

# OUR OPINION, THEIR OPINION

**"The goal of social justice and all round development can't be achieved through ideas but actions."**  
**Mehiel Alber**

## S.I.R of Electoral Rolls

Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls is welcome. It was done in 2003 previously and a twenty-two years gap is there in between to bring free and fair electoral rolls which will include the legal voters and exclude illegal voters' names. But all that glitters is not gold and herein lies the need of looking at both side of the coin. The roll revision is being done first in Bihar where assembly elections are to be held in the next few months. Elections are scheduled next year in other states including Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The Commission has said that the exercise is intended to weed out the names of ineligible voters from the electoral rolls. It has cited rapid urbanisation, migration, non-reporting of deaths, and the inclusion of the names of foreign illegal immigrants as reasons for the house-to-house verification. As part of the exercise, voters whose names did not figure in the rolls in 2003 – when an SIR was conducted the last time – will have to provide a declaration that they are Indian citizens, and support this declaration with documented proof of birth and place of birth. The Commission has announced the decision against the backdrop of allegations made by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of electoral manipulation using the voters' list in Maharashtra. The ECI has denied the charges. The Opposition parties have responded to the exercise in Bihar with suspicion. The RJD (Rashtriya Janata Dal) has said it is a "well-planned conspiracy" to deprive lakhs of people in the state of their right to vote. It has questioned the need to undertake the revision in a hurry when it has not been done for over two decades. The Congress has said that the exercise is intended to remove the names of the poor, Dalits, and minorities from the voters' list ahead of the election. The parties have said that the SIR would help the BJP in the poll. Booth level officers (BLOs) will carry out door-to-door checks and voters will be given an enumeration form they have to fill on the spot and return to the BLO. The draft electoral roll will be published on August 1 and the final roll on September 30. The Commission's stated keenness to remove the names of ineligible voters from the list is laudable but the revision could have been conducted well ahead of the polls. Producing the proof of birth may pose challenges for many people. Voters have also been told to specify the places of their birth – this is a new requirement that makes the process more complex. The roll revision should not lead to disenfranchisement and denial of voting rights to vulnerable sections of society.

## Middle-East model for land restoration

Water scarcity, extreme heatwaves, and desertification are increasingly shaping everyday life in the Middle East and North Africa – an ominous portent for other regions, which will soon face the same challenges



At a time when political instability dominates the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, climate change, floods, and fires tend to get less attention than usual. And the problems of desertification and droughts almost become forgotten. But this neglect is not only unjustified, it is dangerous. While desertification and droughts are slow-moving and less dramatic than wars, floods, and fires, they are just as devastating. Just ask the more than 500 million people living in the MENA region who must cope with them each day.

Whereas healthy land produces food, retains water, absorbs carbon, and supports livelihoods, degraded land does not. And from the Atlas Mountains to the Tigris-Euphrates river valley, the MENA region features some of the driest – and most rapidly degrading – landscapes on Earth. With temperatures in the region rising nearly twice as fast as the global average, water scarcity, extreme heatwaves, and desertification are increasingly shaping everyday life. Add to that some of the world's fastest-growing populations, and the risks to food security, economic stability, and social cohesion will only grow.

MENA's experiences are an ominous portent of what awaits other regions, which will soon find themselves facing many of the same challenges. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the frequency and duration of droughts have increased globally by nearly 30% since 2000. More than 3.2 billion

people worldwide are now affected by land degradation, with 12 million hectares of arable land lost each year.

But the MENA region also offers reason for hope. For example, Saudi Arabia – for which I am the FAO's program director – has been investing heavily in mitigating and, where possible, reversing the effects of climate change, including through land rehabilitation, rangeland restoration, reforestation, and climate adaptation.

The Kingdom's ambition is exemplified by the Saudi Green Initiative, which includes pledges to plant ten billion trees and rehabilitate 40 million hectares of degraded land. Innovation is central to this effort. One novel land-restoration technique, developed through a collaboration between Saudi technical institutions and the FAO, uses dry palm leaves to stabilise sand dunes in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. This organic material, which was historically considered waste, protects topsoil from wind erosion and slows the rate at which water evaporates, thereby ensuring enough moisture for dormant native seeds to germinate.

