

The Republic of Noise – Horn OK Please

By Uday Kumar Varma

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The Motorcycle Manifesto

I wonder how many of us have experienced it.

A motorcycle roars past, its silencer apparently discarded as an unnecessary accessory. The sound is not merely loud; it is physically invasive. Startled pedestrians look up in alarm. Conversations stop mid-sentence. Birds take flight. For a fleeting moment one wonders whether a moving explosion has just passed by.

As the machine disappears into the distance, a simple question arises: how can this possibly be legal?

The answer, surprisingly, is almost beside the point.

In India, noise has long ceased to be merely a regulatory issue. It has become a cultural condition.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the immortal slogan painted across the backs of countless trucks: Horn OK Please. To foreign visitors, the phrase is puzzling. To Indians, it is practically a constitutional principle. It encapsulates an entire philosophy of public life. If Descartes had been Indian, he might have written: I honk, therefore I am.

A Nation of Horns

In most countries, the horn is a warning device used sparingly and apologetically. In India, it has evolved into a versatile means of communication. One honks to overtake, to greet, to protest, to encourage, to express impatience, to announce arrival, and sometimes, it would seem, merely to alleviate boredom.

The Indian Road is less a transport system than an orchestra without a conductor.

Such behaviour is actively encouraged. Trucks invite motorists to honk. Shops specialise in repairing and enhancing horns. Luxury automobile manufacturers have reportedly adapted the durability of their horns for Indian conditions. A study of e-scooter riders in Kolkata found that they honked an average of 131 times an hour—more than twice every minute.

One begins to suspect that the national bird of India is no longer the peacock but the pressure horn.

Yet this national affection for noise comes at a staggering cost.

The Cost of Cacophony

According to studies cited recently by The Economist, average street noise levels in Delhi hover around 75 decibels,

roughly four times the threshold recommended by the World Health Organisation. In some Indian cities, peak readings exceed 100 decibels, comparable to standing beside a chainsaw.

The comparison with other world capitals is revealing. Average traffic noise levels in London are around 55 decibels. Tokyo and Seoul generally remain below 70. Delhi routinely exceeds 75. Among major cities surveyed internationally, only Dhaka appears capable of challenging it in the contest to overwhelm human hearing.

Road traffic alone accounts for nearly three-quarters of urban noise in India. The numbers become even more alarming.

More than sixty million Indians are estimated to suffer from hearing loss. Medical research increasingly links prolonged exposure to excessive noise with hypertension, cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, chronic stress, anxiety, and impaired mental well-being. Studies have shown that even modest increases in traffic noise can affect children's memory development and reduce reading comprehension.

If noise pollution were a virus, it would dominate headlines.

Instead, it remains largely invisible. Or rather, inaudible—because we have become accustomed to it.

When Noise Becomes Normal

Perhaps the most revealing finding comes from an experiment conducted by researchers at IIT Delhi.

British and Indian participants were exposed to recordings of traffic noise from London and Delhi. The British subjects displayed immediate signs of physiological stress when listening to the Delhi recordings. Indians appeared less disturbed.

At first glance this seems reassuring. It is not.

Researchers found indications that what looked like resilience might actually be adaptation to chronic exposure. The body had become accustomed to the assault, but not immune to its effects. The damage was still being done.

This may be the most Indian aspect of the problem. We do not always solve adversity; we often learn to live with it.

Power cuts become routine. Traffic congestion becomes routine. Polluted air becomes routine. Noise pollution follows the same pattern. What begins as an outrage gradually becomes background.

The remarkable thing is not that we endure these conditions. It is that we cease to notice them.

And what extraordinary background it is.

India's festivals are often measured less by participation than by decibels. Loudspeakers blare through residential neighbourhoods late into the night. Firecrackers transform celebrations into artillery demonstrations. Political campaigns resemble acoustic warfare. Religious observances increasingly rely on amplification systems powerful enough to persuade the heavens that worshippers are serious.

One is tempted to ask how the gods managed for thousands of years before the invention of loudspeakers.

Laws Without Silence

The irony is that India possesses no shortage of laws.

Noise is officially classified as an air pollutant. Residential areas are subject to prescribed limits. Silence zones exist around schools and hospitals. The Noise Pollution Rules of 2000 regulate loudspeakers and public-address systems. The law, on paper, is both detailed and sensible.

Reality, however, has developed an independent career.

A decade-long analysis found that noise levels around many hospitals and schools exceeded prescribed limits by more than double. Enforcement is sporadic, fragmented, and often paralysed by political and social pressures. Few administrators wish to be remembered as the official who turned down the volume of a religious festival, curtailed a political rally, or confiscated a neighbourhood loudspeaker.

