

How to decongest the City Beautiful and why

A FEW weeks ago, the unthinkable happened. Flying back to Chandigarh from the smog-laden dystopia of Delhi, I looked forward to getting back to the blue skies of my 'Garden City' hometown. But as the plane descended for landing, the erstwhile panorama of green fields and the azure-blue Shivalik mountain range was cloaked in a gloomy shawl of grey.

Media reports raised serious concerns about the unprecedented rise in the AQI levels of the city. The figures were matching those of Delhi and were even worse at times. The usual suspects were being blamed: 'western disturbances', farm fires, poor wind speed, dust, construction. But the elephant in the room was the increase in vehicular emissions.

Chandigarh not only has the distinction of the highest per capita income but also the highest number of cars per person car in the country. From being a pedestrians paradise, its roads are crammed with automobiles today. In 2023, Chandigarh registered a record-breaking 53,220 vehicles, much above the average 45,697 vehicles registered per year over the last decade. The 'oxygen capital of India' has now among the highest AQI figures in the country.

Another development — about Haryana wanting to build its own Assembly complex in Chandigarh to accommodate its growing spatial needs — also reflects the congestion and paucity of space occurring in the city, and specially in the Capitol Complex, which is listed as a UNESCO property. The other edifices of the Capitol — the Secretariat and high court — face similar constraints. Perhaps, all three need to shift some of their functions to other locations. The constant struggle to balance the two forces — the ever-expanding needs of a 'living heritage city' and saving the work of genius architect and planner Le Corbusier — needs a nuanced approach. With unplanned expansions will come threats to its authenticity that could jeopardise its UNESCO tag. Designed for a population of half a million, today is home to nearly 1.3 million. The Chandigarh Master Plan 2031 has estimated that the projected population of Chandigarh could touch between 16 and 20 lakh by 2030 and that of the entire Tricity region could shoot up to 45 lakh. And only seven decades ago, when the new capital project of Chandigarh was launched by the Government of Punjab, there were some apprehensions that India's first planned city would never be inhabited; it would be like the historic follies of Daulatabad and Fatehpur Sikri.

The success story of Chandigarh has now, quite ironically, become its problem. 'Brand Chandigarh' as an urban product has not been bettered or even matched by the new satellite towns or other capital cities in the post-Independence India. The trifurcation of Chandigarh in 1966 made it not only the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana but also a centrally administered city. With three governments functioning out of a 114-sq km Union Territory (out of which only 70-sq km constitute the planned urban grid), it leaves it open for encroachments and violations. As such, the city needs to decompress and decentralise some facilities to the adjoining satellite towns to its advantage. A larger Chandigarh Urban Complex (CUC), on the lines of the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi needs to be considered. Like the NCR Planning Board, there ought to be a well-empowered CUC to undertake common interlinked infrastructure projects. All congestion points in Chandigarh need to be decongested. Instead of permitting mega shopping malls in its industrial area, which are leading to traffic jams, the sub city centre of Sector 34 should be made more attractive for investment as it has more space. Similarly, the 'urban villages' in Chandigarh are no more traditional villages engaged in agricultural activities but hubs for low rental accommodation or low tariff hotels. With very little control over their expansion and an absence of bye-laws, they are growing in a chaotic manner.

The idea of Viksit Bharat is facing huge challenges

Structural reforms, especially at the state and local levels of governance, can make India's growth rate sustainable.

INDIA is dreaming of becoming a developed country by 2047. Recently, the CEO of NITI Aayog BVR Subrahmanyam recently predicted that India was on track to achieving the targeted \$30-trillion economy by 2047. Arvind Subramanian, former chief economic adviser, has projected that even a \$50-trillion economy is well within India's reach.

