

ATTACK ON J&K BUS

Haryana Police have taken two local youth from Kurukshetra for attacking a Kashmir bound bus and injuring a passenger into custody and seized their car. The follow up action was prompt despite the bus driver and passenger refusing to lodge a formal complaint, probably because they felt they would have to wait for formalities. The Police acted on the complaint of the restaurant owner and detained the culprits based on the CCTV footage. The Haryana Police has done a good job. It must have been traumatic for the passengers to face the threats, abuse and attack with bricks from the two youth but the reality is that it was a parking dispute – something which is common in this part of the world – and not a anti-Kashmiri campaign. While it's mandatory that Police take the action, spreading rumours and presenting it as an attack targeted at people of a region or religion is misleading. However, it doesn't make the crime of those involved any less serious but people, including leaders, must not twist the facts of the incident to project a community as victims. Today, we all know people from J&K are working and studying in different parts of India and are doing well.

ITI UPGRADE

The proposed upgrading of the Industrial Training Institutes of J&K is going to be a gamechanger for the youth of the UT. The upgrading being approved as Strategic Investment Plans (SIPs) worth Rs 475.41 crore by the center would end up producing top class skilled youth with high prospectus of employment. The future jobs will be given for the degrees one possesses but for the skills. Indian skilled workers are already much in demand across the world and this will open more windows of opportunity for our youth. The scheme is targeted at IITs at R.S. Pura, Nowshera, Samba and Kathua in Jammu and it is at Ganderbal, Kangan, Budgam and Charar-i-Sharief in the Valley. ITI Jammu and ITI Srinagar will also get up upgrade as ITI hubs.

Ashwani Mahajan

About two weeks ago, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha stated that India's proposal regarding a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine was the most comprehensive among the four proposals currently under consideration. Notably, India's proposal addresses a wide range of issues, including energy, infrastructure, Black Sea ports, grain exports and commercial shipping. Ukraine has reported receiving a total of four peace proposals so far—from India, Türkiye, Egypt and the United States.

The war between Russia and Ukraine, which has been ongoing for over four years, has caused immense devastation. Although Russia, being a major power, has suffered significantly less damage compared to Ukraine, the conflict is nonetheless proving detrimental not only to both nations but also to global peace. Wars disrupt supply chains, cause loss of life and property, hinder the movement of people and economic activity, and lead to the wastage of resources; ultimately, public welfare suffers the most. Therefore, it is imperative that this protracted war comes to an end soon.

Reflecting on the origins of the conflict, it is worth noting that both Russia and Ukraine were once part of the Soviet Union (USSR); Ukraine emerged as an independent nation following the Soviet collapse. There was no history of deep-seated animosity between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, and pro-Russian political parties had frequently been elected to power in Ukraine.

However, a primary and critical trigger for the war was the move by Ukraine's current political leadership to seek membership in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). NATO is a political and military alliance comprising nations from Europe and North America. It was established on April 4, 1949, with the aim of providing collective security to its member states. Until now, NATO countries hostile to Russia were separated from it by Ukraine. Consequently, if Ukraine were to become a NATO member, the direct result would be



a shared border between NATO and Russia, raising the prospect of a direct confrontation between Russia and the powerful NATO alliance. This is why Russia found the idea of Ukraine joining NATO unacceptable and launched an attack on the country.

Following the attack, Ukraine was able to sustain its war effort for a prolonged period thanks to assistance from NATO nations, comprising both European countries and the United States, and managed to inflict some damage on Russia. However, the protracted nature of the conflict has led to a sense of fatigue within the United States. President Trump believed he could end the war through mediation; he made statements to this effect, even claiming he would bring the conflict to a close within 24 hours of assuming the presidency.

True to his nature of disregarding global institutions, President Trump continued to show disdain not only for the United Nations and the World Trade Organization but also for NATO, even declaring an intention to withdraw the United States from the alliance, though no formal announcement of withdrawal has actually been made so far.

It is not as though no attempts have been made to halt the war over the past few years; rather, those efforts have yet to bear fruit. President Trump even summoned President Zelenskyy to Washington regarding this matter, but the talks ended with a widely publicised clash between the two leaders.

