"When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it."

—Henry Ford

Edit

Bridging the gaps

For decades, one of the biggest criticisms of India's education system has been its disconnect from the real world. Students graduate with degrees, yet many struggle to find jobs that match their skills. Employers, on the other hand, often complain that graduates lack practical knowledge and industry exposure. It is this gap that Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently highlighted while calling for faster efforts to link India's education sector with the real-world economy. The message is both timely and necessary. In a country where millions of young people enter the workforce every year, education cannot remain confined to textbooks and examinations. It must prepare students for the realities of a rapidly changing economy. The Modi government's emphasis on aligning education with employment and enterprise is therefore a step in the right direction. Education and skill development are not just sectors of governance. They are instruments through which the aspirations of millions of Indians can be fulfilled. A strong education system creates opportunities, builds confidence and ultimately strengthens the nation's economic foundation. When students are equipped with relevant skills, they do not merely seek jobs, but also create enterprises and generate employment for others. In recent years, efforts have been made to bridge this gap between classrooms and careers. The National Education Policy (NEP) provides an important framework in this direction. It recognises that the future of learning must stay aligned with market demands and emerging technologies. Fields such as artificial intelligence, automation and the digital economy are no longer distant possibilities. They are already shaping industries and transforming the way societies function. For India to remain competitive in this global environment, its education system must keep pace with these changes. The faster institutions adapt, the better prepared the country's youth will be to participate in and lead the next wave of economic transformation. India is steadily moving towards an innovation-driven economy. This shift requires a new approach to learning. Universities and colleges must evolve from being mere centres of instruction into hubs of research, innovation and industry collaboration. Students should not encounter the real world only after graduation. Their exposure to industry practices, entrepreneurship and research must begin during their academic years. This is where stronger partnerships between academia and industry become essential. Internships, collaborative research projects, startup incubation centres and skill-based programmes can give students practical experience while still in college. Such initiatives allow young minds to understand the demands of the job market and develop the confidence to navigate it. Equally important is the creation of a robust research ecosystem. Young researchers must be encouraged to experiment, explore new ideas and challenge conventional thinking. Innovation rarely emerges from rigid structures. It flourishes in environments where curiosity is supported and failure is seen as part of learning. India today stands at a unique moment in its development journey. With a large and energetic youth population, the country possesses an immense reservoir of talent. When this youth power is nurtured through relevant education, practical skills and opportunities for innovation, it transforms into true national strength. The direction is clear. The policies are being shaped. What remains is the pace of implementation. If India can successfully bridge the gap between education and the real economy, the possibilities are limitless. In many ways, the world is already opening its doors to India's talent. All that is needed now is to accelerate the journey.

IMPEACHMENT MOTION

CEC IN MPs CROSSHAIRS

POONAM I KAUSHISH

Phew! Its electioneering season again as Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala go to polls next month with Parties rolling out a perfect electoral cake to the strains of 'Vote For Me' to cream the electorate. Amidst this poll nautanki 193 MPs moved an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, no matter Lok Sabha rejected a no-confidence motion against Speaker Birla for his failure to ensure the House's impartial functioning last week.

They cite "partisan and discriminatory conduct," "vote theft," "deliberate obstruction of investigation of electoral fraud" and "mass disenfranchisement of Dalits, underprivileged, and Muslim voters" through Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

Clearly, Opposition has taken an extreme step to draw attention to the "less-than-fair" conduct of the Election Commission led by Kumar. Yet it lacks numerical strength in Parliament and it is a foregone conclusion the impeachment motion will fail and hence will have little moral or psychological impact on the CEC. The motion's defeat would be seen as his victory and an implicit exoneration of his alleged wrongdoing.

However, some see merit in Opposition's grievances. The EC has acted in ways that invite accusations of political bias. It has treated Opposition with disrespect and its decisions have often handed advantage to BJP-led NDA. Be it SIR's conduct in Bihar over its pace and timing, setting off a scramble for hard-to-get documents and casting burden of proof on vulnerable voters in an exercise that morphed into a test of citizenship.

Thankfully, Supreme Court stepped in, to nudge EC towards greater transparency. Amid ongoing SIR in West Bengal, its intervention tamped down escalating confrontation between Mamata's TMC Government and EC. The Chief Minister called off her sit-in after the Court ordered formation of tribunals to hear appeals against exclusion from voter lists.

Others argue it is misguided to believe Opposition should refrain from raising the issue because it lacks numbers to succeed as it is aware it does not command numbers required. But does that mean it should refrain from exercising its democratic right to expose what it considers institutional wrongdoing?

Is it committing political suicide? No, as the motion is intended to register a formal protest against what Opposition describes as CEC's bias and partisan conduct. What he is doing in the name of ensuring fair, transparent, and credible implementation of SIR exercise reflects a broader political strategy aimed at weakening the Opposition. Besides, what alternative mechanism is available?

Since SIR process began, Opposition has repeatedly pointed to what it considers serious flaws in its implementation. Yet despite judicial scrutiny and repeated protests, the Commission has continued with the exercise.