The claims are supplemented by various global governance institutions and corporate think tank organisations that have thrown up a variety of arguments and presumptions. It seems that India is poised to become a developed country by the stipulated date. This projection is reinforced by the media, warding off critics. However, some business leaders and policymakers have started questioning the current model of governance and fixing long-term targets without facing the real challenges. Infosys founder Narayana Murthy recently said that India's governance system has failed to be innovative. Problems are recurring with no viable and sustainable solutions in sight. Murthy used Delhi's pollution to vindicate his point. He urged the government to change its system of management and take the challenges of the Indian economy head on. The Indian rupee, in comparison to the US dollar, has depreciated and the growth rate in the second quarter of 2024-25 nose-dived. Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran has warned businessmen against being complacent. He has cautioned them to not take advantage of the depreciation of the rupee in increasing their exports. Rather, they should concentrate on increasing productivity and innovations to be competitive in the international markets. He also proposed some structural reforms, especially at the state and local levels of governance, to make India's growth rate sustainable. Pertinently, the Commerce and Industry has proposed to dismantle the facility of ease-of-doing business's single-window system because captains of the Indian industry have not shown much interest in this policy instrument. This clearly brings out the fact that the idea of a developed India (Viksit Bharat) is facing gigantic challenges. There is need to clear the long bumpy road ahead. The first and foremost challenge lies in the evolution of the economic structure and its

disconnect among the three sectors of economy. One must keep in view the development experience of the developed countries, including East Asian countries, which have had a dynamic and leading industrial sector at the centre of transformation of their economies. The industry, as an engine of growth and transformation of these economies, had provided new products to the world, raising productivity and was the main source of

instead, has remained predominant, standalone, adding low value and not much employment opportunities. Instead of providing new products to the world, it has remained a subservient service office of the western developed countries.

These structural weaknesses have resulted in a long-term chronic deficit in the balance of trade and a stressed foreign exchange rate. This deficit has forced for the compensation to be derived from the capital account. This has further burdened the economy with a rising debt-GDP ratio. These challenges are formidable and can act as a stumbling block in the realisation of India's goal of becoming developed. The recently published World Development Report 2024 has examined the causes of why countries fall in low- or middle-income traps. The report has also attempted to provide some way forward. The most important factor that allowed the smooth transition of a country to become developed has been the discipline on 'capital'. The second most important factor has been investment in research and development and become a leader in innovation.

On both counts, India has remained not only deficit but also lagging. A large number of billionaires has emerged in India in a short span of time, but their contribution in introducing new products in the world is almost nil. Low investment in innovation is a violation of the expected ethics/code of conduct of capital for a developed country.

Studies on domestic innovations since the July 1991 economic reforms show a decline in domestic share of innovations. This supports the fact that the Indian polity and policymakers have failed to make the Indian capitalists to invest in innovations to become a leader in high productivity and competitive globally. If the dynamics are changed, they can generate higher job opportunities and more income in the hands of the workforce. This will ensure upward mobility of the workers and generate adequate demand for goods and services. This multiplier impact is needed for the business as an incentive to be innovative for a sustained economic activity.



employment. It is the services sector that has remained predominant for generating income. But the largest proportion of the workforce continues to derive livelihood from the agriculture sector. The agriculture sector, during the last three decades of economic reforms, has borne the burden of the promised transformation of the Indian economy. The workforce currently employed in this sector is as high as 45 per cent. This work engagement comprises low productivity and subsistence wage income, making the agriculture sector as one in distress. Another feature of the developed countries' experience has been the strong intersectoral linkages during the process of structural transformation, including the agriculture, industry and services sectors. Studies examining the sectoral linkages of the developed economies and the Indian economy show that weak intersectoral linkages have prevented the Indian industry from realising the economies of scale. The services sector of India,

Groundwater crisis

PUNJAB and Haryana are on the brink of a groundwater crisis that could jeopardise not only the region's agricultural backbone but also the nation's food security. Recent data from the Central Ground Water Board paints a grim picture: Punjab's Stage...

PUNJAB and Haryana are on the brink of a groundwater crisis that could jeopardise not only the region's agricultural backbone but also the nation's food security. Recent data from the Central Ground Water Board paints a grim picture: Punjab's Stage of Groundwater Extraction (SoE) stands at a staggering 163.76%, while Haryana follows closely with 135.74%. These figures indicate that groundwater extraction in these states far exceeds natural recharge, pushing aquifers to critical depletion levels.

The crisis is primarily driven by the cultivation of paddy, a water-guzzling crop that dominates Punjab's agricultural landscape due to assured procurement and subsidies. Despite efforts to promote alternatives like maize or pulses, farmers remain hesitant, citing inadequate minimum support prices (MSP) and procurement guarantees. As groundwater levels plummet — they are expected to drop below 300 metres by 2039 in Punjab — the quality of water deteriorates,



rendering it unfit for both irrigation and drinking. In addition to agricultural practices, rapid urbanisation and industrial growth have exacerbated the crisis. Cities like

Gurugram and Faridabad in Haryana have been drawing more than double their extractable groundwater, highlighting the unsustainable pressure on this vital resource. The state governments, along with the Centre, must urgently implement measures such as expanding canal-based irrigation, incentivising crop diversification and ensuring robust water pricing mechanisms to discourage over-extraction.

