

## LADAKH'S DEVELOPMENT

The Center is finally unveiling its plan of action on Ladakh. It's clear that right now, the center is seeking to pursue the developmental model to address grievances of people including demand for declaring the border UT a State. The first step in this direction is the creation of seven districts of — Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass — and 193 Panchayats. The setting up of administrative units in these seven districts would lead to focus on development and of course job creation in government sector. In due course, with the Panchayat bodies becoming active in 193 villages will bring about a revolution in local self-governance and grass root democracy. The promise of rapid development was made by none other than Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The promise comes in the wake of recent release of the jailed activist Sonam Wangchuk. Enumerating the plan of action for Ladakh Shah said already many Ladakhis languages and dialects have been included in the official work to preserve the cultural roots of the region. The rapid construction of roads, internet and mobile connectivity to entire region have already changed the lives of the people of this cold region. Picking hints from Shah's speech it's clear that the government is taking the road of development; Political changes are surely not on the cards.

Ladakh with its peculiar topography, terrain and climates poses a challenge to the authorities. The industrialization will take time and also provided locals want it. The extension of Railways — on which the world in on — will lead to its major transformation. Till then the authorities and private players have to tap the potential of tourism industry. In this direction, creation of two major Valleys of flowers proposed by the Ladakh LG Saksena is a good beginning. Ladakh's private sector is already doing a great job in promoting tourism. It needs support from the government and infrastructural development.

Rajeev Kumar

The recent exit of seven members from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to align with the ruling dispensation has drawn sharp attention - not only nationally but within the party's leadership. Yet, given their socio-economic profiles, the development may be less surprising than it appears.

A majority come from highly privileged or resource-rich backgrounds: Ashok Kumar Mittal, Rajendra Gupta, and Vikramjit Singh Sahney are linked with substantial wealth; Harbhajan Singh is associated with the financially powerful Board of Control for Cricket in India; and Raghav Chadha has strong connections across corporate and Bollywood circles.

The remaining figures - Swati Maliwal and Sandeep Pathak - have held significant internal influence within the party. Taken together, this group reflects a convergence of wealth, influence, and elite networks - raising a broader question about how such trajectories align with AAP's original common citizen ethos. Seen through

the lens of their privileged and rich backgrounds, these moves appear less unexpected; in this context, even figures like Sandeep Pathak seem drawn towards the orbit of such privileged networks and their pursuit of prosperity.

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Its appeal lay not merely in policy, but in identity - it sought to redefine politics as a space were ordinary individuals, rather than entrenched elites, could shape public life. This moral and political positioning distinguished it sharply from traditional parties and created a sense of credibility and hope among voters disillusioned with conventional power structures.

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## America's deadly divide over firearms

