

India reiterates call for a 'sovereign Palestine state'

New Delhi's 'long-standing and consistent' policy on Palestinian state remains unchanged, says MEA; Operation Ajay begins; Air India flight expected to bring 230 Indians from Israel today

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India reiterated its call for the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state on Thursday, with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) saying that there was an "obligation" to uphold humanitarian principles.

Operation Ajay, India's mission to rescue its citizens from conflict-hit Israel, began on Thursday evening, with an Air India flight reaching Israel to evacuate 230 Indians.

According to a PTI report, the flight is expected to return to the national capital around 5 a.m. on Friday.

MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said at his weekly press briefing that India is in close contact



Dark times: Smoke billowing from buildings in Gaza City during the Israeli air strikes on Thursday. AFP

with "relevant stakeholders" on the fast unfolding situation.

"India always advocated the resumption of direct negotiations towards establishing a sovereign, independent and viable state of Palestine, living within se-

cure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel," Mr. Bagchi said, emphasising that India's position on Palestine has been "long-standing and consistent" and that there has been no change in that policy.

Israel prepares for a possible ground assault

JERUSALEM

Israel, which is continuing its airstrikes on Gaza, said it was preparing for a possible ground invasion. Fleeing Palestinians have taken refuge in U.N.-run schools. The war, which was ignited by a bloody Hamas attack into Israel, has already claimed at least 2,400 lives on both sides. » **WORLD PAGE**

Earlier in the day, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held a round of meetings with Ministry officials to take stock of the situation.

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India calls for 'sovereign Palestine state'

Mr. Bagchi added that there are around 18,000 Indians in Israel right now, with about a dozen in the West Bank, and at least four in the Gaza Strip that is being bombed by Israel.

"This is a dynamic situation. It is evolving. I would request Indians in Israel, please do register with the Embassy of India if you have not registered till now. We will have more flights depending on the demand," Mr. Bagchi said, indicating that the Union government is keeping "all options" on the table and will press more aircraft into service for the operation if needed.

One Indian, a caregiver from Kerala, was injured in the attack by Hamas last Saturday, Mr. Bagchi said, adding that the person is currently undergoing treatment. "There has been no Indian casualty," he said.

'It's a terrorist attack'

Mr. Bagchi categorically stated that India considers last Saturday's strike against Israel a "terrorist attack". Prime Minister Narendra Modi had condemned terrorism and expressed solidarity with the Israeli people following the attack by Hamas on Saturday.

The official spokesperson said that there was a "universal obligation" to observe humanitarian law, but also emphasised the requirement to fight against international terrorism.

However, Mr. Bagchi did not give a clear answer to a journalist's question on whether India considers Hamas a terror organisation. Saying that such a determination was the responsibility of other departments, the MEA spokesperson said, "Our focus is to help our citizens."

His comments were the first set of detailed remarks from the MEA about the situation in West Asia, since Saturday's air, land and sea attack on Israel and its retaliatory air attack on the Gaza Strip.

Should the 50 % legal ceiling on reservation be reconsidered?

PARLEY

In October 2, the Bihar government released the data of its caste survey. The data showed that the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) together account for about 84% of the population. This has reopened the debate on whether the 50% legal ceiling on caste-based reservation should be removed. Kalaiyaran A. and Alok Prasanna discuss this question in a conversation moderated by Pon Vasanth B.A.. Excerpts:

Do you think the initial findings of the Bihar caste survey has necessitated the reconsidering of the ceiling of 50% on reservation set by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case in 1992?

Kalaiyaran A.: The breaching of the 50% ceiling looks like an inevitable historical process. Many political scientists and sociologists view the 50% ceiling as arbitrary because the judiciary did not have numbers to back that cap. For all practical purposes, some States have already breached this. Tamil Nadu provides 69% reservation through a 1994 law, which it has protected from judicial review by getting it placed under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. More so, the [10%] reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections [EWS] brought in by the Central government [in 2019], has, in a way, already breached the 50% ceiling.