The FAO is also working with Saudi Arabia to implement science-based land-monitoring systems, scale up sustainable land-management techniques, and train national experts in climate-smart practices. More than 40 professionals have been trained across key regions, including AlJouf, Riyadh, and the Eastern Province.

While solutions are always adapted to the local ecosystem, they are designed with scalability in mind.

But climate change is not bound by national borders. That is why Saudi

Arabia created the Middle East Green Initiative, which aims to strengthen regional cooperation. At the global level, the Kingdom is spearheading the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, aimed at helping the most vulnerable countries cope with drought.

Since the initiative's announcement at the 2024 UN Convention to Combat Desertification (COP16), more than \$3 billion has been mobilised. It helps that, beyond being crucial to human well-being, land restoration is a high-return investment: the FAO estimates that every dollar invested in it can yield up to \$30 in economic and environmental returns.

Local NGOs and communities are playing a growing role in land-restoration efforts, such as by establishing nurseries for native plants, building green belts, and raising public awareness about land restoration. This combination of local action, national direction, and international cooperation delivers the kind of robust, lasting results that are needed to build true climate resilience. And it should serve as a model for the rest of the world.

The climate crisis is advancing fast, but so are solutions – thanks not least to those on the frontline. The most climate-vulnerable countries are acting as role models, innovators, pioneers, and leaders. What Saudi Arabia is doing today will shape what California, southern Europe, and the Sahel do tomorrow. Fortunately, the lessons are likely to be as plentiful as they are constructive.

BY-NIZAR HADDAD

## Why Is the Eldest or Youngest Son Chosen to Perform the Last Rites of Parents ?

In Hindu religion and ancient texts, it is often mentioned that a son performs the last rites (especially mukhagni - lighting the funeral pyre) of his parents. It is believed that by doing so, the son repays the matru (mother's) and pitru (father's) debt. Life works in a unique cycle - parents give life to their children, and later, children help free their parents from the cycle of birth and death through rituals, helping them attain moksha (liberation). This tradition has become a cultural norm over time. Another spiritual reasoning often given is that the word "putra" means "one who saves from hell (narak)." It is believed that when a son performs the last rites, the soul attains peace and is protected from going to hell, moving instead toward heaven or liberation.

Why Only the Eldest or Youngest Son? But what if a parent has more than one son? Why does only the eldest or sometimes the youngest son perform the last rites?

If we look into the Ramayana, when Lord Ram was in exile with Sita and Lakshman, his father King Dasharath passed away. Since Ram wasn't present, the last rites were performed by his younger brother Bharat. This shows that the responsibility can fall upon other sons too, especially if the eldest is absent.

In ancient scriptures, the male heirs of the family are generally given the right to perform the final rites. In cases where there is no son, even a son-in-law may perform the rites. So, it's not just about eldest or youngest-presence, willingness, and responsibilities matter.

Why Mostly the Eldest Son? Traditionally, the eldest son is considered the legal and moral heir to the family's duties and assets. One of his primary responsibilities is to perform the last rites of his parents. In many communities, after the funeral, there is a special ceremony where the son who performs the last rites is given a turban (pagdi) to symbolize that he is now the head of the family. This turban is not just about property; it's a symbol of responsibility. Sometimes, if the younger son performs the rituals, he passes the pagdi to the elder brother, acknowledging his seniority and responsibility.