There had been earlier attempts to end

the conflict as well. Initially, between February and April 2022, Russia and Ukraine engaged in direct talks in Belarus and Istanbul (Türkiye), though these proved inconclusive. Subsequently, Türkiye and the United Nations attempted to mediate, resulting in an agreement allowing Ukrainian grain shipments via the Black Sea; however, Russia refused to renew this deal in July 2023. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling upon Russia to end the war and respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, but Russia rejected this as well. Mediation efforts by various parties, including Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, the United States, the European Union, China, Brazil and the Vatican, have also proven unsuccessful so far. Furthermore, the numerous economic sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union, the UK, Japan and others have had no impact on the war.

In this context, the question arises: how can this war end? It must be understood that it is not possible to subdue a major strategic power like Russia merely through international sanctions or by providing economic and military aid to Ukraine. During the era of a unipolar world, the US had come to believe that instigating and halting wars was child's play for it. However, one must realise that geopolitical shifts have transformed the global landscape. Meanwhile, European nations, formerly US allies, have begun to assert their own distinct identities. They no longer believe the US is capable of guaranteeing their security. Furthermore, the US has frequently engaged in hostile

rhetoric against them, even threatening to withdraw from NATO.

The protracted nature of the war, geopolitical shifts and the erosion of America's capacity for global leadership are key factors making the prospect of halting the conflict through external pressure appear increasingly dim. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that efforts to stop the war through other avenues are still underway globally.

In the current scenario, the primary point of contention between Russia and Ukraine concerns the line of control. Russia is unwilling to return the territories it has seized, whereas Ukraine maintains that if this does not happen, it would amount to a violation of its territorial integrity. The second issue revolves around NATO; Russia has consistently stated its opposition to Ukraine joining the alliance. The third issue concerns energy infrastructure. Following Ukrainian attacks on Russian oil refineries and power grids, Russia seeks a peace agreement stipulating that neither nation will target the other's energy infrastructure. The fourth contentious issue relates to international sanctions; Western nations remain unwilling to lift these economic restrictions. The fifth issue concerns post-war reconstruction. Civilian and industrial infrastructure has suffered extensive damage during the conflict, and there is a dispute regarding who will bear the cost of this reconstruction.

Both nations acknowledge that an immediate resolution to all these issues is not feasible. In this context, firstly, India's proposal advocates for the protection of energy and other essential infrastructure. Secondly, it simultaneously calls for the uninterrupted flow of food grains to ensure global food security. Thirdly, the proposal seeks guarantees for the safety of all types of commercial vessels and maritime trade routes in the Black Sea. Thus, India's proposal points towards a practical solution that would benefit the economies of both Russia and Ukraine and help avert further devastation in the future. Given that Ukraine has already welcomed this proposal, Russia, too, should have no difficulty in accepting it.

THE ART OF CONSCIOUS LIVING: DISCOVERING WHAT TRULY MATTERS

Gyaneshwar Dayal

It Matters A Lot is a book that encourages readers to ponder their own lives and reflect on where they are headed, what they are striving for, and whether it truly matters. An unusual and thought-provoking work by Shubhra Saxena, published by Rupa Publications, it carries a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The book explores the experiences, relationships and choices that shape people through different stages of life, from childhood and adolescence to adulthood, midlife and old age. It examines how family, upbringing, social expectations, ambition, success, failure, love and loss influence the way people see themselves and the world around them.

It Matters A Lot urges readers to question assumptions they may have accepted without reflection. Is success the same as fulfilment?



How much of what we pursue is genuinely our own choice? What does it mean to live well when life does not unfold as expected?

The book was recently launched by author and bureaucrat Shubhra Saxena. It is her attempt to encourage introspection, inviting readers to pause, examine their lives and consider what truly

matters.

Aptly billed as a reflective journey towards conscious living, the book also carries the endorsement of none other than His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The launch was attended by authors and professionals, including Gurucharan Das, author; Pavan K Varma, author, former diplomat

and former Rajya Sabha MP; Kusum Lata Kedia, author and former director of Gandhi Vidya Sansthan, Varanasi; Abha Sharma, author and life coach; and Shweta Mathur Lall, author and senior consultant at Apollo Hospitals.

Each chapter concludes with questions designed to help read-

ers reflect on their own experiences, beliefs and decisions. Rather than offering a set formula for happiness or success, the book creates space for readers to understand themselves more deeply and consider how they wish to live.