The result is a curious national arrangement in which everyone suffers but almost nobody complains.

The poor, of course, suffer most. They cannot retreat behind soundproof windows or relocate to quieter neighbourhoods. Street vendors, delivery workers, traffic policemen, construction labourers, and residents of informal settlements endure the full force of India's acoustic excess.

Environmental campaigns focus, understandably, on polluted air and contaminated water. Noise rarely attracts comparable attention despite evidence that its economic and health costs may be enormous. European studies suggest that transport-related noise may impose costs amounting to nearly 0.6 per cent of GDP annually. No comparable estimate exists for India, though one suspects the figure would be sobering.

The Sound of Attention

Perhaps the explanation lies deeper than policy. Noise has become a substitute for attention.

The motorcycle rider demands attention. The impatient motorist demands attention. The political candidate demands attention. The religious procession demands attention. The loudspeaker demands attention.

Everyone wishes to be heard, and so everyone becomes louder.

The result is a society in which silence is mistaken for absence and volume mistaken for significance.

This is not a problem that technology alone can solve. Better urban planning, stricter enforcement, quieter vehicles, sound barriers, and improved public transport would all help. But the deeper challenge is cultural. It requires recognising that consideration for others is not weakness and that civility occasionally begins with restraint.

India gave the world yoga, meditation, contemplation, and some of humanity's deepest reflections on inner peace. It is a curious irony that a civilisation which celebrated silence as a path to wisdom should have become one of the noisiest places on earth.

Unless respect for others occasionally begins by lowering the volume, the national motto will remain unchanged:

Horn OK Please.

Three words. A national mantra. And perhaps an unintended summary of modern India.

Leadership Styles of US Presidents: Impact on Global Order, Peace and Geopolitics

By - Vappala Balachandran

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In this intertwined world, the policy direction flowing from the United States of America impacts the whole world like never before. The countries that have nothing to do with the US and Israel's war on Iran have become secondary victims of the American aggression as energy supply chains get disrupted, affecting global manufacturing and the economy.

Introduction

The US President has been described as the most powerful person in the democratic world by virtue of his being the head of state of the world's largest economy. In addition, he is also the commander-in-chief of the most powerful armed force in the world with the largest nuclear arsenal. By virtue of this, he is the world's top diplomat, which entitles him to be the "primus inter pares" (first among equals) at all high-powered international meetings.

How US Presidents Are Judged by History

John Bolton, Trump's National Security Adviser (2018-19) during his first term, had said this about Trump: "If his first four years were bad, a second four will be worse". In the past, several surveys were conducted on the "worst presidents". In many of these surveys, Trump's name comes up prominently. For example, in September 2022, CBS News published a list of ten "worst presidents" in this order:

1. Andrew Johnson (1865-1869)- The first president to face impeachment
2. James Buchanan (1857-1861)- Poor crisis leadership
3. Donald Trump (2017 – 2021& 2025–) Faced impeachment twice

On February 12, 2025, the "New Dealer" (The Students' News Site of Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School in New York) also placed him in 4th place as the "Worst President" after Zachary Taylor (1849-1850), Herbert Hoover (1929-33), and Warren G. Harding (1921-23).

However, mere public opinion polls are not the barometer for judging a president. For example, many still consider the 43rd US President, George W. Bush (2001-2009), as one of the worst presidents. He is blamed for starting the Iraq War (2003-2011) on a totally false reason that Saddam Hussein was about to fabricate nuclear weapons.

This view is not shared by other responsible persons. Former CIA director Robert Gates, the most experienced "Washington Insider" who had served under 8 US presidents in various capacities, including as Deputy National Security Adviser, speaks highly of George W. Bush in his book "Duty" (2014). Gates was also the US Defence Secretary from 2006 to 2011, serving under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

How then do we judge presidential qualities? Presidential historian Richard Norton Smith explained at a 2011 "Wharton Leadership Conference" that several other attributes must be considered when judging a US president. Smith said that President Dwight D. Eisenhower was considered "mediocre" compared to the "Dynamic Camelot Era" of John F. Kennedy, who immediately followed him as president and whose profile rose to dizzying heights after he was assassinated.

Norton Smith said that a historical analysis had revealed that Eisenhower was a far-sighted leader who had worked silently without publicity and kept the U.S. out of the active Vietnam War in 1954.

Despite pressure to rescue the French, he did not agree, although he had asked the CIA to conduct covert operations, influenced by the “containment policy” initiated by his predecessor, Harry Truman.

This was because Eisenhower, as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Europe during the Second World War, knew the horrors of war and did not commit US troops, unlike Kennedy, who later increased the number of US advisors from 900 to 16,300. Kennedy’s successor, President Lyndon Johnson, sent US Marines and got fully involved in the war. American presence peaked in April 1969, with 54,300 military personnel stationed in the country. Despite this, America had to suffer an ignominious defeat after losing more than 50,000 US soldiers in the war.

