combining these connections with measures focused on jobs, schooling, shelter, income, tackling deeper societal factors behind radical views.

Strengthening PMLA and UAPA frameworks for financial strangulation of the funds, and to freeze, expose, and prosecute terror funding, including the increasingly sophisticated use of cryptocurrency and hawala channels that once offered anonymity. Communication interdiction uses cyber monitoring and surveillance of encrypted platforms and dark web infrastructure to map network architecture before attacks can be authorised. Logistics disruption targets infiltration pipelines at India's borders using technological surveillance, drone detection systems, and intelligence-led border management. Legal incapacitation, through high prosecution rates and international extradition efforts, ensures that even operatives who survive interdiction cannot return to operational relevance.

The cumulative effect is what strategists would call a zero-sum outcome: every gain India makes is a direct and permanent loss for the terror organisation's regenerative capacity.

Confronting the Grey Zone

For decades, Islamabad's approach relied heavily on ambiguity. Operating via groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed allowed Islamabad room to deny involvement. Though attacks could be traced indirectly, evidence never firmly tied the state to actions. Control remained behind the scenes, subtle but present. This gap between denial and direction became a facilitator. Outcomes aligned with national aims, even as officials claimed detachment. Accountability slipped away, again and again.

PRAHAAR targets the very structure of plausible denial. Notice how precisely the policy draws its line: terrorism is never tied by India to faith, origin, or ethnic background. Although the framework assigns responsibility to nearby governments when they employ terror as a tool of strategy, it carefully avoids conflating such actions with civilian populations. At a time when dominant group narratives are gaining ground worldwide, this subtle separation holds weight - within the country, and also in how others view India abroad.

Following money paths from groups tied to Pakistan toward regional cells, while also examining captured messages that show collaboration between agents, a pattern of responsibility becomes harder to ignore. With each new document matched by coordinated moves at the United Nations to impose penalties, room to escape accountability shrinks. When faced with persistent scrutiny from international monitors, spy coalitions, and review panels, arguments denying involvement collapse beneath layers of confirmed data.

More significantly, PRAHAAR raises the operational cost of proxy warfare itself. When infiltration attempts face dramatically higher interception probabilities, when domestic modules are identified and rolled up before they can execute, and when financial pipelines are systematically disrupted, the strategic calculus of running proxies' changes. Lower success rates mean higher resource expenditure for diminishing returns. Over time, this cost escalation degrades the strategic attractiveness of proxy terror as an instrument of statecraft.

Future-Proofing the Architecture

PRAHAAR sets itself apart less by site than by foresight. Instead of listing familiar risks, it spots changes in how conflicts evolve focusing on drone supply chains for attacks, abuse of self-operating arms, digital sabotage aimed at vital systems, along with threats involving chemicals,

biology, radiological elements, explosives, and devices. Looking ahead makes a significant difference.

The threat environment India will face over the next decade is not the threat environment of the 2000s. Terror organisations have demonstrated rapid technological adaptation, from encrypted communications to commercial drone modification to sophisticated cryptocurrency use. A doctrine built only for yesterday's battlefield is institutionally obsolete before it is fully implemented. PRAHAAR's technology-centric framing positions India to evolve its CT architecture as threats evolve, rather than perpetually catching up after painful surprises.

A Philosophy, Not Just a Policy

What India has produced with PRAHAAR is not merely a policy document. A philosophy shaped by seeing terror not only as danger needing disruption, yet also as symptom demanding repair. Because lasting harm lingers long after attacks end, healing minds becomes central to safety, matching the urgency of battlefield moves. When people face violence, their role shifts, no longer waiting for help, they become key contributors before crises emerge.

PRAHAAR is not a guarantee against future attacks. No doctrine is. Determined adversaries adapt, gaps persist, and human intelligence is inherently imperfect. But it represents the most coherent attempt yet to transform India's counter-terror posture from reactive triage into something approaching strategic denial, the capacity to ensure that terror ecosystems cannot sustain themselves faster than they are dismantled.

War in West Asia: Questions, Take-Aways

By - Dr. Uttara Sahasrabuddhe

The author is Honorary Fellow, FINS; Former Professor, University of Mumbai

An ongoing war/conflict is the nightmare of an analyst. The events could just drag on, or the course of events could change in a sudden development; thus, making predictions nearly impossible. Yet, the potential impact of some of the wars/conflicts demands analysis – in real time, as well as for the future. As a preliminary analysis made on the eleventh day of the current US-Israel – Iran war, here are some questions and some take-aways.

Questions:

- It appears that there is no unanimity between the US and Israel over the politico-military objectives of the war on Iran. For Israel, as it appears from the official statements, there are two objectives, namely, regime change in Iran and elimination of Iran's nuclear facilities. However, the US has mentioned different objectives at different times; which include the two mentioned by Israel as well as another one, i.e., surrender Iran's stockpile of Uranium. So far, none has been achieved.
- Hence, two further questions: 1) how long will the war continue? And 2) will the war be limited to the use of air power, or will the armies be involved some time in future? It is difficult to answer any of these two questions.
- Under the fog of an ongoing war, it is not clear exactly how much damage has each party inflicted upon the other. It is also not clear whether China is aiding Israel – directly or indirectly.
- The big question is about the energy security of the world, both in short and medium terms. The Brent Oil Index has hovered around the \$ 100 mark. Iran has vowed to close the Strait of Hormuz – the key choke point on the significant oil route from West Asia to the rest of the world,

specifically, Asia. The US has promised to escort the oil carriers through the route. This will involve US naval ships in a big way. This will surely escalate the cost of war for the US. And yet the question remains whether US can make the Strait 100% safe. A related question is whether and how quickly, the affected countries will pivot to other sources of oil and gas.