Adding, Apex court raised questions about EC's transparency and integrity of its actions and ordered a judicial review of voter lists in West Bengal, appointing serving and retired High Court judges to examine disputed applications. It observed EC had issued "interpretative circulars" regarding voter rolls, suggesting either misinterpretation of law or a deliberate attempt to obscure procedural failures. Hence, its impeachment motion is justified.

Also, Parliament is a political arena where politicians assemble to debate and contest policies --- not to engage in ritualistic harmony. Dismissing Parliamentary protest as "political" is little more than an attempt to delegitimise dissent. Similarly, describing the motion as an "extreme step" effectively denies Opposition legitimate avenues of accountability.

But more important, Opposition needs to ask itself whether by rushing to use an instrument of last resort to score only an emblematic point is correct. Given it is not a step towards resolution of a political problem, but a disquieting symptom. It undermines itself, while risking a hardening of confrontation with a high-ranking Constitutional authority.

BJP counters by alleging the move is purely political and meant to create pressure before elections, especially in West Bengal. They argue there is no concrete evidence of misconduct, its mere political theatre of optics and politicization of an independent Constitutional office which could undermine public trust in elections.

Under the Constitution, CEC's removal requires two-thirds majority in both Parliament Houses. Given NDA's Parliamentary strength, the motion is obviously going to be defeated. Nevertheless, this is the first time in independent India that a formal notice seeking removal of a sitting CEC has been introduced. The move represents a high-profile attempt to challenge the Government on the issue of institutional integrity.

Even a failed impeachment motion can carry significant moral and reputational consequences. The process itself brings allegations of "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" into public record. Parliamentary debates, investigations and formal charges create a documented history that may shape the long-term reputation of the office-holder.

Either way the impeachment motion is a serious and worrying signal for democratic institutions. The office belongs to the Election Commission which is supposed to be independent and politically neutral. If impeachment is attempted for political disagreements, it could weaken the independence of the Commission.

Political conflict around the CEC may make citizens question whether elections are free and fair. If Parties start using impeachment threats frequently, Constitutional offices could become political battlegrounds, similar to what sometimes happens with Governors or Speakers.

Till date, the Election Commission is widely seen as fearless and above politics. The

Also, Parliament is a political arena where politicians assemble to debate and contest policies --- not to engage in ritualistic harmony. Dismissing Parliamentary protest as "political" is little more than an attempt to delegitimise dissent. Similarly, describing the motion as an "extreme step" effectively denies Opposition legitimate avenues of accountability. But more important, Opposition needs to ask itself whether by rushing to use an instrument of last resort to score only an emblematic point is correct. Given it is not a step towards resolution of a political problem, but a disquieting symptom. It undermines itself, while risking a hardening of confrontation with a high-ranking Constitutional authority. BJP counters by alleging the move is purely political and meant to create pressure before elections, especially in West Bengal. They argue there is no concrete evidence of misconduct, its mere political theatre of optics and politicization of an independent Constitutional office which could undermine public trust in elections. Under the Constitution, CEC's removal requires two-thirds majority in both Parliament Houses. Given NDA's Parliamentary strength, the motion is obviously going to be defeated. Nevertheless, this is the first time in independent India that a formal notice seeking removal of a sitting CEC has been introduced. The move represents a high-profile attempt to challenge the Government on the issue of institutional integrity. Even a failed impeachment motion can carry significant moral and reputational consequences. The process itself brings allegations of "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" into public record. Parliamentary debates, investigations and formal charges create a documented history that may shape the long-term reputation of the office-holder. Either way the impeachment motion is a serious and worrying signal for democratic institutions. The office belongs to the Election Commission which is supposed to be independent and politically neutral. If impeachment is attempted for political disagreements, it could weaken the independence of the Commission.

CEC's impeachment motion could weaken its reputation and affect how independent the institution appears. As Kumar earns the ignominy of being the first CEC to be impeached it shows how extreme, drastic and rare such a step is, raising concerns about the health of democratic institutions.

All in all, impeachment talk is less about one individual and more about a broader trust deficit between Opposition Parties and Election Commission. Sadly, our leaders ignore a basic premise: Even when impeachment fails to secure removal, the controversy and process will ensure that his conduct would leave a lasting political and historical imprint and remain part of Parliament's historical record.

Worse, it risks weakening the credibility of democratic institutions as accountability and institutional stability must both be balanced. Amid the highly polarization of politics, then, and in spite of an Executive that weaponises its majority, there are countervailing forces, checks and balances.