The same could be said about President Trump for increasing the US military presence in the Iran quagmire, which does not serve US or European interests. As Col.(retired) Douglas Abbott Macgregor, a former Trump follower, said, Trump is blindly following Israel’s script to make Iran another Gaza and, in that process, driving America into deep recession.

At the same time, it is worthwhile recalling that Trump had defused a big crisis during 2019-20 after threatening to destroy North Korea during his first term, by meeting Kim Jong-un thrice in Singapore, Hanoi and at DMZ.

Attributes of a good American President

What then are the attributes needed for a US president? Jon Meacham, former Newsweek editor and author of “Franklin & Winston” (2003), had said: “Curiosity, Candour, Empathy and Humility”. In his captivating 2003 book, Meacham described the fascinating relationship between Winston Churchill and Franklin D Roosevelt, “the two men who piloted the free world to victory in World War II”. He had also written about presidents Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and George H.W. Bush.

Michael Beschloss, another famous presidential historian who personally knew President Richard Nixon, flags four important qualities: “The political guts of George Washington, the ability to explain tough decisions like Abraham Lincoln, a sense of history like Harry Truman, and the ability to reach across the aisle like the founders and Lyndon B. Johnson”. As we all know, historians had held that Nixon was one of the “worst” presidents for the Watergate Scandal although in foreign policy he was more far-sighted than any of his predecessors by his move to normalise relations with China in 1972, which had startled the world.

Similarly, how do we judge President Jimmy Carter, an exceptionally compassionate person who made human rights the sheet anchor of America’s internal and external policies? He also had a special bond with India, as his mother, Lillian Carter, had worked as a “Peace Corps nurse” at the age of 68 for nearly 2 years from 1966 at a clinic in Godrej Nagar, Vikhroli, in Mumbai. Carter, a deeply religious man, had walked out of the Southern Baptist Church in 2000, protesting their negative attitude toward women’s rights. He was also a prolific writer, having authored 32 books.

Yet he was highly critical of India’s nuclear programme and had criticised our reluctance to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) during an official visit to India. Also, if an impartial history is written, his covert Afghanistan war through the CIA from 1979 onwards had inflicted indescribable suffering on millions of hapless Afghans who had no say in these developments. This war had also led to the rise of the cruel Taliban, Osama bin Laden and other extremist forces and was responsible for the consequent mayhem in America, like 9/11 and elsewhere in the world.

This war, which lasted more than 9 years (1979-1989), killed 15,000 Soviet soldiers and about 90,000 Afghans, including Mujahideen rebels. Three million Afghans who were rendered homeless had fled to Pakistan. Another 1.5 million escaped to Iran. By the end of the 20th century, Afghanistan had become a barren land, one of the most heavily mined countries in the world,

with vast quantities of unexploded mines killing people. All these were started by Carter in 1979 through a moralistic zeal to punish the Soviet Union for its illegal invasion of Afghanistan.

Richard Norton Smith would recommend some rules to judge an American president: Firstly, history rewards the risk-takers: from this angle, he mentions Thomas Jefferson (Louisiana Purchase), Harry Truman (stopping Communist aggression in Korea), Lyndon Johnson (Civil Rights Act of 1964), and Richard Nixon (dialogue with Red China).

Secondly, a president who thinks too much about his historical place will rarely reach his goals: Smith cites the case of President Warren G. Harding, who came to office in 1921-23 with a narcissistic hope that he would be the “best loved” president. Ultimately, he became involved in the “Teapot Dome bribery scandal” and was finally ranked among the worst presidents.

Thirdly, there is no single yardstick to judge any US president. “Presidents can only be understood within the context and limitations of their time”. Presidential power, although awesome on paper, is based largely on moral authority.

The last barometer he mentions is “Greatness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder”. That is why all presidents carefully study “approval ratings”. According to CNN, Trump’s approval rating has hit a new low on 1 April 2026 after he launched the Iran war.

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Neutralizing the ‘String of Pearls’ - The Strategic Imperative of the Great Nicobar Project

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Introduction

The Great Nicobar Project, which includes the construction of a deep draft transshipment port at Galathea Bay and the development of airport and energy infrastructure, is one of the most important maritime endeavors undertaken by India in recent years. Located at the southern tip of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Great Nicobar is close to the northern approaches of the Malacca Strait, which is considered the one of most important maritime chokepoints in the world. While the project has important commercial implications, it must also be seen as a strategic tool that aims to strengthen India’s position in the maritime order of the Indo-Pacific region and resist the growing presence of China in the Indian Ocean Region.

