

OUR OPINION, THEIR OPINION

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

On Modi's visit to Manipur

Prime Minister's visit is not a magic wand to solve the problems of a state radically. But ou it has a big hand to build confidence and trust among the people which works to form a cognitive solution to the problems a state facing. Its true that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Manipur on Saturday came too late and did too little to address the problems of conflict, unrest and distrust that have wracked the state for more than two years. A prime minister's visit does not always offer solutions. But it has certainly brought a confidence to those seeking a solution to the yeas long conflict. Modi visited the state 864 days after trouble erupted in May 2023, and there is no explanation why he did not go to the state where some 250 people were killed and 60,000 were displaced from their homes. His speech on Saturday, however, had a wave of promises that may bring a ray hope. he talked of building a bridge of trust between two polarised regions of the state. He tried to lay a road map for the future but the road is not clear and it is not known what it is paved with. Modi addressed meetings in Kuki-dominated Churachandpur in the hills and the Meitei stronghold of Imphal in the plains. He said peace was the only way forward and that his government would continue to work to restore normalcy. He inaugurated development projects worth Rs 7,300 crore in the hill districts. In his speech in Imphal, he said the violence in the state was unfortunate, and inaugurated projects worth Rs 1,200 crore. The unrest in Manipur was not about development though it could have indirectly worked as a factor behind the Meitei demand for reservation, from where the whole trouble began. The present phase of confrontation and violence started with Kuki protests against a court decision to grant reservation to the Meiteis. But the problem has now acquired other dimensions which cannot not be solved with the offer of development projects. The government had announced two agreements—one about revival of a Suspension of Operations (SoO) with rebel groups and the other about free movement on the arterial NH 02. These were to be presented as progress in the process of reconciliation but both collapsed because there was no all-round support for them. For the peace process to make any headway, all parties have to be engaged and involved in a broad framework of democratic discourse. This has not happened in Manipur. There was disappointment among the people from both sides over Modi's visit as it did not seem to further the process of peace and normalcy in the state. The rival sides in Manipur still stick to their headline positions and that is a sign of the lack of progress in moving forward.

How Trump can prevent a war over Taiwan

The current collision course was never inevitable, and President Trump's best bet would be to boldly seek a fresh deal with China by restoring equilibrium across the Taiwan Strait by offering to dial back US defence buildups from the region

China and the United States are closer than they've ever been to a war over Taiwan. A dangerous feedback loop has set in over the past decade: Taiwanese defiance toward China provokes aggressive bluster from Beijing, leading to stronger rhetorical support for Taiwan in Washington. The self-reinforcing pattern repeats itself. Each time, it moves Taiwan more to the centre of the US-China relationship, increases the risk of conflict, and provokes fretful analysis over what to do about this seemingly intractable situation. This arc was not preordained. Nor is it immutable, and in Trump, the US has a norm-defying president uniquely positioned to reverse it. The Trump administration's best bet for avoiding war would be to boldly seek a fresh deal with China, restoring equilibrium across the Taiwan Strait by offering to dial back US defence buildups in the region and putting Taiwan on notice that American military backup is neither assured nor boundless. If that seems deceptively simple and logical, it's because it's worked before, to everyone's benefit. Taiwan has been a thorn in US-China relations ever since Communist forces took control of China in 1949, driving the US-backed Nationalists to Taiwan. China has never given up its goal of unifying the island with the mainland. In the 1970s, Beijing and Washington reached a nuanced compromise: The US affirmed that the government in Beijing was China's sole legal authority and acknowledged Beijing's position that Taiwan is part of China. America also refrained from supporting Taiwan's independence and limited contact with Taipei to unofficial channels, even while providing it arms and other military backing. This ambivalent balancing act proved remarkably successful, with the resulting stability allowing China, Taiwan, and much of Asia to prosper. The US benefited greatly from soaring trade and other cooperation with the region, and to this day, Taiwan remains a vibrant, self-governing democracy. Things began breaking down in earnest in 2016 when Taiwan