The Jal Shakti Abhiyan and Atal Bhujal Yojana have laid the groundwork for rainwater harvesting and aquifer management. But, unfortunately, their impact remains limited. It raises questions over the ability of the two states to reverse the alarming decline. Without immediate and concerted action, the groundwater crisis could spiral into a national emergency, threatening livelihoods and food security. It is time for policymakers to act decisively to protect this irreplaceable resource even as the affected states face impending barrenness.

Playing fast & loose with secularism

A communal frenzy that feeds off each other is alive and well in parts of India and Bangladesh

FOREIGN Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Bangladesh for foreign office consultations early next week is not one second late in coming. Between Dhaka's arrest of the ISKCON-related Hindu monk, Chinmoy Krishna Das, on trumped-up sedition charges and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's absurd remarks on the "same DNA" that connects the Mughal king Babur's destruction of temples in Ayodhya, Sambhal and today's Bangladesh, it's fair to say that a communal feeding frenzy that feeds off each other is alive and well in parts of both India and Bangladesh.

Adityanath's remarks are hardly unique. The RSS recently called on the "government of Bharat" to prevent atrocities on Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh, while BJP leader in West Bengal Suwendu Adhikari has threatened a trade embargo if Muhammad Yunus' government doesn't stop attacking Hindus. Nor is Adityanath the first big BJP leader to speak his mind. Back in 2018, then BJP president and current Home Minister Amit Shah described Bangladeshi migrants into India as "termites" — he used the Hindi word "deemak" — and promised that each of them would be struck off the electoral rolls. It is another matter that 43 per cent of "foreigners" in Assam between 1971 and 2014 (20,613/47,928 people), the Assam Government conceded this August, are Hindus.

Shah's undiplomatic remarks were probably made with the full force of foresight and are testimony to the unhealthy mixing of Hindutva politics with a strategic insensitivity, especially since India's all-important neighbourhood is in question. At the time, the Ministry of External Affairs held its peace, but it took a lot of effort to assuage then Bangladeshi Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina that she shouldn't take the politician's remarks personally.

At the time, PM Modi had been fully involved in revamping India's relations with its eastern neighbour — Shah's comments constituted a great setback. Modi well understood that Bangladesh is certainly far too important a country to take for granted at any time. That's why Misri's visit to Dhaka is so important. Ever since Hasina fled to Delhi in early August, bilateral ties have plummeted. The two countries have been at loggerheads over most things, including why the so-called revolution was allowed to reach a crescendo of violence, which ended in Hasina's dramatic flight to safety. Dhaka believes that India deliberately refuses to understand Hasina's starring role in the degradation of Bangladesh, while Delhi for the life of itself cannot comprehend why Bangladesh wants to willfully erase today the memory of icons like Mujibur Rahman and dump it in the ignominious dustbin of history.

The problem, of course, is far more confounded. When Adityanath and Shah are seen as spokespersons of the ruling party, in this case by Bangladesh, and when Delhi refuses to either publicly censure them or privately call upon them to refrain from making the statements they do, the fallout escalates and snowballs and often acquires a life of its own.

Worse, when Indian politicians accuse Bangladeshi politicians of doing what they often do at home — for example, Adityanath's "bulldozer justice" has often meant that houses owned by Muslims have been disproportionately demolished, as compared to houses owned by Hindus — or when Indian politicians openly call for the so-called "return" of disputed sites of worship, for eg in Varanasi and

Mathura, even if it violates the Places of Worship Act, 1991, they sanction the communal politics in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh.