Today's rise of China's blue-water navy, command of the oceans has successively reshaped the world order. In the 21st-century Indo-Pacific, where trade, energy, and military power is funneled through narrow sea lanes, geography again takes center stage for the setting of strategic decisions. It is in this context that the Great Nicobar Island Development Project arises.

Maritime Chokepoints: Geography as Strategic Leverage

The Strait of Malacca is the world's largest oil chokepoint by volume, carrying approximately 29% (23.2 million barrels per day) of total global maritime oil flows. Malacca Strait is identified as one of the world’s most vulnerable oil transit chokepoints due to congestion and narrow navigational limits, comparable in importance to the Strait of Hormuz. For China, roughly 75 to 80 percent of its oil imports pass through this narrow corridor creating what Chinese scholars termed as the “Malacca Dilemma.” of China’s energy security, pointing out the ambitions of certain major powers to gain control of the strait.

Alternative routes such as the Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait in Indonesia serve as secondary routes, particularly for deeper draft vessels or in crisis scenarios. However, they are longer and less commercially efficient. The clustering of these chokepoints in proximity to Great Nicobar enhances the island's geostrategic value. Great Nicobar's proximity, which is roughly 90 nautical miles north of Indonesia's Rondo Island in Aceh province, Malacca's northern entrance, gives India a unique positional advantage. Allowing near-continuous monitoring and rapid force deployment.

Trans-Shipment Hubs

Currently, a large share of India's container trans-shipment traffic is routed through foreign hubs such as Colombo (Sri Lanka) and Port Klang (Malaysia). This increases logistics costs, creates time delays, and exposes Indian trade to external geopolitical risks.

The Great Nicobar transshipment port aims to correct this imbalance by leveraging proximity to the East-West shipping corridor. If executed efficiently, it could reduce India's reliance on foreign hubs and retain freight value domestically. The ICTP, whose first phase is scheduled for commissioning in 2028, is expected to reduce India's annual transshipment expenditure by approximately US\$200 million. The project also includes a dedicated naval enclave capable of accommodating Indian warships. Unlike the existing facilities at Port Blair, which have limited capacity, the new port infrastructure will be able to support larger naval platforms, including destroyers and aircraft carriers.

As India aspires to become the world's third largest economy, maritime infrastructure will determine trade competitiveness. Nearly 95% of India's trade by volume and about 70% by value moves through maritime routes. A domestic hub strategically located near major shipping lanes enhances India's ability to influence global maritime flows rather than merely depend on them.

Naval Build-Up

Naval modernization plans indicate expansion from roughly 140 ships toward a 200-ship fleet by 2035. Furthermore, the planned purchase of six additional P-8I aircraft. It will enhance anti-submarine warfare and surveillance across the eastern Indian Ocean when deployed from Nicobar. India maintains a credible sea-based nuclear deterrent, with ballistic missile submarines deployed across the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and the wider northern Indian Ocean.

Great Nicobar already hosts INS Baaz, India's southernmost airbase under the Andaman and Nicobar Command. The island's location, 1,200-1,400 km from the Indian mainland which offers forward basing advantages. A naval platform operating from the Eastern Naval Command at Visakhapatnam must traverse approximately 1,400-1,800 nautical miles to reach the western approaches of the Malacca Strait. In contrast, Great Nicobar Island lies only about 90 nautical miles from the Strait, providing India with a forward-operating position in close proximity to one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints.

In addition to the port and airport, the project includes supporting infrastructure such as a 450 MVA hybrid power plant. Combining gas, solar energy, and battery storage, the plant will provide a reliable power supply, reduce dependence on diesel, and support future industrial and residential development.

China's Naval Expansion

For China, roughly 75 to 80 percent of its oil imports pass through the Malacca Strait,¹ which has been described by former Chinese President Hu Jintao as the "Malacca Dilemma." The possibility that an adversary could interfere with or monitor this route has been a strategic worry among the Chinese.

China's naval expansion has been rapid and sustained. The People's Liberation Army Navy, now the world's largest by ship count, maintains a continuous presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

Through port investments and infrastructure development in Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh, infrastructure in Myanmar, and access arrangements in Cambodia. Beijing has created an arc of maritime access points often described as the “String of Pearls.” These locations serve as vital resupply points, expand our ability to monitor the region, and offer flexible bases for both commercial and military use.

China’s expanding presence has heightened concerns within India’s strategic community, reinforcing a security dilemma dynamic. In this context, the Nicobar port becomes important in India’s maritime counter-strategy. A sprawling naval base in the Nicobar Islands with multiple berths and operational depth would mitigate such vulnerabilities while extending India’s reach toward the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Ombai-Wetar Straits. These alternative Indonesian passages are frequently used by Chinese submarines and warships entering the Indian Ocean.