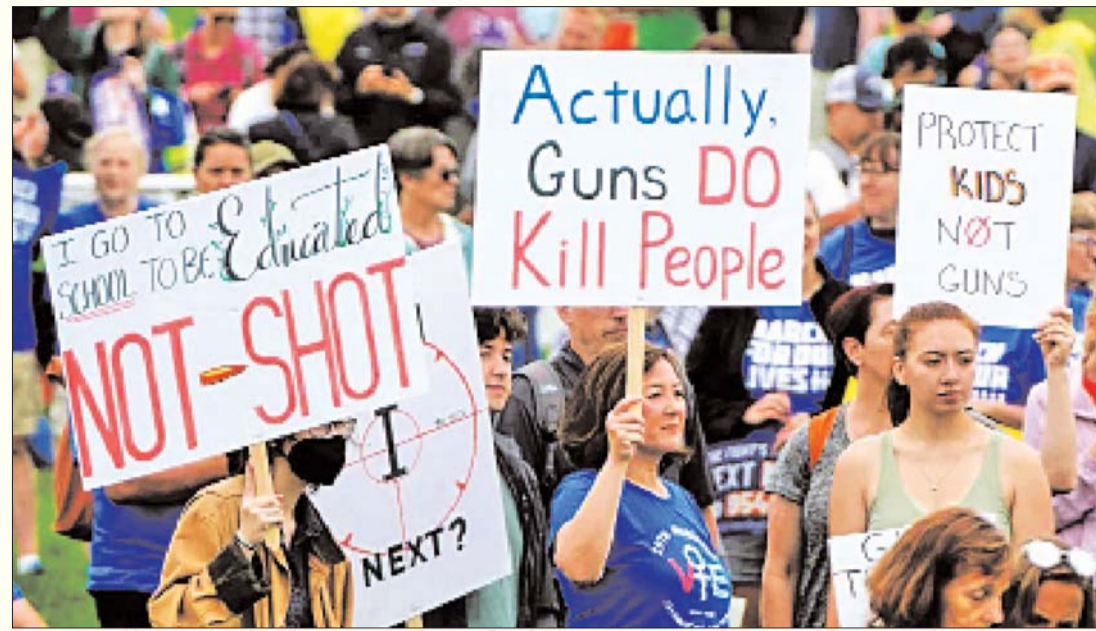
Bhopinder Singh

Traditionally, Republicans are more opposed to gun control laws than the Democrats, owing to differences in cultural identity of respective cadres, geographical psychographics, and also the urban-rural split (or the coastline-hinterland "divide"). The Republican heartland is essentially the white-dominated "red-neck" country, where people go hunting and have self-defence traditions.

Therefore, the all-powerful National Rifle Association (NRA) has aligned itself with Republican ranks to pursue its agenda. The Second Amendment to the Constitution is interpreted contrastingly by Republicans and Democrats. The line "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" - herein, the word "militia" is decoded by Republicans as implying individuals.

Today, Americans own 46 per cent of the world's civilian-owned firearms. It has been statistically proven that firearm ownership increases the risk of firearm homicide, suicide, and even impulsive lethality. As per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this leads to 45,000-48,000 gun-related deaths annually. All counter-arguments that firearms provide safety are humbug, as data show that firearm ownership puts individuals and their families at higher risk of injury and death.

It is well established that bearing weapons tends to trigger aggressive thoughts and actions. So why do Republicans still oppose



gun control laws? Besides the interpretation of the Second Amendment, there is also an unmistakable racial undertone to that position, wherein white supremacist/majoritarian groups (core Republican base) are inherently and overwhelmingly opposed to gun laws.

Former President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, was a classic Republican (with his cowboy image), like Donald Trump today. In 1981, an actress-obsessed lunatic shot at President Ronald Reagan to impress the said actress and catch her attention. Ironically, the shooter was a white male who had registered as a Republican earlier.

The shooter's action was not a political act, but a delusional act driven by psychological impulse. Yet, despite being hit and having a narrow escape after surgery, Reagan did not budge from the core Republican stance. He argued, "It's a nasty truth, but those who

seek to inflict harm are not fazed by gun control laws. I happen to know this from personal experience". Most likely, the shrewd politician would have sensed that any strengthening of anti-gun laws would have gone against his political base. However, once out of office and seeing the real-time fate of his Press Secretary, James Brady (left permanently disabled), in the same shootout, Reagan supported the anti-gun Brady Bill, thereby building a bipartisan consensus on the issue. It marked a significant turning point in US gun policy.

The US has had a violent past of presidential assassinations, with figures such as Abraham Lincoln, William McKinley, and JF Kennedy. Many more have survived assassination attempts. Whenever such instances occurred, the deeply partisan issue of gun laws erupted, only to subside thereafter to familiar positions of disagreement between

Republicans and Democrats.

The most recent addition to presidential assassination attempts involves the current incumbent, Donald Trump, who has faced multiple attempts on his life. Trump was first fired upon at a Pennsylvania campaign rally in July 2024. Later, in September 2024, Secret Service agents spotted a gunman concealed in the bushes of his golfing club in Florida.