elected Tsai Ing-wen, a president who departed sharply from her predecessor's approach of accommodating China, which responded by ramping up military and economic pressure on the island. Trump, too, irked Beijing, breaking with protocol to accept a congratulatory call from Tsai after his own 2016 win and easing restrictions on diplomatic contact with Taiwan. More damage was done under President Biden, who repeatedly said he would send US forces to defend Taiwan against attack, parting from the longtime "strategic ambiguity" on that question. (Officials later affirmed that US policy remained unchanged.) And, in 2022, after Nancy Pelosi made the first visit to Taipei by a sitting US speaker of the House in 25 years, Chinese military intimidation of Taiwan escalated. Trump, who is seeking deals with China on trade and security, so far appears wary of antagonising Beijing over this issue in his second term. This summer, his administration denied a request by President Lai Ching-te of Taiwan to stop over in the US en route to Latin America and cancelled defence talks with Taipei. The president must go further by strongly reaffirming that the US does not support Taiwan independence, reimposing restrictions on diplomatic contact, and stopping congressional and State Department efforts to expand Taipei's participation in international organisations, all of which China opposes. The Trump administration could also remove US military trainers from Taiwan and weapon systems in the region that provoke China as much as they deter it. Trump should, of course, seek reciprocal steps from China, such as a declaration that Beijing has no timeline for achieving unification with Taiwan nor any firm intent to use force. China must also commit to scaling back cyber warfare, military threats, and trade sanctions that stoke fear and defiance in Taiwan. This proposal finds receptive ears in Beijing. China, too, hopes to avoid a war and its enormous costs. There is no guarantee that the difficult air, land, and sea campaign required to seize Taiwan would succeed, and failure would be humiliating for the Chinese Communist Party,

potentially even undermining its legitimacy at home. President Xi Jinping is struggling to rein in persistent corruption in the People's Liberation Army that could affect military readiness, and it is uncertain whether the country's slowing economy could withstand a lengthy conflict and the resulting trade disruptions. Making a deal with China is politically risky for Trump. Support for Taiwan has grown in Washington, especially in his own party, and the president could face accusations of appeasing Beijing and abandoning a democratic friend. But Trump is uniquely immune to such push-back. He has whipped a compliant Republican Party and Congress into line and, as a second-term president, needn't worry about re-election. At any rate, this isn't about abandoning Taiwan. It's merely about reducing its central role in U.S.-China ties. Taiwan is, of course, valuable to the United States, not only symbolically as a fellow democracy but also as a source of advanced semiconductors. But even all that is not worth America going to war. China is a formidable military power, with a growing arsenal of missiles and nuclear weapons that can reach the US mainland. With its military resources already overstretched by conflicts elsewhere, the US can ill afford conflict with China. Taiwan has been an important factor in the spiral of destabilisation. Lai, who won office in January 2024, has taken an even more confrontational stance toward China than Tsai did. Taipei must be made aware that the US may not be there to help, and should refrain from inflaming Beijing. That, in the end, may be the best way to preserve Taiwan's freedoms. An overture like this could, of course, fail. But that would leave the situation no worse than it is now. And merely making the effort would send the important signal that the US is willing to give and take on issues of great importance to China. A war between the US and China would have no winners. Preventing one would rightfully secure Trump the place in history as a peacemaker that he so covets.

BY-JENNIFER KAVANAGH

Railway Dreams on Track:

Counting the Costs and Benefits

The newly built railway line has sparked both excitement and questions. For many, it is seen as a lifeline connecting regions, boosting tourism, and creating jobs. But critics ask: what was the cost of laying these tracks, and will the returns be enough to justify the investment? The Price Tag: How Much Did It Cost? Building a modern railway line is never cheap. According to official estimates, the project cost runs into thousands of crores. Land acquisition, tunneling, bridges, safety systems, and modern coaches pushed up the budget. For taxpayers, this is a big commitment, and naturally, people want to know if their money will be well-spent. Promised Benefits: Tourism, Trade, Jobs Supporters argue the railway will more than pay for itself. By connecting new regions, it can attract tourists, open markets for trade, and bring in investment. Small towns along the route expect better business, farmers hope to sell their produce faster, and thousands of workers are already employed in construction and operations. Sustainability: Will It Run in Profit? This is the real test. Many rail projects in the past became "white elephants" because earnings could not match the high costs. For this line to be sustainable, passenger traffic, freight bookings, and tourism inflow must grow steadily. Experts suggest that if marketed smartly—with tourist packages, industrial linkages, and cargo services—the railway can cover its costs and even earn profit in the long run. Tracks Towards Growth Yes, the project is expensive. Yes, the risks are real. But infrastructure is not just about numbers it is about vision and goal. The railway line has the potential to transform local economies, connect people, and create opportunities that go beyond balance sheets. If managed well, it will not just be a railway, but a track towards growth, hope, and future prosperity.