Alok Prasanna: The 50% ceiling came out of nowhere; basically, in one judgment [M.R. Balaji, 1962], the court said maybe there has to be some limit. Then, in T. Devadasan, it extended the limit to government jobs as well and said that it did not want to take away equality of opportunity, guaranteed under the Constitution. Later, in the N.M. Thomas case (1976), the judiciary had a rethink. The Supreme Court found the 50% [ceiling] unreasoned and pushed back against it. States such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu thought that they could provide more reservation. However, the bigger push back came in the Mandal case [Indra Sawhney] where the judiciary essentially elevated the principle [50% limit] almost to a status of a fundamental right. Even in the EWS judgement, which has huge problems of its own, the Supreme Court said it may be okay with 10% for EWS, but that shouldn't mean that it is okay to go beyond 50% for caste-based reservation. The judiciary is, however, not able to defend this in a principled way. One big State, such as Bihar, has to take the lead and dare the Court with the information it has and a litigation strategy. Are we willing to ask the Court to reconsider its judgment in the Indra Sawhney case? This is not difficult or impossible per se. But the political moment has to be right.



Staff collect information from residents for the Bihar caste survey, in Patna. [PHOTO: ANI](#)

Bihar has only released the caste-wise count of its population, not the socio-economic data yet. There have been debates about the extent of backwardness of castes within the OBC classification. There have been demands from a few communities for inclusion into the OBC, SC or ST categories. Will the release of socio-economic data lead to demands for the reconfiguration of these categories?

KA: OBC is an administrative category and not a caste category. There are heterogeneous castes grouped under what we call OBCs. There is a risk of the landed and locally dominant communities taking more advantage. So, sub-categorisation of communities which do not have enough representation will become necessary. Bihar has the Extreme Backward Classes category and Tamil Nadu, the Most Backward Classes category. The process of sub-categorisation will be inevitable not just for political reasons, but for reasons of right to representation and for addressing backwardness.

AP: In the 1980s in Karnataka, the Venkataswamy Commission's report caused a huge controversy because the Vokkaligas and Lingayats were found to be much better off than most other backward castes. In the present context, in the Jaishri Laxmanrao Patil case [where reservation for the Marathas was struck down], the Supreme Court said Marathas are as well off as any other "upper" castes.

This leads us to a conceptual problem. Unlike SCs and STs, there is no clear way of defining the OBCs. The Constitution says OBCs are "socially and economically backward classes (SEBCs)". We are saying let's look at data. But the data are useful when you have some idea of what you're looking for. For instance, if the number of government jobs is a factor, a lot of "advanced OBCs" will not be eligible for reservation. Just by setting a barrier and saying that everybody who is below is a SEBC may have led us to this position, where certain castes have actually taken the big chunk [of the benefits of



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ALOK PRASANNA

reservation]. Therefore, sub-categorisation is necessary, but it can only happen when there is some serious conceptual jurisprudential rethinking of who belongs to a social and educationally backward class.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has raised the slogan of "jini abadi utna haq (representation according to the population)". Will a caste census lead to individual caste groups demanding separate reservations, depending on their numbers? What will be the implications of such demands?

AP: The BJP government in Karnataka, just before the [2023 Assembly] elections, tried to do a sub-categorisation within the SCs. There was such a strong political reaction to it that the "most well off" among the SC communities, who had started to support the BJP, attacked B.S. Yediyurappa's house. Sub-categorisation is a zero-sum game. The BJP thought it would get the less well off SCs on its side. However, it ended up losing the support of the "better off" SCs.

Also, if there is sub-categorisation, it will also open up the question of whether some castes should even be on the list. It could get subsumed in a political tug of war and may not necessarily lead to the most optimal solution in the context of ensuring representation.

KA: I'm not sure Mr. Gandhi used it in the sense of essentially translating it into reservation according to the population. The question he is raising is that there is some kind of group-based deprivation. The slogan does not mean dividing castes at a granular level, but grouping together sets of castes which are similarly positioned, to make a group-based representation or policy response to address the deprivation. Obviously, there is a risk that political parties or caste groups will take the slogan to mean specific caste-based mobilisation. We need to remember that caste is always divisive. Whether addressing group-based deprivation will lead to caste-based mobilisation is something we need to be mindful of. But it need not that way. We can simultaneously address caste-based deprivation while stopping caste-based mobilisation.

Some are concerned that a caste census will lead to further accentuation of caste identities and a fragmented polity.

AP: There is validity in that criticism, but it is also not something to say to not do something [caste-based survey]. The reason is, these identities are there. It's just that the administrative state is not officially recording them. But I feel that there is something missing in the discourse on reservation. There are two larger forces at play. One is the privatisation of the state. The state is outsourcing a lot of its work to private entities, which are not particularly going to be bound by obligations relating to caste or reservation. We are also seeing contractualisation of labour. Two, a lot of States have just stopped filling vacant posts. We are essentially fighting over jobs which don't exist any more. The problem, perhaps, with this discourse on reservation is that it is being rendered irrelevant in some ways. We are discussing percentages when the pie itself is disappearing. The discourse should be what is the size of pie that you're going to distribute.