The difference between the Indian secular state and the rest of the neighbourhood has been plain to see for decades — in fact, the neighbourhood has often held up India's democratic sensibility as a role model. It is nobody's case that Indians of all political colours never wreaked vengeance on their minorities, or that



justice was denied to these minorities, often for long periods of time — both the Congress and the BJP have been guilty of perpetrating riots. The difference is that India's judiciary more often than not spoke truth to power. Democracy was more than just a word. Even when compromises were finely wrought, as in the Ram Jannabhoomi dispute which ended with a mediated Supreme Court verdict in 2019 — in which the Muslim side gave up the claim to the sanctum

sanctorum real estate on which the Ram temple had once been destroyed in 1529 and the Babri Masjid built by a lieutenant of Babur — it was hoped that the Hindu side wouldn't thump its chest and flaunt its victory. That hasn't quite happened, of course. Instead of being satisfied with wresting the Ram temple back, aggressive Hindu litigants have targeted more and more sites, from the Gyanvapi mosque to the Krishna Jannabhoomi to the Sambhal mosque. It's as if they are thirsting to wreak vengeance on past injustice, no matter they have no first-person experience of the injustice in question. Imagine how the playbook plays out in Bangladesh, already seething with anger over the despotic Hasina fleeing to India. The Bangladeshi media rejects the charge that the Yunus government is not targeting minorities at home, but it is clear that the ISKCON monk is a lightning rod. He has become a fall guy. It will be easy to sacrifice him.

Imagine, too, what the BJP's politics of Hindutva does to the BJP's own foreign policy — it undermines India, of course, but it also undermines Modi, who in his third term certainly wants to leave a mark, even a legacy. The irony is that Modi has creditably held his own elsewhere. He has held India steady against Joe Biden's sanctions against Russia, he is preparing to deal with Trump, he has agreed to swallow his pride vis-à-vis China and he has reached out even to the Taliban in an effort to stabilise the neighbourhood. And then there is Bangladesh — a country that India helped midwife back in 1971 and assisted with giving it an identity of its own. It would be truly tragic if India were to lose Bangladesh today because some short-sighted Indians are intent on playing fast and loose with one of the greatest ideas of our times — an idea called secularism.



Disha Patani

Turns Up The Heat In An Extra-Plunging Black Pantsuit



Disha Patani, known for her bold and edgy style, once again set the internet ablaze with her latest Instagram post. The actress shared a series of sizzling photos dressed in a jaw-dropping black pantsuit, oozing hotness and glamour. The all-black ensemble featured a tailored blazer with a plunging neckline that perfectly highlighted her toned physique. The structured fit and sharp lapels added a power-packed vibe, while subtle embroidery on one side lent a touch of understated glamour. Paired with sleek, straight-cut trousers, Disha's outfit was the epitome of modern elegance.

Keeping her accessories minimal, Disha opted for delicate silver rings and tiny hoop earrings, allowing her statement outfit to do all the talking. Her hair was styled into a chic updo with loose strands framing her face, and her makeup was kept fresh and dewy, accentuated with a nude lip and winged eyeliner. Striking a series of sensuous poses against a backdrop of cityscape views, the actress gave major "lady boss" energy.

Fans flooded the comment section with compliments, calling her "absolute perfection" and "too hot to handle." Among the many reactions, Disha's best friend, actress Mouni Roy, left a comment saying, "Stunned," followed by fire emojis, while her sister Khushboo Patani aptly wrote, "Lady boss." Clearly, Disha's look was a hit not just with fans but also within her close circle. On the professional front, Disha was last seen in *Kanguva*, where she shared the screen with Suriya and Bobby Deol. In the action-packed film directed by Siva, Disha played a fierce bounty hunter who partners with Suriya's dual characters, a warrior and a modern-day hunter. Whether it's slaying in a photoshoot or delivering power-packed performances on screen, Disha Patani continues to be an unstoppable force in Bollywood.

Samantha Ruth Prabhu Grooves To 'It's A New Day, It's A New Life': 'The Most Beautiful...'



Samantha Ruth Prabhu's ex-husband, Naga Chaitanya, recently got remarried to Sobhita Dhulipala in a grand yet traditional ceremony. Naga Chaitanya and Sobhita Dhulipala tied the knot on December 4 at the Annapurna Studios in Hyderabad. Amid this, Samantha has been keeping herself busy with events and work commitments. The actress recently attended an event where she danced to Michael Buble's *I'm Feeling Good*. The actress looked gorgeous in a black gown as she danced with her friend and fashion designer, Kresha Bajaj. She shared a video from the event and wrote, "The most beautiful evening it was."