China has historically reacted sensitively to India’s maritime engagements. Following India’s 2018 strategic investment in Indonesia’s Sabang port near Malacca’s northern entrance, Beijing warned it would not ignore potential Indian military access.

Regional Balancing : India’s Act East Strategy

The Great Nicobar project aligns with India’s broader Act East and Act South-East Asia strategies. As the ICTP progresses, India has intensified maritime engagement with Southeast Asian partners.

India has secured support from Singapore for joint patrols with Malaysia and Indonesia in the Malacca Strait. The Indian Navy has conducted joint exercises with the Philippines, following the export of BrahMos cruise missile systems to Manila . Discussions continue with Vietnam and Indonesia regarding defense cooperation and missile exports.

These developments reflect a regional balancing dynamic. Countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines have modernized naval capabilities amid concerns over China’s maritime assertiveness. The Philippines’ acquisition of BrahMos systems and Vietnam’s submarine modernization efforts reflect growing anxiety regarding the security of sea lanes.

An eastern port in Great Nicobar provides a permanent anchor for both Indian commerce and defense ties in Southeast Asia. This moves India beyond diplomatic promises, establishing a long-term maritime footprint that backs up the 'Act East' strategy.

Conclusion

We shouldn't see the Great Nicobar Project as just a one-off construction plan. Instead, it's India playing the long game at sea. By building this, India is finally matching its financial goals with its naval strength and using its natural location to meet its security needs. Because global competition is moving away from land and onto the water, India's ability to influence maritime routes will eventually define its status as a world power.

India wants to be the world’s third-largest economy, but that can’t happen if our trade is at the mercy of others. This project secures our future by moving away from foreign shipping hubs and protected 'chokepoints.' It ensures that no adversary can hold our economic progress hostage by controlling the routes we use. Historically, maritime dominance has defined the rise and fall of empires, from the Ming Dynasty’s treasure fleets to the collapse of Imperial Japan. Today, as China’s "String of Pearls" seeks to encircle the Indian Ocean, Great Nicobar serves as the "counter-pearl" a forward operating base that mitigates the vulnerabilities of the mainland and solves the "Malacca Dilemma" in India’s favor. It transforms the "Act East" policy from a diplomatic framework into a permanent, fortified presence, providing a security umbrella not only for India but for regional partners like Vietnam and the Philippines who are increasingly wary of unilateral maritime expansion.

If implemented with institutional efficiency and environmental responsibility, Great Nicobar can serve as the foundation of a more outward-looking India, one that is not merely reacting to maritime competition, but actively shaping the Indo-Pacific order.

A Triangulated War Theatre—

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In the triangulated war circumstances of Iran, Israel and the US; the entire regional arrangement appears to have got triangulated. The tacit alliance of Iran-Hamas-Houthis and Saudi Arabia-America-Pakistan; the stoic trio of Bahrain-Kuwait-Qatar; and the econo-religious configurations like GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council]-Abraham Accords-OIC [Organization of Islamic Cooperation]; fully desecrated countries like Iraq-Syria-Lebanon and seemingly neutral trio of Egypt-Oman-Turkiye. In this, barring Iran, the rest of the countries, directly or indirectly depended upon the US for protection. America has its military bases in all these countries that Iran is now targeting as part of its military strategy. That has made all these US allies most vulnerable. Irani missiles are trained at US bases but in the fall out strike severe damages to properties in these countries; especially their oil refineries and gas fields. Trump's episodic nature oscillates his decisions continuously. He doesn't show any respect for diplomatic ties and commitments. His narcissi and nihilistic mindset render everything irrelevant. His eyes are always set on selfish mottos; pure hedonism. That translates this period for Middle-East friends most inauspicious time [Rahu-Kal]. The generations of liberal thinkers and statesmen in US assiduously crafted the image of US for the third and second worlds that of a dependable and benevolent friend. They showed them an 'American Dream' to work with American society and share with them their prosperity. This assurance made US an attractive destination for millions to migrate and create the future of their families. It was not a one-sided dream. It was a tacit response to American vision of harnessing the talent and energy of other countries to enhance American prosperity and elevate US image as the world leader. The two dreams were reciprocal and complementary. Inventions and discoveries made in American labs, the long list of patents and the nobels undeniably have had a big contribution from the immigrants. Trump has shattered those dreams for ever. Talent and skilled professionals from the aspiring countries are now on the rebound. The GenZ and GenAlpha understand the implications of US-complicity and plan active engagement with AI-led technology for building their own business models in startups and business solutions back home. No wonder in the coming decade, the prosperity map of the globe might see entirely a different and enviable change in the other world. This process has already begun in the Asian countries. Let America be content with its mediocre minds like Trump's, Marco Rubio's and Peter Hegseth's.