KA: Castes are a reality. Counting does not necessarily lead to strengthening of that reality. People, political parties, or individuals with vested interests may exploit this. However, that should not stop us from accounting the existing realities. A caste census has to come along with a simultaneous ideological campaign or a kind of political mobilisation which counters or tames individual caste mobilisation.

With the demand for a caste census, will the Opposition parties be able to disturb what the BJP has achieved electorally, i.e., consolidating Hindu votes across caste lines?

KA: I see this moment as Mandal 2.0. The present situation, in the shorter run, would push the BJP into a defensive mode, which is already happening. In the longer run, the BJP may adjust to this new reality. Caste mobilisation happening without any social or broad-based anti-caste mobilisation can lead to upgrading of status in the hierarchy of the Sanskritisation process, which may help the BJP. A great example is U.P., where Mandal 1.0 pushed back the BJP. But the caste mobilisation that followed did not address the anti-caste sentiment or other broad-based problems. As a result, BJP mobilised the left-out communities.

Caste by design is divisive. You need some kind of a glue to put castes together. The question is whether that glue is Hindutva that preserves caste or the Bahujan identity or the Dravidian or some kind of class-based mobilisation which transcends caste identities and bring these communities together to provide a meaningful representation.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.bhaskar.com

Tamil author Sivasankari conferred Saraswati Samman

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Tamil writer Sivasankari was on Thursday presented with the 'Saraswati Samman' 2022 for her book of memoirs *Surya Vamsam*.

The award, instituted by the K.K. Birla Foundation, was presented to her by former Union Minister M. Veerappa Moily. It carries a citation, a plaque, and prize money of ₹15 lakh.

Surya Vamsam is a book of memoirs in two volumes. These two volumes together present not only the evolution of an innocent child into an acclaimed author but also unfold the transformation society has undergone in these seven decades, the award citation said.

Ms. Sivasankari, born in 1942, has a literary career spanning over five decades. She has authored 36



Former Union Minister Veerappa Moily presenting the award to author Sivasankari in New Delhi on Thursday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

novels, 48 novelettes, 150 short stories, five travelogues, seven collection of essays and three biographies. Her greatest contribution to Indian literature is her four-volume *Knit India Through Literature*, a compendium of Indian literature.

"I have been a writer for 56 years. Many have asked me what is good literature. Good literature is something that transcends the barriers of time and creates an

impact on the reader and inspires them to think constructively. It [literature] is like a mirror. We correct the flaws which it shows us," Ms. Sivasankari said accepting the award.

On the book *Surya Vamsam*, she said: "The book is my autobiography. It starts at one-and-a-half years and ends at 78 years. I have been very honest. I have not lied anywhere nor have I exaggerated any character or incident."

India ranks 111 out of 125 countries in Global Hunger Index

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

India ranks 111 out of a total of 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023, with its progress against hunger nearly halted since 2015, reflecting a global trend. The Union government, though, contested India's performance for the third year in a row, citing flawed methodology.

Afghanistan, Haiti and 12 sub-Saharan countries performed worse than India on the GHI.

India's ranking is based on a Global Hunger Index score of 28.7 on a 100-point scale where 0 is the best score (no hunger) and 100 is the worst. This categorises India's severity of hunger as "serious". The GHI score is based on a formula which combines four indicators that together capture the multi-dimensional nature of hunger, including under-nourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and child mortality.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development yet again questioned the GHI and called it a "flawed measure of hunger that doesn't reflect India's true position".



India's ranking is based on a Global Hunger Index score of 28.7 on a 100-point scale.

It said that data recorded on its Poshan Tracker portal showed child wasting prevalence of 7.2% among a total of 7.24 crore under-five-year-olds whose data was captured, whereas the GHI used a value of 18.7% for child wasting. The latter, however, comes from the National Family Health Survey 5, which is reported in the global repository, set up to ensure harmonised child nutrition estimates.

"The GHI uses the same data sources for all countries to calculate the respective country scores. This ensures that all the rates used have been produced using comparable methodologies," Miriam Wiemers, senior policy advisor at the GHI, said in an email response.

NGT pulls up States, Centre for failing to clean up rivers

It issues notices to Chief Secretaries of all States and Secretary of Jal Shakti Ministry for not complying with its 2021 order to clean polluted stretches; next hearing on December 13

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered issuing notices to Chief Secretaries of all States and the Secretary of the Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS), pointing out that its 2021 order on cleaning polluted river stretches has not been implemented till now.

