

## PAK-AFGHAN TENSION

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a paradoxical relationship. Islamabad considered Kabul with the Taliban two in power as its ally and yet treated the regime with a condescending attitude. However, the latter showed no special leaning to its western neighbour. Pakistan jumped into the hotchpotch situation emerging soon after Taliban 2 took control of Kabul. Its deep state actors walked into the country exuding authority and openly wishing the Taliban would take charge of its proxy war against India. Its Prime Minister Imran Khan spoke about the end of slavery and neither the world nor the Taliban understood him. Today the border between the two countries is on fire; the Afghans continue to reject the Duran line and seek reunification of a major chunk of the population and land of what is Pakistan's tribal region with Afghanistan. This all shows Pakistan has ceased to be a normal country that respects its neighbours and seeks good relations with as many countries as it can.

## SWIFT ACTION

The incident of goons attacking foreign students in Ahmedabad as they were offering namaz is shameful but it was encouraging to see the swift action by the police which arrested two culprits. Goons and anti-social elements must never feel encouraged and rewarded whenever they indulge in criminal activities more so purposely targeting foreigners. Those involved in the incident must be investigated for their connections and motivations. Seeing Muslims pray is a common scene in India and not the strangest thing to be seen by anyone. The police acted swiftly and took action something that will instil confidence among the victims and other foreign students. Such actions end up distorting the image of our country. The police action will surely act as a deterrence to others with the same criminal mindsets.

## Addressing the complexity of land use

BKP Sinha

Land, the foundation of our existence, is often overlooked in the discourse on sustainable development. Yet, it is this very land that cradles life, harbours resources, and sustains us all. As we stride forward in our quest for progress, it is crucial to remember that every step we take leaves an imprint on the land beneath us.

As a developing nation, India's relationship with land is complex and multifaceted. It is deeply intertwined with cultural, social, and environmental aspects, embodying the country's rich heritage and biodiversity. However, it is also a highly coveted resource, often the subject of conflicts as various stakeholders, each with their unique vision of development, compete for its possession.

India's terrain, once a vibrant mosaic of lush fields and flourishing ecosystems, is confronting a transformed paradigm. The ceaseless progression of urbanisation and industrialisation is swiftly altering the landscape, leaving a trail of unintended consequences in its wake. This shift is diverting fertile land away from its traditional agricultural use, posing serious challenges for food security and causing harm to eco-sensitive areas, thereby disrupting wildlife habitats and biodiversity on both micro and macro levels. Rivers, once brimming with life and vitality, are now enduring relentless assaults. Encroachments and diversions are strangling their ability to sustain us, while the toxic deluge of industrial waste is poisoning their essence. This contamination is turning these once vibrant waterways into barren stretches making it unfit for aquatic life, diminishing their aesthetic value and cultural significance and impeding their natural self-purification capabilities.

Mining, particularly in forested regions, is inflicting deep wounds on the earth, causing extensive land degrada-

tion and disturbing the fragile ecological balance. Meanwhile, rapid urbanisation, although promising improved living standards often lacks environmental sustainability in its construction processes. Development, despite its promise of progress, tends to exploit nature's bounty and displace indigenous communities, severing the sacred ties that have bound them to the land for generations. These competing and conflicting land uses along with evolving land rights issues are igniting conflicts between local communities and administrative entities.

With India's rise as the world's most populous country, accounting for nearly 18% of the global population, the per capita land availability is dwindling. This decline, especially in areas vital for human life, agriculture, ecosystems, and natural resources, carries significant implications. The task ahead is to unlock the potential of the land in a way that harmoniously accommodates the diverse needs and impacts associated with different land uses.

The agricultural landscape of India has also experienced significant transformations over the centuries, evolving from traditional farming to modern techniques. Initially, Indian farming was subsistence-based, relying on indigenous knowledge and techniques like mixed cropping, crop rotation, and organic manure use, which fostered a healthy relationship with the environment. Agroforestry, the harmonious integration of trees and shrubs within farmlands had further enriched this tapestry which contributed to the overall health and productivity of the land.

However, the British era marked a shift towards commercial agriculture, focusing on cash crops and monoculture farming. This period also witnessed the introduction of land revenue systems, often marginalising small farmers and disrupting rural communities.

Post-independence, the Green Revolu-

tion emerged as a beacon of hope, aiming to alleviate hunger and poverty by increasing food grain production. While this revolution successfully doubled the output of staple crops like wheat and rice, it came at a cost. Overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides led to widespread soil degradation and water pollution. The dependence on water-intensive crops, aggravated water scarcity challenges, particularly in regions like Punjab. Moreover, the focus on specific high-yield varieties overshadowed the importance of other vital food sources like varieties of rice and millet, threatening the diversity and resilience of India's food security. While the Green Revolution brought prosperity to many, unfortunately, it also overlooked small and marginal farmers.