By-Komal

Gen Z protest is more about alarm, a new weapon

After the shocking series of events marked by widespread violence and bloodshed in Nepal, the term 'Gen Z' emerges as a powerful entity, brimming with boundless, directionless energy that can be tapped by any force. The term defines a new-age phenomenon, hitherto unknown, born out of the tech revolution that humankind is proud of, yet also one that opens the door to manipulation by creating a delusive world within. Gen Z may appear gregarious, but beneath the surface, there is little harmony -- cutthroat competition is the core, and everything has to be in reel. Nepal is perhaps the first country where the term "Gen Z" was used to label and define a situation. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also witnessed unrest led by students, but those movements were not tagged as Gen Z. In both countries, students played a big role in overthrowing regimes and installing new ones. Nepal's situation, however, is entirely different. The sudden surge of protests in Nepal, which led to the burning down of the three pillars of democracy -- Parliament, the Supreme Court, and the Executive -- can hardly be called a revolution. It was not merely the destruction of buildings or structures; it was more about the execution of a thought through the gullible minds of a generation which is not mature enough to grasp the consequences. Nepal today stands damaged by its own youth, who should have been the nation's building blocks. In a democracy, it is essential to protest and express dissent. Saying "no" is vital, and the biggest weapon is the electoral system. Elections are the best way to punish bad politicians. In India, Indira Gandhi was punished in 1977 when people believed she had erred, leading to her defeat. In 2014, the corrupt Congress-led UPA regime was voted out, and since then, the grand old party has been on a steady decline, leaning on smaller parties for survival. In Nepal, voter turnout for the November 2022 House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly elections stood at 61 per cent -- a healthy figure showing strong participation. If most of the electorate was willing to vote, why wasn't that power used to vote out the "corrupt" leaders? The previous KP Sharma Oli government erred by ordering police to fire at protesting youths. Had it been patient and sensitive, those killings could have been avoided. Once the deaths occurred during the crackdown, mayhem erupted. September 8-10 turned into one of the darkest days for Nepal, with its democratic pillars destroyed by a few thousand angry, misguided young people who could not distinguish between a corrupt politician and Parliament, a corrupt judge and the judiciary, or a corrupt bureaucrat and the administration. In India, when the farmers' protest (2020-2021) turned violent and a section stormed the Red Fort, desecrating the National Flag, the government could have ordered a harsh crackdown. But wise leadership showed restraint, diffusing what had the potential to spiral into a major disaster and drag the country into a vortex of violence. Before that, the anti-CAA protests launched by various Muslim outfits in December 2019 aimed to create a nationwide wave. Yet, through tactful handling, the Modi government contained the unrest, which fizzled out by March 24, 2020. The government's position on the CAA was later validated, while the claims of its critics -- including Leftist groups, Congress, and the then-ruling AAP government in Delhi -- collapsed. In both cases, external forces attempted to amplify the protests under the guise of human rights activism. Yet both failed due to effective handling by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Despite attempts to project these protests as referendums against the Centre, the Modi-led NDA returned to power in 2019 and again in 2024, while those who fuelled the unrest were rejected in the states.

By-Deepika Bhan

The Smartphone Revolution: How digital citizens are rewriting regime change

In the age of smartphones, protests are no longer confined to streets and squares. They unfold instantly across digital networks, empowering millions to coordinate, document and amplify their voices in real time. Governments face a new reality: power is now as much about control of the signal as control of the street. OP Singh, DGP, is his upcoming book on 'Crowd Engineering' says that this transformation demands a rethink of how states engage with crowds, how movements wield influence—and how legitimacy itself is earned in a connected world. Smartphones have done more than connect us; they have upended the mechanics of protest. Once, a demonstration needed a leader, a leaflet and a loudhailer. Now it requires a signal. From Dhaka to Dakar, digital citizens coordinate, document, and broadcast dissent at the tap of a screen. Revolutions aren't guaranteed—but they've become faster, flatter, and far harder for rigid hierarchies to control. A new playbook for protest Three smartphone-enabled capabilities explain this shift. First, smartphones break the state's grip on the narrative. A baton raised at dusk becomes a clip viewed by millions before dawn. Second, they solve the coordination puzzle: participants watch headcounts rise, live and adapt routes or tactics on the fly. Third, they globalise local grievances: a scuffle at a university gate can trend in faraway feeds by mid-afternoon. Put together, crowds become "networked publics" — leaderless, improvisational, and resilient. Hierarchies creak; swarms iterate. States have been slow to catch