Most recently, at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner in Washington, a major security scare was averted as the supposed "lone wolf" could not reach the presidential dais.

But Trump is a 24-hour politician who seizes every opportunity to sharpen his polarising image and invest in personal bravado, as opposed to making restorative changes towards tackling rampant gun misuse in American society. In the Pennsylvania shooting attempt, he struck

a gladiator-like fist-pump pose. Now, post the latest attempt, he postured "muscularity" by insisting that he did not want to leave the place and that he "fought like hell to stay, but it was protocol".

This incident may be political gold for Trump personally to revive his sagging popularity following the unpopular Iran war, but it could also be yet another lost opportunity to make wiser decisions on gun laws.

Trump should show humility and sensitivity on the issue of gun violence by rising above partisan positions if he is to make America — and Americans — truly safe. Already, Trump's "us-versus-them" narrative has dangerously divided Americans and made many feel deeply isolated, discriminated against, and even targeted. There is a disturbing cause-and-effect relationship that can be established between a tense society and easy access to weapons.

But neither is Trump expected to lower his xenophobic and polarising rhetoric, nor is he expected to draft progressive legislation that rises above partisan positions, even if the same is tantamount to making America safer. It is important to note that most attacks conducted have not emanated from the societal typographies that have been fear-mongered by politicians like Trump. If anything, very often these "lone wolves" hail from sections of society that are encouraged by his policies.

As Trump's predecessor at the White House, Joe Biden, famously said, "Enough prayers. Time for action". But it is unlikely that Trump will drive any positive action, despite this incident.

## AUNTY: FROM CASUAL ADDRESS TO CULTURAL STEREOTYPE

Kajleen Kaur

Recently, a UK employment tribunal ruled in favour of an Indian-origin healthcare assistant and awarded her approx `1.7 lakh in compensation after a colleague repeatedly called her "aunty" against her wishes. It was quoted that using it when unwelcomed creates an offensive environment, and constitutes harassment, age and sex discrimination and carries a negative social impact.

Aunty, a social label, reflects a generational gap and is now taken to be a 'hostile' and ridiculed manner of addressing a lady. It is actually a spoiled form of "aunt," which, according to any English dictionary, means "father's/mother's sister." But in our society, it has a filthy meaning of not being young anymore, with its use further deteriorating to refer to "middle-class mentality".

In common parlance, it refers to an ageing woman, even "not-so-elderly," if she is married, or, surely, when she is a mother, or if she chooses to dress in ethnic clothing. Social media and memes have additionally reinforced it from a gesture of respect to a subject of humour.

All women of 40-plus age or even in their late 30s have to face the trauma of the uncalled-for transition to the new



age group, and thereby to the unfriendly sobriquet. It does take some time to sink in, and every lady in India can well relate it to the famous lines from an old TV serial, "Aunty Mat Kaho Na".

The initial stages of the shock begin with substantial time spent in front of the mirror, checking for any visible wrinkles on the face, salt and pepper hair, or any such trait in physical appearance that has pushed them into this new ugly stamping.

This is then followed by efforts to improve skin care routines and maintain a good figure. The result is an extra slot of expenditure spent on the services of

beauticians and spas.

It's worth pondering what urges us to keep away from this branding. There is indeed an insecurity in joining the too-early and unwanted old-age league. In fact, in the contemporary world, even the actually elderly women are choosing to take up invasive cosmetic treatments like Botox, fillers, and hair transplants to manage to look young and, needless to say, not be referred to as Aunty.

Moreover, a comparison with a little time ago in the 1990s, women were mostly restricted to household chores and family care. There was a smaller proportion of the population consisting

of women who were working, driving vehicles, and working out in gymnasiums or doing aerobics or swimming to maintain their physiques.

The society was not even open to women with modern or western dressing, especially after marriage. So now, if women are working hard to keep themselves young, it is also for society to respect their choice and approve of their disapproval. A serious introspection of the situation, to the unreciprocal and offensive nature of the 'Aunty title', is needed, given its misogynistic relevance and social consequences, especially when it has been taken legally.