Special Bond with the Youngest Son In many Indian families, parents often have a special emotional bond with the youngest son. Sometimes they express a wish that he should light the pyre. In situations where the elder son is unavailable or the parents desired the younger one to do the last rites, the younger son has the full right to perform them. In Indian tradition, the concept of heirship plays a major role. If the father is no more, the eldest son naturally becomes the pillar of the family. This is why the responsibility of giving mukhagni often lies with him. Over time, this became a widely followed tradition and belief. However, religious texts and real-life examples show that any son can perform the last rites if needed. What matters most is love, respect, and the intention to fulfill one's final duty towards parents

By-Komal

## DNA is the new medicine

A portable DNA sequencing device may be a key genomic surveillance tool for detecting hotspots of antibiotic resistance in animals, and the environment, according to a new study. In the pilot project, researchers from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, Indonesia's Ministry of Agriculture, and Arizona State University (ASU) in the US tested the handheld DNA sequencing device to check antibiotic resistance across six chicken slaughterhouses. The global team collected samples from both wastewater and surrounding rivers in Indonesia's Greater Jakarta area. The study found signs that drug-resistant E. coli bacteria -- a key indicator of antibiotic resistance -- from slaughterhouse wastewater may be reaching nearby rivers. In many cases, downstream sites had higher levels of resistant E. coli than upstream, pointing to a possible route for resistance to spread from animal waste into the environment. The researchers found that portable DNA sequencing can strengthen national surveillance efforts by making it easier to detect antibiotic resistance hotspots. This will pave the way for more targeted, cost-effective solutions to reduce the spread of resistant E. coli strains, which can cause a range of illnesses, including diarrhoea, especially in children, older adults, and immunocompromised individuals, the researchers said. "In certain settings, diarrhoea isn't just uncomfortable -- it's life-threatening," said Lee Voth-Gaeddert, a researcher with the ASU Biodesign Center for Health Through Microbiomes. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a critical global health issue, posing significant risks to human and animal health. In 2021, AMR was associated with 4.71 million deaths, including 1.14 million directly attributable to AMR. By 2050, AMR is projected to cause 8.22 million deaths annually, with 1.91 million directly attributable. Fast, affordable, and locally accessible tools like the portable DNA sequencing device may significantly advance efforts to track and control a broad range of microbial threats.

## Pakistan is sick

On December 8, 1947, just a few months after that mistake of history called Pakistan was created, the Time magazine carried a story, "Pakistan: Sick". It narrated Jinnah's response to a reporter's observation about the Hindus' belief that Pakistan was unworkable because it lacked coal, industry and other economic resources. The reporter's presumption was wrong; states without resources have worked, as Lee Kuan Yew showed with Singapore. Yet, Jinnah's response was irrational to the extent of being stupid and charlatan, unfit to be the response of a nation's founder leader. He said, "Why should they care if I starve?" Some may disagree with our using strong epithets for this response. Yet, history has confirmed the apprehension behind the reporter's observation.

Pakistan is repeatedly in the news for being very high on the failed state and fragile state indices. It need not have been there; it inherited the rich agricultural areas of West Punjab and it got the thriving port of Karachi. With US help from day one, its per capita income was higher than India in the 1960s by about 25 percent and even its foreign reserves were ahead of India. Today, its foreign reserves are 4 percent of that of India while its per capita income is half. India gave Pakistan 80 percent of water of the Indus system while remaining content for six decades with just 20 percent. For all the early decades, India was stuck with Nehruvian socialism, was derided for the "Hindu rate of growth" and was shunned by foreign investors. Most of the rich countries were courting Pakistan. It made Pakistan complacent; with such bounties, they did not need to strive. They became even more complacent with the gift of armed forces at the time of partition; 30 percent of the army, 40 percent of the navy and 20 percent of the air

force of undivided India was handed over to Pakistan. The huge military dominated the polity, drained its resources and adopted Kashmir as a perennial issue to justify the military's huge expenditure and dominance.

Jinnah had nothing to do with the rosy figures in the 1960s; which were Ayub Khan's work. When it was formed, Pakistan got \$60 million (More than \$800 million today) from the Reserve Bank of India. By November 1947, it was all over and a Pakistan government cheque to the British Overseas Airways Corporation bounced. Before 1947 was over, there was a cut in the salaries and allowances of public servants. The bounced check crashed its credit ratings and imports became expensive, up to three times the going rate. Jinnah tried imposing a steep duty on jute exports to India, which retaliated by increasing the price of coal. The fallout of all this economic mayhem was that there was no money to rehabilitate the Muslim refugees fleeing India, which was spending half a million dollars daily to take care of the Hindu refugees. India gave urban and rural properties and agricultural lands to these refugees and within a decade, they constituted thriving communities all over northern India. The hungry refugees in Pakistan turned to the communists or Islamists. The Communist Party of Pakistan was founded in 1948, Jamaat-e-Islami was there from the beginning, having split from the original outfit in India.