In the 2021 order, the green court directed that all States and Union Territories may address gaps in the generation and treatment of sewage or effluents by ensuring the setting up of the requisite number of functional effluent treatment plants (ETPs), common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) and sewage treatment plants (STPs), as directed by the Supreme Court.

Steps for rejuvenation

The order had also said that the MoJS may devise an appropriate mechanism for more effective monitoring of steps for control of pollution and rejuvenation of all polluted river stretches in the country.

"Chief Secretaries of all States/UTs and PCBs (Pollution Control Boards)/PCCs (Pollution Control



Choking lifeline: A woman praying on the banks of the polluted Yamuna in New Delhi. AFP

Committees) must work in mission mode for strict compliance of timelines," the order had mentioned among others.

In an order dated October 9, 2023, the NGT said: "The material pointed out by the applicants indicate that the order of the tribunal has not been implemented by all the States in true letter and spirit till now. Hence, we issue notice to Chief Secretaries of all the States and Secretary, MoJS, with the direction to submit the report in respect of compliance of above order of the tribunal."

The green court was hearing an execution application by petitioners seek-

ing implementation of the earlier order of the NGT.

The applicants pointed out that different States including Assam, Bihar and Tripura are not treating all the sewage generated. The applicants said that Assam does not have the facility to treat 437.23 MLD (million litres per day) of sewage generated. "He (applicants) has also referred to the minutes related to Tripura and has submitted that out of total sewage generation of 82.4 MLD, sewage treatment capacity exists only for 8.72 MLD. Thus, there's a huge gap of 73.68 MLD in sewage treatment," the order said.

The matter is now listed for December 13.

Panel told to submit report on Ramakkal Lake pollution

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Taking *suo motu* cognisance of a report about water pollution in Ramakkal Lake in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has formed a joint committee to look into the matter.

"The view expressed in the news item is that Ramakkal Lake is the most prosperous lake in the district but the water is extremely polluted with sewage water draining into the lake," an NGT order dated October 9 read.

The green tribunal said the Central Pollution Control Board had informed it that the filtration unit installed at the lake was not working, and this had led to an increase in pollution.

The joint committee has been directed to visit the site, ascertain the status of pollution, and submit an action taken report before the next date of hearing.

'Project Nilgiri Tahr' launched by T.N. to protect State animal

Nilgiri Tahr, an endangered species endemic to the Western Ghats, is known for 'gravity-defying skills'. There are references to it in Sangam Tamil literature. The project has an outlay of ₹25 crore

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Thursday launched 'Project Nilgiri Tahr' to promote the conservation of Tamil Nadu's State animal. He also distributed books to school students to create awareness about the Nilgiri Tahr.

The project, with an outlay of ₹25 crore, aims to facilitate a better understanding of the Nilgiri Tahr population, their distribution and ecology. Reintroducing the animals to their historic habitats, addressing proximate threats to them, increasing public awareness on the species, and developing eco-tourism at select sites are among the other aims.

"Bi-annual synchronised surveys across various divisions, tranquillisation, collaring and monitoring of Tahr individuals, re-introduction and monitoring of the Nilgiri Tahr, diagnosis and treat-



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin launching 'Project Nilgiri Tahr' at the Secretariat in Chennai on Thursday.

ment for affected individuals, field gear and training support to staff and Shola grassland restoration in Upper Bhavani are among the activities planned in the project which has a budget outlay of ₹25 crore," an official press release said.

A project office has been set up by the Forest Department in Coimbatore. A full-time Project Director, and a Senior Scientist assisted by four Senior Research Fellows have also

been appointed.

The Nilgiri Tahr is an endangered species endemic to the Western Ghats, known for its "gravity-defying skills" in climbing steep cliffs. There are multiple references to the Nilgiri Tahr in Sangam Tamil literature. Two epics – *Silappathikaram* and *Sivakasin-damani* – have descriptions of the Nilgiri Tahr and its habitat.

"Moreover, in books such as *Natrinal*, *Aingurunooru*, *Paripadal*, *Pathi-*

truppathu and *Patinapalai* from *Pathinen Melkanakku Noolgal*, the Nilgiri Tahr is mentioned," the press release said. Minister for Forests M. Mathiventhan, Chief Secretary Shiv Das Meena, Secretary of Environment, Climate Change and Forests Department Supriya Sahu, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden Srinivas R. Reddy and senior officials were present during the event at the Secretariat.