American friends in the gulf region are feeling badly let down and abandoned. Qatar-Kuwait-Bahrain bore the brunt of ferocious Iran. They have been badly hurt, Iraq-Syria-Jordan-Yemen were in ruins from the beginning. Lebanon is struggling for its survival. Saudi Arabia, because of its business alliances with Trump and his son-in-law Kushner and a strategic military alliance with Pakistan, managed to escape with minor bruises.

The country which has suffered the dereliction most is the United Arab Emirates [UAE]. A group of seven city states, the UAE was never dependent on oil as much as on its Trade, Industry, Tourism and Global Investment, for decades now Dubai's name has become synonymous with a gratifying life style, safety and security; opportunity to thrive and settle. This war has ruptured this reputation. In its moment of crisis, neither US nor any gulf country, nor any of the three organizational outfits, showed any empathy with the UAE. The Sheikhs realized long ago that the

military and religion-based alliances are irrelevant in this era of technology. They decided to forge an independent strategic arrangement to deter any such threat in future. The sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have always been conscious enough in keeping their economy stable and attractive. They had adopted the Abraham Accords long back to insulate their market against the growing competition from Iran and Saudi Arabia. They had relied on American promise of protection through their military bases, but also marked India as a reliable friend waiting in the wings. India was a second line of defense for them. That's the reason why, in the tumult of the War, the President of the UAE Sheikh Zayed, instead of going to the US or to the organizational platforms, harkened back to India. UAE leadership admires the self-dependent military preparation and the mature political leadership of India. Iran-Israel War flared up in June 2025 and got punctuated after 13 days, but the UAE leadership had sensed its re-trigger any time in near future. President of the UAE Sheikh Zayed decided to act fast and at a very short notice arrived in Delhi on Jan 19 to consult with PM Narendra Modi. His 3-hour visit to Delhi surprised Iran and US both. Exactly a month later he sent his crown prince Sheikh Khaled on a two-day visit [Feb 18-19] with a technical delegation to Delhi. Some deals of technological purport, military cooperation and deeper diplomatic engagement were signed. The relationship was reinforced. India's relations with Israel are already intimate and strategic. Modi-Netanyahu friendship is well-known. During the turbulent conditions of Iran-Israel War, Modi received an invitation from Israel to pay a state visit. Modi went and addressed the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. The joint communiqué emphasized the need for peace in the world and denounced the state-supported terrorism. Some deals were signed to strengthen mutual cooperation. Iran-Israel war intensified and US jumped into the fray. The gulf countries harbouring US bases were targeted by Iran. At this juncture, some consultations went on and PM Netanyahu met Sheikh Zayed at Al-Ain near the border of Oman. It was a short meeting of a few hours and kept secret but it was only after this meeting that the UAE started receiving Missile-intercepting Iron-Drone and other defense equipments from Israel. The commitment of the group of these three countries to eradicate terrorism has unnerved the leadership of Iran and Pakistan.

The Iran War has exposed the American President Trump as a loud mouthed buffoon and Iran has emerged as an epitome of culturally united proud Nation. Iran's top political and military brass was decimated by the Mossad, but the stream of leadership that emerged from the crisis kept flowing and didn't allow enemies to see a chink or a missing link. It is the subject matter of a classic case study in collective leadership as part of a military strategy. It's unique. Such feeling of continuity and oneness can inspire any society to resurrect and rise from the ashes; be the phoenix. Such a society also does not allow its wounds to heal early and doesn't forget its enemies easily. No wonder the camp followers of US in the region are getting restive.

America has landed itself, in a situation where it has lost billions of dollars in war expenses, lost the credibility of its big weapons and will have to shoulder the burden of compensation to Iran. American legislators are perturbed. Crossing party-lines they are jointly opposing Trump's demand for enhanced budgetary provision. They are unequivocally asking the president to withdraw from this war. The game that was being played with the help of puppet-negotiators is over. Growing opposition to uncalled for involvement in this war pressured Trump into finally backing out. Trump has announced the ceasefire. Nothing of the declared objectives of war has been achieved. Hormuz is open; not an ounce of uranium seized; its enrichment programme would continue. In the face of such stark realities, Trump would be facing mid-term in November. The tormentor of the world is now finding himself in turmoil. On the side margin of this large story board, is being scribbled a side story. Disenchanted with big weapons, many countries are approaching India with enquiries about mid-sized missiles and small weapons for supply. UAE has placed its order for BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile, Akash Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) System, Akashteer Air Defence System and some Artillery and Rocket Systems. The buyer list exceeds eighty. Indigenous thinking, indigenously adapted technology and dedicated minds can do miracles, if given a purpose; that should motivate the talent in India.