At its core, the book links self-awareness to conscious living. By recognising the thoughts, emotions and patterns that drive their actions, readers can make more considered choices and respond to life with greater clarity. Such self-understanding, it argues, nurtures empathy, compassion and a stronger sense of responsibility towards others. In an age of constant stimulation and distraction, Saxena's book offers readers an opportunity to pause and reflect on what gives their lives meaning.

It presents conscious living as a continuing journey, one that begins with understanding oneself and extends to how one relates to other people and the wider world.

Middle East's strategic autonomy: A new regional order emerges

Habib Badawi

For most of the last century, the Middle East has been discussed as a prize — a board on which Washington, Moscow, Beijing, Ankara or Tehran move pieces. The 2026 war between Israel and Iran, and the Gulf's scramble to manage its fallout, might look like more of the same. It is not. The more consequential story is that the region's own states are no longer content to be moved.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies now describes the Middle East as entering a “hinge moment”, in which local actors are acquiring far more say over their own futures than the old framework of great-power competition allows for. That framing matters more than another round of counting whose air force flew where. The real question is not which outside power will end up dominant. It is whether Riyadh, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Ankara and Islamabad have built enough independent options - enough strategic autonomy, meaning the ability to avoid be-

ing cornered into dependence on any single patron - that the region's trajectory stops being written elsewhere.

Nothing about this makes American power disappear. The Gulf states still need Washington's military umbrella, and the Iran war has reminded everyone why. But needing American protection and taking orders from Washington are no longer the same thing.

Reuters reported this month that Tehran is signalling openness to talks over Hormuz shipping security even as leaders converge on the UN General Assembly — while Gulf capitals are simultaneously absorbing the economic shockwaves of the war and quietly exploring security arrangements that include Iran, not just against it. That is not confusion. It is hedging: preparing for confrontation and pursuing accommodation at the same time, because putting every chip on one relationship is now seen as the riskier bet.

The clearest proof of this shift is not rhetorical; it is a signed document. On 7 August, Saudi Arabia,



Türkiye and Pakistan signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, committing each to treat an attack on any one of them as an attack on all three.

Carnegie's Diwan has rightly cautioned against reading it purely as an anti-Iran pact — its real significance is that three states with quite different relationships to Washington chose to build a mutual-defence structure with each other rather than simply deepen bilateral ties to the United States. Whether Mecca becomes a

genuine institution or a one-off gesture will depend on something that cannot yet be answered with confidence: whether it grows into cooperation on economics and diplomacy, not just deterrence. A pact defined only by what it is against tends to fray once the threat perception shifts; one built on what its members are for tends to last.

This is why “bloc” thinking increasingly misdescribes the region. Saudi Arabia can lean on American security guarantees while deepening

ties with China. Qatar can host a US air base and keep a hotline to Tehran open. The UAE can court both Washington and Beijing without having to pick. Türkiye can stay inside NATO while cooperating with Moscow where it suits Ankara. None of this is incoherence - it is multi-alignment: drawing security from one partner, investment from another, technology from a third, and treating exclusive allegiance as a liability rather than a virtue.

The stakes go beyond oil and troop deployments. Ports, data infrastructure, energy corridors and AI investment are becoming the terrain on which sovereignty is contested - a state can keep its flag and its seat at the UN while its economic and technological choices are quietly constrained by whoever controls the infrastructure it depends on. Strategic autonomy today means having enough alternatives that no single external partner can make that call for you.

None of this guarantees a stable outcome. A regional order that permanently locks Iran out risks recreat-

ing the very insecurity it is meant to solve; one that ignores its neighbours' fears of Iran will collapse just as fast. What might work - a “managed multipolarity” in which rival powers compete but are constrained by direct communication channels and shared economic stakes rather than by raw deterrence — is plausible, not guaranteed, because it depends on political choices no single actor controls.

That uncertainty is not a hedge on my part; it is the honest state of a region where Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Syria all have their own internal fights that no outside power can simply dictate away.

The old question — who controls the Middle East — assumes someone eventually will. The more urgent question is whether the region's own states can turn the leverage they are accumulating into institutions before the next crisis forces the answer on them.

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