Traditional practices like shifting cultivation in some regions are contributing to deforestation and the conversion of agricultural land into less productive ones. This alteration of land use, particularly the conversion of forests for agriculture or industry, is further amplifying the effects of climate change. Rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events are disrupting agricultural production, posing immense challenges for farmers and making it difficult for them to predict yields and plan effectively. Climate change is also worsening the existing water scarcity, creating a vicious cycle that threatens the very foundation of agriculture in many regions.

Beyond these environmental challenges, socioeconomic changes like rapid urbanisation, labour migration, and evolving societal attitudes are also reshaping the agricultural landscape. Increasing fuel costs and a looming energy crisis further squeeze the profitability of farming, making it a less attractive livelihood for many. Farmers often face unfair market practices, including receiving low prices for their crops and delayed payments.

These multifaceted challenges culminate in a tragic reality - the distressing issue of farmer suicides. Driven by crippling debt, crop failures, and difficulties in securing a sustainable livelihood, many small and marginal farmers are pushed to the brink of despair. This sombre consequence casts a long shadow on the future of Indian agriculture, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and empathetic solutions that address not just the economic aspects but also the social and emotional well-being of the farmers who are the backbone of the nation's food security.

While initiatives like the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana and PM-KISAN Yojana offer crucial financial support to the farmers, they fail to address the fundamental issue of farming being non-renewable.

A market-driven approach, guided by demand and supply, is often proposed and was reflected in the Centre's response to the pandemic-induced economic crisis. However, the pandemic has also challenged previous notions about the agricultural economy and exposed vulnerabilities in supply chain-dependent food security.

Given the complexity and diversity of these challenges, it's clear that a holistic and integrated approach is essential for sustainable land management. However, the current strategies are plagued by sector-specific focus, decentralised decision-making, outdated data, and unclear land records, often leading to conflicting land uses and unsustainable practices. We need to prioritise both economic growth and environmental sustainability while ensuring social equity.

The key to sustainable land management lies in open discussions and collective decision-making among a diverse group of stakeholders. To realise this vision, it's essential to empower all stakeholders, with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions.

## FEASTING AND FASTING: THE RIGHT BALANCE

Ravi Valluri

*It always depresses me when people moan about how commercial Christmas is. I love everything about it. The tradition of having this big feast, slap bang in the middle of winter, is an essential thing to look forward to at the end of the year, writes Richard E. Grant.*

Indians practice multiple faiths; Holi and Ram Navami are Hindu festivals interspersed with Good Friday and Easter. I have several Christian friends and my maternal uncle is married to a Christian, so he will present me with a cake (eggless).

This will be followed by Muslim friends celebrating Eid and we savour sevayian (a delicacy). Festivals follow festivals and our stomachs seldom get the time to recuperate. Then there is party time, family togetherness, picnics, office staff celebrating birthdays and anniversaries. We are not anti-social people, so keep attending marriage festivities and innumerable birthday bashes. A relative drops in from the US and there is a customary family get-together. The company achieves certain corporate objectives and there is all-round celebration. All of us should feel grateful for the abundance that nature has provided us with; but do we pause to think about our abdominal region?

Ayurveda has imparted this quintessential knowledge that what we partake of determines our health and quality of life. The



ancient seer Sushrut says, 'Food builds and supports the body, improves complexion and general appearance.'

Overeating causes heaviness in the body and makes us sluggish and uncomfortable. Over some time, our metabolic rate gets disturbed and the process of elimination gets disrupted and warped.

Taittareya Upanishad succinctly puts it — 'Food is the cause of creation, preservation and destruction. Therefore, food is all

in all — Anna Brahma. It is life itself. It is God'.

Yet, do we care in this age of junk and packaged food? Do humans care about a wholesome diet? A wholesome diet provides energy (prana) and helps in the restoration of balance. It does not clog the channels (Nadis). Two harmful substances consumed are excessive salt and sugar.

The human body is a sublime gift of

God, it sends us important signals — when to fast after feasting!

Amas or toxins are to be necessarily released from the system. This can be done through the method of fasting. Our seers and rishis advocated fasting (during certain festivals and certain days like Ekadashi) to provide adequate space for digestion. Fasting is nature's method of cleansing the system. It detoxifies the body by throwing out all waste matter and impurities that get accumulated through heavy splurging, improper eating patterns and adopting harmful lifestyles (lack of exercise, smoking and drinking). The body gets diseased through the accumulation of toxic substances and acids. It invades the digestive process.