Take-aways:

- A troubled Strait of Hormuz also means trade in other goods will also be impacted in a major way. Besides, it should be noted that as Iran is at war, the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC – linking St. Petersburg with Bandar Abbas and Chabahar) is also ruled out for trade. Diverting trade via other routes is not possible in short time frame. It could take weeks, even months, to do so. This may cause shortages and supply chain disruptions. Any diversion of trade to other routes will mean longer trade routes, resulting in spiralling costs.
- The US-Israeli attack must have brought a smile on the face of the Russian President Putin for more than one reasons. First of all, the American claim that Iran was attacked because its regime posed grave threat to US national security almost legitimises, in retrospect, the Russian attack on Ukraine. (Though it must be admitted that Russia faced more realistic threat in NATO expansion than the perceived US threat from the Iranian regime.)
- Secondly, it appears (although it may prove completely wrong over time) that the current US administration wants to accept – and not reverse – the reality of Russian occupation of parts of Ukraine. This leads to the speculation that Washington currently perceives Beijing as a bigger challenger of US hegemony, not Moscow.
- Third reason for Putin to be happy is the fact that this war provides Moscow with an opportunity to move away – if it wishes – from its European oil and gas market and create new markets in Asia. It could be a win-win situation for Russia and Asian countries in the medium and long term; because Russian oil and gas will come on the Eastern Indian Ocean routes, avoiding flashpoints as well as choke points.
- For New Delhi, it is by far the most severe test of its principle of strategic autonomy and the policy of multi-alignment. West Asia is a text book case of challenges to both. It is perhaps easier to maintain strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the big powers like the US, China and Russia; than in the context of regional powers.

India's Response and the Way Forward

- India has attempted to balance its relations with the countries involved. The US, Israel and UAE are strategic partners of India, and the four countries make the I2-U2 group. On the other hand, Iran is crucial because of India's investment in the construction and maintenance of the Chabahar port, a link to the INSTC. As expected, New Delhi has not directly condemned the attack on Iran. However, it has called the sinking of Iranian warship IRIS Dena as “unfortunate”. It has confirmed that another Iranian warship IRIS Lavan has been allowed to dock in India. The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister participated in the recently concluded Raisina Dialogue and also held meeting with Indian Foreign Minister on the side-lines.
- It is true that the ideology of the Islamist state of Iran and the ethos of the secular state of India are anti-theses of each other. But it has been India's principle that no country has any right to bring in regime change in another sovereign country by armed intervention. It is important for India to adhere to it strictly, in its own national interest.

- The crisis might also be an opportunity in disguise, whereby India can recalibrate its energy basket – both in terms of the choice of fuels and the choice of countries to buy from. In the medium term, India can aim to rely more on nuclear energy, more on energy routes to the east (and explore even the Arctic option), and continue to buy a substantial part from Russia. Just as it makes sense to diversify sources of arms supply (away from Russia), it also makes sense to diversify the geography of energy sources (away from West Asia).

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of: Aruna Mukherjee (1916-2018)



A 100-year-old woman from Assam inspired generations with her indomitable spirit.

She started eating less since 1947 for feeding refugees who fled present day Bangladesh during partition

‘Age is just a number’, goes a well-known saying and some people manage to prove it right by setting an example that inspires generations to come. One such soul was Aruna Mukherjee from Guwahati, who has lived a life dedication to service of mankind and opened an old age home at the age of 100. Arna Mukherjee started eating less since 1947 for feeding refugees who fled present day Bangladesh after partition and others in need that followed. While alive, she managed four vocational institutes that trains people in music, painting, sewing and embroidery, knitting and soft toy-making.

When this strong-willed woman approached the civic body for permission to start an old age home, the mayor asked who will run it. Aruna Mukherjee told him that she will run it herself and says she loved the expression on the mayor's face. About her journey, once Aruna told The Sunday Standard Newspaper that, "I had seen hundreds of hungry people when they fled Bangladesh and took refuge at Guwahati railway station. I had seen children cry inconsolably for food. I cooked for them and gave them my food. I made paper bags to earn money so I could feed as many as possible. Once she said-In due course, they migrated to different places, but the feeling that they didn't get to eat for days together is still with me. That's why I can't eat anything except tea and biscuits even today. It is that feeling which made (singer-lyricist-musician) Bhupen Hazarika compose and sing the song 'Manuhe Manuhar Babe' (man for mankind). Mukherjee was born in Dhaka and moved to Guwahati eight decades ago with her husband. Her indomitable spirit is such that even at 100 she was willing to travel to flood affected areas and help people. Her husband Jadulal Mukherjee, was the head in the department of Chemistry of most sought-after college in North East i.e., Cotton College in Guwahati.

On her life an education documentary "Life that refuses to fade out" directed by Bobbeeta Sharma was adjudged the best educational film of the year 2021 at 23rd UGC CEC Educational Video Competition under the aegis of Communication for Educational Consortium, New Delhi and Director was awarded a prize of Rs One Lakh.

What a great inspirational life journey of Aurana Mukherjee is!

Write to us at:

bulletin@finsindia.org

***OFFICE :4, Belle View, Lakhamsi Nappu Road,
Dadar (East), MUMBAI - 400014
Phone 022 24127274, 98339 24371***

EDITORIAL BOARD

Col (Dr) Ravindra Tripathi