We must understand that times, outlook of people, education, and society are all transforming. There are more acceptance and respect for people's opinions and the mental impact of any action.

As societies evolve and we strive for an inclusive culture, we should discard acts of personification, disrespect, and unhealthy communicative practices. Words may seem trivial, but they quietly shape attitudes, and changing them is often the first step towards changing mindsets.

It can be replaced with more respectful, pleasing, and acceptable forms of address such as Madam and Sir.

## AAP's shift: From common man roots to elite drift

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aimed to create space for volunteers, grassroots activists, first-time entrants, and honest professionals - marking a clear break from parties shaped by dynasties and elite networks. This principle was also visible in the leadership's conduct. AAP leaders maintained a simple, common appearance - blending into everyday public life. It reinforced their claim of sharing the realities and mindset of ordinary citizens.

The model drew wide support, including among Indians working across the globe, many of whom contributed intellectually, financially, and emotionally to this experiment. The result was unprecedented: a relatively young political formation, still in its infancy, secured remarkable electoral success in Delhi, challenging long-entrenched political structures. However, early compromises in candidate selection - often justified as electoral necessity - led to dissatisfaction and the first signs of internal strain, including the exit of some founding members who saw a dilution of core ideals.

In January 2018, the Aam Aadmi

Party marked a clear shift in its Rajya Sabha selections: two of the three nominees, ND Gupta and Sushil Gupta, were from elite backgrounds - including one from a long-established national party - while only Sanjay Singh came from its grassroots leadership.

This departure from its anti-elitist stance signalled a move towards privilege through a route often associated with influence and resources.

The decision triggered internal dissent, led to the exit or marginalisation of key founding members, and widened the gap between principle and practice. The shift did not remain isolated; it became a pattern. In April 2022, five selections from Punjab reinforced this trend: Harbhajan Singh, a well-known cricketer; two key party strategists, Raghav Chadha and Sandeep Pathak; and two individuals, Ashok Mittal and Sanjeev Arora, from influential or financially strong backgrounds.

The July 2022 additions continued similarly; Vikramjit Sahney is a well-known elite, while Balbir Singh Seechewal is rooted in AAP ideology,

though he declined to be associated with AAP. In January 2024 (Delhi), among the three nominees, the wealthy ND Gupta was re-nominated, and the highly privileged insider, Swati Maliwal, entered the Rajya Sabha. In October 2025, Sanjeev Arora's replacement from Punjab again brought in a wealthy candidate, Rajendra Gupta.

Across these cycles, selections consistently favoured individuals with visibility, influence, or economic capital over grassroots workers - indicating a sustained shift in which the Rajya Sabha became a channel for privileged profiles, reinforcing the party's ideological drift.

The warning signs were clear, yet largely overlooked. In India, cricket and Bollywood are closely tied to affluent networks, and the trajectory of Raghav Chadha - already among the more privileged faces in the Aam Aadmi Party - became emblematic. His marriage into a well-connected Bollywood circle reinforced perception of deepening elite linkages, raising doubts about alignment with the "common citizen" ethos, especially

within the elite setting of the Rajya Sabha. Observers noted his gradual distancing from grounded engagement.

Interventions on everyday issues, though symbolically relevant, were seen as limited in substance compared to the lived realities of ordinary citizens. Despite such signals, the leadership response remained muted. Individually credible, these choices collectively point to a sustained reliance on privileged individuals over grassroots representation - suggesting that repeated wake-up calls went unaddressed, widening the gap between ideals and practice.

The pattern of "privileged exits" is not just about individuals - it stems from leadership choices. When people from elite backgrounds are brought in and later leave, it reveals a deeper internal mismatch: a repeated preference for influential or wealthy individuals (especially through the Rajya Sabha), centralised decision-making that limits grassroots voices, and a growing gap between the party's "common citizen" claim and its actual choices.