Fasting once in 15 days is indeed a therapeutic measure as it cleanses our blood and replenishes the depleted vitamins and other important reserves to be stored in the body. To purge the body from all things negative, it would be worthwhile to have plenty of liquids juices.

Good health is man's inherent nature — 'A sound body with a sound mind!' Gandhiji used to take immense care of his body through regular fasting. Of course, in a lighter vein, Sarojini Naidu used to say that it cost a fortune to keep Gandhiji in poverty. Along with fasting, one needs to maintain a schedule of exercise. Long walks, yoga, pranayama and breathing practices like Sudarshan Kriya help in the restoration of balance in the system.

## The importance of consular services in global diplomacy

Shikhar Aggarwal

With the intricate tapestry of international relations, consular services stand out as the crucial thread that weaves together global diplomatic efforts while also working to safeguard their citizens' interests outside of their country of origin. From the Indian perspective, consular duties are of immense importance. At present, officials assigned to various Indian missions worldwide have been burdened with the responsibility to safeguard the highest interests of Indians abroad and secure their well-being by any means possible. Particularly, Indian consular services are internationally active in fostering business ties.

These consular duties reflect domestic legal requirements under the Indian Constitution and international responsibilities. The wide range of functions available to Indian citizens within countries where they are resident encompasses several areas, including keeping them safe, vital for their welfare, and helping them normally adjust to a new culture abroad. This demonstrates that consular services are

multi-dimensional because they connect local laws with global obligations. Worldwide, the Indian consulates take care of Indian citizens. This entails providing advice, assistance, or help in instances like emergencies, sicknesses, and natural calamities. Consular services support Indians in distress abroad by providing financial aid to enable them to cope with unexpected situations. The rescue of Indians during crisis periods, such as the Vande Bharat Mission, is reflective of their well-being.

The consulates have a central role to play in the attestation of various documents that are essential for Indians who live outside India. These include the power of attorney, wills, oaths, affidavits, and other trade, shipping, and education documents. Such attestations serve as proof of genuineness and legitimacy, which make transactions easy in the place where they operate. Consular services are central when it comes to legal issues affecting Indians.

The consulates oversee the complicated matters regarding inheritance, properties, and wills of Indian citizens abroad.

This entails judicial processes and legal requisites essential for the smooth management of such possessions. In addition, they deal with war cemeteries, war damage payments, pensions, and provident funds for overseas Indians. Furthermore, they cooperate with foreign governments in the enforcement of extradition pacts, mutual legal assistance treaties, letters rogatory, letter rotators, transmission of process notices including summons and examination of witnesses on criminal cases by India, as well as transfer back home convicted offenders.

Another group of such cases is represented by special consular services provided to Indian nationals living or working abroad. For instance, consuls deal with Indian residents about marriage and divorce through the Special Marriage Act 1969 and Foreign Marriage Act 1969 and other applicable provisions thereof. This ensures that Indians abroad have access to legal support for personal and familial matters.

These functions are also crucial when dealing with issues arising out of death situations involving Indian nation-

als overseas, where compensations need to be paid to families affected and repatriation procedures followed. Last but not least, Indian sailors are given a special status by the consular services. The wide-ranging support for this group of Indian nationals is evident in inquiries such as their location and provision of aid in case of problems that they encounter.

Citizen-centricity is at the centre stage of consular diplomacy within international relations. Image building for a positive perception of the country abroad greatly depends on how efficient and effective its consular services are. This commitment is shown through a customer-oriented mode matched with respect and friendliness when dealing with victims in foreign lands. From imprisonment abroad to domestic disputes, every incident can turn into a public issue. Retaining good public opinion requires handling these challenges openly and in a diplomatically refined manner to prevent any image damage. Consular diplomacy, a vital component in global politics, unfolds around protecting state interests and the well-being of its citizens and legal entities

abroad; it also nurtures global bonds via various people-to-people commitments. The multifunctional approach includes safeguarding and alternatively working with the diaspora to strengthen their economy, cultural, and educational links. Consular services now play a major role in responding to the effects of migration on diasporas worldwide.

Consular services become indispensable as India assumes its rightful place in the world. These provisions confirm that India is committed to its nationals abroad by catering to them while they are still away from home, including social welfare, legal aid, and affidavit attestation. This is why consular diplomacy goes beyond protecting the rights and interests of Indian citizens; it also contributes to building long-lasting ties between India and the different countries they reside in. The ability of the consulate to handle every situation that comes up remains vital as we continue having a global community whose members are becoming more adaptable than ever before.

(The writer is joint MD, BLS International, the views are personal)