The Left and the Islamists had a complex love-hate relationship in Pakistan, as they have even today in the rest of the world, particularly among the intellectuals. Communism and Islam, both are transformational in nature, with emphasis on supplanting the existing social order with a new one, by violent means, if necessary. Both preach a classless society and an equitable



distribution of resources but both end up creating an entrenched elite that corners most of the resources while the masses have to live on ideology and poverty. In Pakistan, they paraded a hybrid called Islamic socialism but, in their hearts, both the Islamists and Communists thought that their ideology would ultimately prevail and subsume the other. Arif Hussain, in his 1966 book "Pakistan: Its Ideology and Foreign Policy" had bluntly stated this "Islamic socialism is as much above Communism and if Communism comes into contact with Islamic socialism, I am sure we may be able to convert it into the Islamic cult." Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party claimed to subscribe to Islamic socialism and used it against Ayub Khan. In the end, the Bhutto family entrenched itself in Pakistan's politics, enriching themselves with Benazir's husband Asif Ali Zardari earning the moniker of "Mr. 10 percent" for his 'pay for play' role while his wife was Prime Minister. Dynasties like the Bhuttos and Sharifs, alongside the usurper army generals have drained Pakistan and stashed their money abroad, where they escape when things get too hot at home.

Let us come back to Jinnah's reply in 1948, "Why should they care if I starve?" Just imagine that you live in luxury in a large mansion while the mansion next door is dilapidated and inhabited by a starving family. Would you care?

Would it affect your security? The concept of ownership of property is a moral one and there is a world of difference between the morality of one who has plenty and of another who has nothing; the latter has nothing to lose and the former lives in apprehension of mischance and worse from the latter. Well known is the helplessness of law enforcement authorities confronted with a law-breaker who has nothing to lose. For him, life in prison may be better than life outside it; he puts in no defence, gets convicted and goes back to his life of crime when he is released. Three entrenched sections of Pakistan's society have their future protected by wealth filched from the nation - big landlords, religious leaders and the army brass. The rest of the nation has nothing to lose; they leave the question of survival to God and are conditioned by the elite to believe in a beautiful afterlife.

These three categories of rich puppeteers hold the strings that make the masses kill their family members, their countrymen and those designated as kafirs and dhimmis. They are happy to terminate their own miserable lives in suicide missions as beyond that lie the pleasures that they never had in this life. Is that a clue to the state of mental health in Pakistan, where people kill polio vaccinators and teenager TikTok-and-Instagram influencers, considering their acts to be un-Islamic, where fathers and brothers kill young girls in

honour killings, 'religious' teachers chain students in seminaries and commit sexual atrocities on pre-teens and where lawyers shower rose petals on a bodyguard who murdered a Governor he was supposed to protect just because he spoke against the misuse of blasphemy laws? Can that society be called sane?

The answer to Jinnah's question is -- yes, India and Indians have to care. India does not produce suicide bombers because here suicide is a sin that obviates the possibility of liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. The Islamists' belief in the pleasures of the afterlife and the Indian belief in karma that makes you pay for your deeds, in the final analysis, are just beliefs without any tangible proof. Yet, among humans, you have to believe before you can achieve. Pakistan being sick ideologically, mentally and economically is not by chance, nor is India's steady progress in every parameter, certainly not as dramatic a burst as China's, but still holding the promise of a steady trajectory for decades to come. Lastly, one more answer to Jinnah's question -- it may not be important if Indians care; Pakistan's rulers should care if their countrymen starve. There is no indication that it will happen anytime soon.

By-R. N. Prasher  
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