From Numbers to Nation Builders: Why the World's Biggest Population Can Become Its Greatest Strength

By Dr. Santhosh Mathew

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Every second, the world's population clock keeps moving. A child is born, a life ends, and humanity continues its endless journey. On July 11, World Population Day, the world pauses to reflect on one of its greatest challenges and opportunities: people. Population is often discussed as a burden, though history shows that people are the greatest creators of wealth, innovation and civilization. The world's most valuable resource is neither oil nor gold nor artificial intelligence. It is the human being. The global population has crossed eight billion, and nowhere is this demographic story more fascinating than the Indian subcontinent. South Asia remains the world's most densely populated region, home to nearly one-fourth of humanity despite occupying only a small fraction of the Earth's land area. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives together represent one of the most dynamic demographic landscapes in the world.

India has emerged as the world's most populous country. Within India, Uttar Pradesh stands as the country's largest populated state, with a population exceeding that of many independent nations. If Uttar Pradesh were a separate country, it would rank among the world's most populous nations. Other Indian states such as Maharashtra, Bihar and West Bengal also have populations larger than those of several continents' individual countries.

Population density tells another remarkable story. Bangladesh is among the world's most densely populated large countries, demonstrating how millions of people can live within a relatively small geographical area. Indian states like Bihar and West Bengal also rank among the most densely populated regions on Earth. Such density creates enormous pressure on land, water, housing, transportation and public services. The region is also home to some of the world's largest cities. Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, Karachi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad continue to expand at an astonishing pace. These megacities generate economic growth, attract talent and create opportunities for millions. At the same time, rapid urbanisation has produced another uncomfortable reality. Several cities in the Indian subcontinent frequently appear among the world's most polluted cities. Air pollution has become a silent public health emergency affecting children, the elderly and working populations alike.

Population growth brings opportunities only when resources are managed wisely. Mahatma Gandhi's timeless observation remains deeply relevant: "The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." The problem is often not the number of people alone but the unsustainable way resources are consumed. Forests disappear, groundwater declines, rivers become polluted and biodiversity suffers when development ignores environmental limits.

Demography has become one of the most important subjects in public policy. Governments study the population pyramid, a simple graphical representation showing the age and sex composition of a population. A broad-based pyramid indicates a young population with immense potential for economic growth. An ageing pyramid signals rising healthcare costs and labour shortages. India currently enjoys what economists describe as a demographic dividend, with a large working-age population capable of driving economic expansion for decades if provided with quality education, healthcare and employment.

Population statistics are impossible without reliable census operations. India possesses a long tradition of population enumeration. Ancient texts indicate that Kautilya, the celebrated author of the Arthashastra, and chief adviser to Chandragupta Maurya,

advocated systematic recording of households, occupations, agriculture and taxable resources for efficient administration. Many scholars regard these practices as among the earliest organised forms of state enumeration in India. Modern scientific census operations developed during British rule, with the first synchronous all-India census conducted in 1872. Since then, the census has become the backbone of planning, governance and democratic representation.

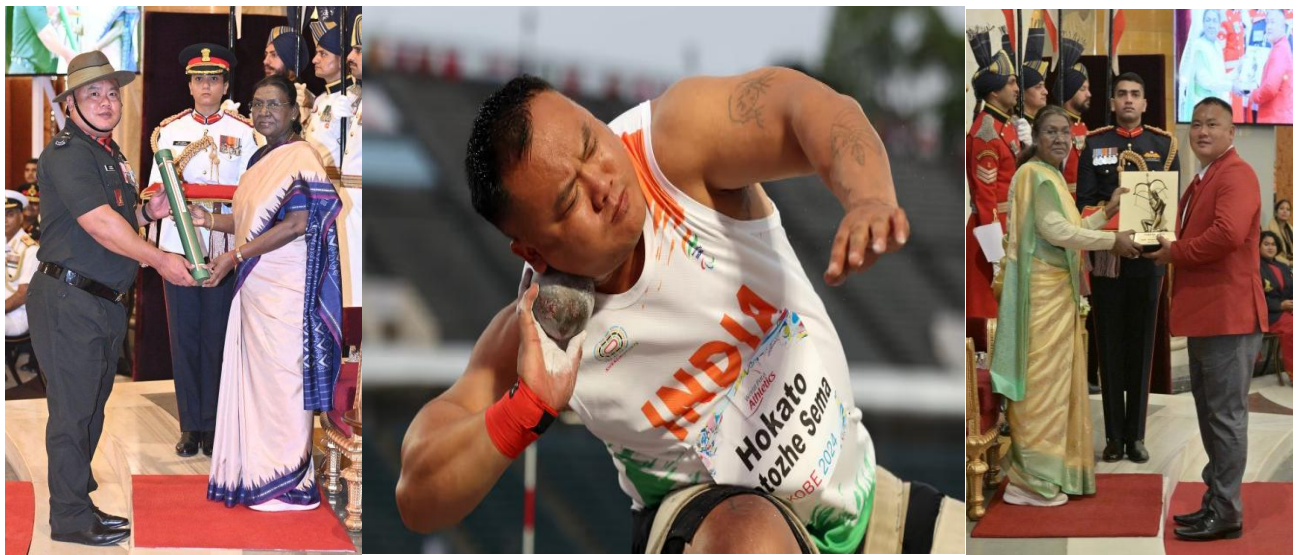
The word "census" itself has ancient roots. It originates from the Latin word *censere*, meaning "to assess" or "to estimate." Population statistics shape democracy itself. Electoral constituencies, welfare programmes, public distribution systems, healthcare infrastructure, school planning and infrastructure projects all depend upon accurate demographic data. Without reliable numbers, governments cannot distribute resources fairly or measure social progress effectively. Modern demography extends beyond counting people. It also measures the quality of life. Indicators such as the Gender Development Index, Gender Inequality Index and sex ratio reveal how equally societies treat women and men. Improving women's education, healthcare, employment opportunities and political participation produces healthier families, lower maternal mortality and stronger economies. Population policies succeed best when women enjoy greater freedom, education and economic independence.