up. Internet shutdowns and platform bans appear as blunt instruments that signal panic, punish the uninvolved, and erode civic trust. In Haryana, as field officer, I helped organise SPAT trials, district marathons, and the weekly Raahgiri open-street mornings — events designed to meet our evolutionary urge to crowd with dignity rather than deny it. These rituals acknowledged the social electricity that Emile Durkheim called collective effervescence and turned potential flashpoints into civic celebrations. Smartphones supercharge this urge. They compress the timeline of mobilisation, amplify participation and make protest part digital spectacle, part live event. The ability to live-stream a march or post a video of police action brings the world closer in real time but also raises stakes with every click.

"Crowds are not threats to order; they are solutions with their own rhythms and aspirations. By designing spaces for inclusion and participation, and by connecting digital mobilisation with meaningful offline engagement, states can transform volatile gatherings into civic rituals built on trust and dignity."

Yet this power cuts both ways. The same device that empowers dissenters arms autocrats. Authoritarian regimes have mastered digital surveillance, coordinated disinformation, forced content takedowns, and press platforms for user data. They seed comment sections with paid agitators and deploy deepfakes to undermine trust. The struggle has become as much about con-

trol of the narrative online as control of the streets. This new playing field demands fresh literacies: digital diplomacy, narrative management, and participatory design—skills that many governments are only beginning to develop. Design, not denial The antidote to turmoil isn't censorship — it's crowd engineering. Borrowing from disaster response and public health, crowd engineering anticipates flashpoints, communicates clearly and stages space for safety and respect. Officials must speak plainly and early, on platforms where people already gather. Share verifiable updates in real time. Train frontline officers not only in protocol but in posture and de-escalation—because in the age of the camera, demeanour sets the tone of governance. Networks favour spectacle, but spectacle is brittle. Performative politics thrives on drama; persuasive politics builds coalition. Verification should always trump virality. Responsible organisers invest in fact-checking, protect vulnerable participants at the edges of crowds and de-escalate tensions through rapid communications and mediation. A viral video can mobilise thousands—but it demands a transparent and timely response to correct errors before outrage snowballs. Toxic influencer culture is another challenge. Influencers chasing clicks sometimes become grievance factories, with followings far larger than what governments can safely accommodate. The solution is transparency, not silence. Conspicuous disclosures of paid partnerships, auditable claims, and friction provisions for calls to assemble beyond certain scales can reduce



risks. Europe's Digital Services Act and India's ASCI/CCPA guidelines provide models, mandating clear labels, periodic transparency reports and risk assessments for large platforms — all backed by enforceable penalties. Social media platforms themselves are no longer neutral conduits. Their invisible hand shapes which sparks flare into fires, deciding the salience of crises and narratives. This power carries responsibility. Platforms must adopt crisis-response protocols co-designed with local institutions, speed up appeals, and publish lists of government requests for content removal. Transparency about content moderation, artificial amplification and manipulation campaigns should be normalised, not a reluctant afterthought. A generational compact for legitimacy Generations Y and Z, digital natives fluent in tap-and-swipe, expect to co-author the public arena. They reject traditional gatekeepers and scorn pomp. When they crowd capital squares, they bring a different view of authority: less vertical, more participatory; less stagecraft, more dialogue. States that learn to meet them on these terms build resilience. Those that cling to bans and batons bleed legitimacy they cannot afford to lose.

Movements and platforms alike must balance zeal with responsibility. The smartphone invites performative politics; the wiser path is persuasive politics. Not every grievance demands maximalist escalation. Coalitions grow when messages speak to those nearly persuaded instead of catering only to hardened activists. The smartphone has compressed political timelines and expanded the cast. It forces scrutiny into every corner and shortens the lag between action and reaction. Courage, grievance, and hope long predate the glass rectangle in our pockets, but the device puts all three under constant, real-time review. The workable compact for the smartphone era demands clear roles. Governments should design for dignity, open communication and dialogue, and reserve shutdowns as a last resort. Movements should value truth over tempo, discipline over drama. Platforms must wield their editorial power transparently and fairly. The instrument that has made politics more combustible can also make it more honest. Everyone sees. Everyone remembers. Legitimacy, in a world so networked, is the most precious currency—and the one most worth cultivating.

By-OP Singh