The Opposition needs to make its way by appealing to and widening these spaces from within, strategically and imaginatively instead of pulling CEC, Governors, Courts etc into a political conflict. No-confidence and impeachment motions are a cop-out, and an abdication of that responsibility. Remember, free and fair elections are the foundation of our democratic system. If elections lose credibility, legitimacy of Governments also weakens. ----- INFA

Contaminated Water: The Hidden Crisis Behind Development Claims

LALIT GARGG

It is often said that water is life. But if that very water becomes contaminated, can it still be called the foundation of life? The truth is, polluted water does not sustain life—it endangers it. Today, not only India but the entire world is facing a growing challenge in ensuring access to clean and safe drinking water. The irony is striking: in a country where rivers are revered as mothers and water is considered a sacred element, millions of people still lack access to safe drinking water. This situation is not merely the result of resource scarcity, but also reflects policy gaps, administrative indifference, and an imbalanced model of development. In recent years, the Government of India has launched several ambitious initiatives to improve drinking water access. The Jal Jeevan Mission, launched in 2019, is considered a major step in this direction, aiming to provide tap water to every rural household. Similarly, projects like Namami Gange have focused on cleaning rivers. These initiatives have significantly expanded water supply infrastructure. While only about 16.7% of rural households had tap water connections in 2019, this figure rose to over 80% by the end of 2024. This achievement is noteworthy—but laying pipelines alone does not solve the problem. The real challenge lies in ensuring that the water reaching households is genuinely clean and safe.

Unfortunately, the situation regarding water quality remains far from satisfactory. Testing of drinking water samples across various states and union territories reveals that a significant portion is contaminated. Alarmingly, only about one-fourth of the contaminated samples have undergone corrective treatment. This means a large population continues to consume unsafe water. Such a reality raises serious questions about the credibility of our development claims. If the quality of such a basic resource cannot be ensured, then our achievements remain incomplete. The crisis of water quality is not confined to rural areas; urban regions face similar issues. Rapid urbanization, aging pipeline systems, and inadequate sewage management are major contributors to water contamination in cities. In many places, drinking water pipelines run dangerously close to sewage lines. Over time, as pipelines deteriorate, sewage water seeps into drinking water supplies, leading to severe health hazards. In recent years, several cities have reported outbreaks of illness—and even deaths—due to contaminated water. Incidents in cities like Indore highlight the gravity of the situation. It is deeply ironic that a city repeatedly ranked among the cleanest in India faces such deadly consequences due to polluted water.

Health experts have long warned that most diseases originate from the digestive system, with contaminated water being a primary cause. Waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, vomiting, typhoid, cholera, and jaundice continue to affect millions. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable due to weaker immunity. In rural areas, where healthcare facilities are limited, the impact becomes even more severe. Thus, contaminated water is not just an environmental issue—it is a major public health crisis. Several factors contribute to water pollution. One of the most significant is the discharge of untreated industrial waste into rivers and water bodies. Additionally, untreated sewage from cities further pollutes water sources. Reports from pollution control authorities indicate that many river stretches across the country fail to meet water quality standards. This suggests that our water bodies are increasingly trapped in a web of pollution. At the same time, excessive groundwater extraction is compounding the crisis. India is among the largest users of groundwater globally, and over-extraction has led not only to declining water tables but also to increased concentrations of harmful substances like fluoride and arsenic in many regions.

Unplanned and unchecked development has further aggravated the situation. Expanding cities, growing industries, and rising population exert immense pressure on water resources. However, water management systems have not kept pace with this growth. In many cities, sewage treatment plants are either inadequate or inefficient, resulting in large volumes of untreated wastewater flowing directly into rivers and lakes. When these polluted sources are used for drinking water supply, contamination becomes inevitable. The impact of polluted water extends beyond human health—it affects entire ecosystems. Rising pollution levels in rivers and lakes threaten aquatic life, pushing many species toward extinction. Furthermore, when contaminated water is used for irrigation, it degrades soil quality and eventually enters the food chain, posing long-term risks to human health. Thus, water pollution is a complex and multidimensional problem.

Addressing this crisis requires more than policy announcements—it demands effective implementation. First and foremost, regular and transparent monitoring of water quality must be ensured. Testing water samples is meaningful only if prompt corrective action follows contamination detection. Additionally, maintaining a safe distance between water supply and sewage systems should be made mandatory. In cities and towns with outdated pipeline infrastructure, urgent and phased replacement is essential. Strict control over industrial pollution is equally critical. Industries must ensure that no untreated waste is discharged into water bodies. This requires not only stringent regulations but also robust monitoring mechanisms. Equally important is fixing accountability at the level of local authorities, who are often responsible for both water supply and quality monitoring. Lack of transparency at this level often exacerbates the problem.

It is essential to recognize that access to clean water is not a luxury—it is a fundamental right of every citizen. Just as food, education, and healthcare are considered basic necessities, safe drinking water must be accorded the same priority. If the nation truly aspires to be healthy and prosperous, ensuring water quality must become a top priority. Initiatives like the Jal Jeevan Mission can be deemed fully successful only when the water delivered to every household is genuinely safe. Going forward, water management must not remain confined to government programs alone; it must evolve into a mass movement driven by public participation. Community-based water testing, rainwater harvesting, wastewater recycling, and awareness campaigns can play a transformative role. Without collective efforts from society, administration, and government, the crisis of contaminated water cannot be fully resolved. Protecting clean water is, in essence, protecting life itself—and this responsibility belongs to all of us.