The Indian subcontinent also represents one of history's greatest migration stories. South Asians constitute the world's largest diaspora, with millions living and working across North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia and Oceania. Their contributions enrich economies through entrepreneurship, professional expertise and remittances sent home to support families and national development. Migration, though, has a darker side. Human trafficking remains one of the world's fastest-growing organised crimes. Women, children and vulnerable migrant workers are often exploited through forced labour, sexual exploitation and illegal recruitment. Population pressures, poverty and lack of opportunities increase vulnerability, making stronger international cooperation essential to combat trafficking networks. World Population Day reminds us that people should never be viewed merely as numbers. Every statistic represents a child seeking education, a farmer growing food, a scientist making discoveries, a worker building infrastructure or a family dreaming of a better future. A nation's true strength lies not in how many people it has but in how well it nurtures them.

The ticking population clock cannot be stopped. The real challenge is ensuring that every tick marks not the depletion of resources but the creation of opportunity. If governments invest in education, healthcare, gender equality, sustainable development and productive employment, the world's largest populations can become the world's greatest engines of peace, prosperity and human progress. On this World Population Day, the message is simple: the future belongs not to the countries with the biggest numbers, but to those that transform their people into their greatest national asset.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of:
Subedar Hokato Hotozhe Sema, AVSM, VSM



The First Paralympian Honoured with the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM)

President Droupadi Murmu honoured decorated Indian Army para-athlete for distinguished service, resilience and exceptional sporting achievements. In a historic milestone for the Indian Armed Forces and Indian para-sports, Subedar Hokato Hotozhe Sema, AVSM, VSM, of the 9 Assam Regiment, was conferred the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM) by President Droupadi Murmu during a recent Defence Investiture Ceremony 2026 held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Subedar Sema became the first Paralympian in India's history to receive the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, one of the nation's highest peacetime military decorations for distinguished service. The award is also a rare recognition for a Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO), underscoring his extraordinary contribution to the Indian Army and Indian sports.

A native of Niuland district, Nagaland, Subedar Sema joined the Assam Regiment in 2000. Just two years into military service, he suffered life-changing injuries after losing a leg in a landmine blast during a counter-infiltration operation along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir in 2002. Refusing to let adversity define his future, he turned to para-sports and began training in shot put under coach Rakesh Rawat at the Army Para Olympic Node, Pune.

His perseverance and determination earned him international success. He won a bronze medal in the Men's Shot Put F57 event at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games, recording a personal best throw of 14.65 metres, and earlier secured a bronze medal at the 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou. For his outstanding sporting achievements, Subedar Sema was also honoured with the Arjuna Award in 2024. His inspiring journey from a severely injured soldier to a Paralympic medallist has become a symbol of courage, resilience and unwavering determination. The conferment of the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal recognises not only his distinguished military service but also his remarkable achievements in para-athletics, making him an inspiration to soldiers, athletes and the nation alike. Subedar Hokato Hotozhe Sema's historic achievement reinforces the Indian Army's enduring ethos of courage, resilience and excellence, proving that determination and perseverance can overcome even the greatest adversity.

A human being who is determined can reach to any heights and Subedar Sema is one such example.

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