Amid Naga Chaitanya's second wedding, Samantha also received support from her family as her sister-in-law showered love on the actress. Samantha Ruth Prabhu's sister-in-law, Nicole Joseph, shared a post on her Instagram Story that read, "Good sisters-in-law exist, and I love mine." Nicole tagged Samantha in her story and the actress re-shared it with the caption, "Love you." Samantha Ruth Prabhu and Naga Chaitanya got married in 2017 and called it quits after nearly four years. Samantha Ruth Prabhu and Naga Chaitanya announced their divorce in October 2021, a few days before their wedding anniversary. Recently, the actress got candid about the aftermath that a woman has to face after a divorce. "Unfortunately, we live in a society which is so patriarchal in nature, that anytime something goes wrong, a woman gets subjected to... I'm not saying men don't, men do, but a woman gets subjected to a lot more judgment and a lot more shaming, not just online, even in real life," she told *Galatta India*. "Many things were said about me that were absolutely untrue. But what held me back, I remember having this conversation with myself when things were really, really crappy and they were really, really... absolute lies were being spread. And there were many times when I wanted to come out and say, this is not true, let me tell you the truth," she admitted.

Munawar Faruqi Reveals His Son Had A Rare Disease 'Kawasaki': 'That Situation Scares Me'



Munawar Faruqi has revealed that his son was only one and a half years old when he was diagnosed with a rare disease called 'Kawasaki'. The comedian appeared on a podcast when he told the host Janice Sequeira that the disease could inflame blood vessels and damage his son's heart. Munawar also revealed how he struggled financially during that time. He shared that during the diagnosis his son required injections costing Rs 25,000 each. However, he had hardly Rs 700 in his pocket. "That situation scares me. My son was one and a half years old back then. He fell ill, and for 2-3 days, his condition didn't improve. After taking him to the hospital, we discovered he had Kawasaki disease. Three injections were required, each costing Rs 25,000. I needed Rs



75,000 but had only Rs 700-800 in my wallet," Munawar told *Etimes*. "I smiled casually at the doctor, assuring him I'd arrange the money. But as I stepped out, I froze for 30-40 minutes, unable to think. It was the heaviest moment of my life," the comedian added.

Munawar shared that he had to ask people for money because there was no other option. "I travelled to Mumbai Central, collected the money, and returned within three hours. While I was relieved, I couldn't smile because it wasn't my money," he said and then added, "After that day, I made sure I'd never be insufficient financially again." Munawar Faruqi married Mehzabeen Coatwala in May this year. Before Mehzabeen, the comedian was married to Jasmine, with whom he also has a six-year-old son named Mikael. Munawar first opened up about his son in Kangana Ranaut's *Lock Upp*. Now, he often shares pictures with his son on social media.

Deepika Padukone

Dances To Lover At Diljit Dosanjh's Concert In 1st Appearance Post-Baby

Deepika Padukone made her first public appearance after welcoming her daughter, Dua, in September 2024. The actor was spotted attending singer Diljit Dosanjh's concert in Bangalore, where she grooved to his tunes in a relaxed and cheerful mood. Dressed in a white sweatshirt and blue jeans, Deepika kept it casual yet chic, radiating a post-delivery glow. Videos from the event show her seated and enjoying the electrifying performance while fans



around her cheered for both the singer and the Bollywood superstar.

Deepika and Ranveer Singh became proud parents to their daughter on September 8, 2024. The couple had shared the joyous news with a heartwarming social media post that read, "Welcome baby girl. 8-9-2024. Deepika & Ranveer (sic)." Since then, Deepika has

largely stayed away from public events, focusing on her new role as a mother. During her pregnancy, Deepika continued working and even promoted *Kalki 2898 AD*, her ambitious sci-fi project. However, after embracing motherhood, she took a break from the limelight.

Meanwhile, her husband, Ranveer Singh, has been actively engaging with fans and the media. Ranveer recently opened up about the life-changing experience of fatherhood.

At an event, he shared his overwhelming joy, saying, "That infinite happiness that I'm experiencing right now." He added a humorous touch, stating, "I've been on daddy duty for a long time now. So, I am ready to let loose with you all." The actor also spoke about his deep bond with Deepika, describing their companionship as "magic." On the work front, both stars continue to shine. Deepika and Ranveer recently featured in Rohit Shetty's *Singham Again*, a blockbuster hit that resonated well with audiences. Ranveer is now gearing up for Farhan Akhtar's *Don 3*, one of the

most anticipated projects of the year. Deepika's concert appearance has delighted fans, marking a celebratory moment for her followers eager to see her back in the spotlight.

