

# Vulgarity must stop

The ongoing spate of vulgarity in mainstream Indian music is both disappointing and deeply concerning. For many, it felt like we had moved past the era of crass, double-meaning songs that dominated playlists between 2010 and 2012. That phase, often criticised for reducing art to cheap shock value, seemed to have given way to more meaningful and creative expression. Yet, in just the past two weeks, two glaring examples have forced us to confront an uncomfortable truth. The problem is far from gone. The controversy around Sarke Chunar from KD The Devil, featuring Sanjay Dutt and Nora Fatehi is a case in point. The song sparked outrage for its sexually explicit lyrics, triggering widespread criticism from the public, artists and institutions alike. The government's decision to ban the song last week was not only justified but necessary. It sends a clear signal that there are limits to what can be normalised in the name of entertainment. Equally troubling was the earlier controversy surrounding Tateere by Badshah. The backlash was swift and strong, leading to police complaints, summons from a state commission and eventually a public apology from the artist. Legal action under the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act and provisions relating to obscene content further underlined the seriousness of the issue. These two are not isolated incidents. They reflect a growing trend where vulgar, sexually suggestive and double-meaning lyrics are being pushed into the mainstream under the garb of commercial success. In a country that is now a thriving digital economy, such content is not confined to cinema halls. It is instantly accessible across television, YouTube and social media platforms, reaching audiences of all ages including impressionable children. This easy accessibility makes the issue far more dangerous. When explicit content becomes part of everyday consumption, it begins to shape attitudes and language. The normalisation of such expressions among young audiences can have long-term consequences on their mental well-being and moral framework. What starts as just a song can subtly influence behaviour, desensitise individuals and erode social boundaries. Cinema and music are not just forms of entertainment. They are powerful cultural forces. They reflect society but they also shape it. When lyrics degrade women or reduce them to objects of vulgarity, it reinforces harmful stereotypes. More worryingly, such content can embolden behaviours like eve-teasing, particularly affecting women and girls in both rural and urban settings, including school and college environments. Creative freedom is important but it cannot be absolute. It must operate within the framework of responsibility. The framers of our Constitution envisioned reasonable restrictions to protect the dignity of individuals and the moral fabric of society. The time has come for stricter oversight and more accountable content creation. Laws must not only exist on paper but be implemented firmly. Regulatory bodies, digital platforms and the entertainment industry must work together to draw clear lines. India deserves better. Our music has a rich legacy of poetry, emotion and depth. Reducing it to vulgarity for fleeting attention is regressive. Safeguarding the dignity of women and preserving societal values is not censorship, it is a collective responsibility.



“There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.”

—Mister Rogers



## ■ Nepal After Elections

# PROSPECTS FOR NEW GOVT

■ ADAM BURAKOWSKI

The recent elections in Nepal saw Rashtriya Swatantra Party and its leader Balendra Shah win a decisive victory, ending the uncertainty after last September's revolution and an interim government. The vote took place smoothly and peacefully. The defeat of the current elite is indisputable and gives the new government a strong mandate to implement profound reforms.

Nepal needs significant infrastructure investments and a high pace of development over the long term. It is not yet clear whether Shah will be able to achieve this. It can be predicted that Nepal will emphasise its independence in foreign policy, while also turning subtly to India and indirectly to the West.

Everyone expected Shah to win, but the final results were a surprise due to the scale of the defeat for the incumbent government. The RSP secured the support of nearly 48% of voters and won 182 seats in the 275-seat parliament. This was the second-best result in Nepal's history, and Shah himself personally defeated former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in the constituency. Second and third place went to the largest parties of the previous regime: Congress (16.2%) and former Prime Minister Sharma Oli's Communists (13.4%). It's worth noting the exceptionally poor performance of monarchists (around 2%), meaning the issue of restoring the old system, which had been circulating in the media worldwide for some time, was shelved for a long time.

The turnout was a surprise, reaching just under 60%, a record low (for example, in 2017 it was 68%), and it was expected to be higher this time due to the emotions stirred by the revolution. Why didn't this happen? Commentators cite two primary reasons: growing distrust of the electoral process and all political parties, and logistical issues related to the voting itself. The events of the last six months have led many citizens to conclude that elections are pointless, as the situation is being shaped regardless of the outcome. Elite parties primarily inspire apathy among such voters, while the RSP (Russian Socialist Party) and its leader have failed to convince them to support them.

Logistics certainly influenced voter turnout. In Nepal, many urban residents are registered in their villages. Voting is often not enough to justify traveling many hours in difficult conditions (infrastructure in Nepal still leaves much to be desired, which was one of the reasons for the protests). Several million Nepalese work abroad, a growing number, and Nepalese law does not allow voting at diplomatic missions. Furthermore, war broke out in the Middle East just before the elections, with numerous flights canceled, preventing citizens from reaching Kathmandu and thus from voting.

Nevertheless, Balendra Shah received an exceptionally strong mandate (weakened only by low turnout). This gives him a secure majority in parliament and stable support for the long term. He can therefore proceed with the reforms he has announced and the public expects.

The new leader and his chances  
Who is Balendra Shah, and does he really want to implement reforms? In the media, especially globally, he is portrayed primarily as a

singer. He does indeed sing and record; this is undoubtedly one of his personalities. His style is nephop – short for Nepali hip-hop, combining Melo declamation and modern sound with traditional instruments. On stage, he performs under the stage name Balen, a diminutive of his name, and cultivates a star-like image.

new Nepalese government go? Will he succeed in making real changes that will set Nepal on a path to rapid development, as its neighbours have been doing for decades? Or will he concentrate on accumulating power and promoting a cult of personality around himself? History is full of such examples. However, it seems that this is an exceptionally favorable

most positive outcome of such a revolution and could draw others along. If he fails, Nepal will join the examples above, and Generation Z protests around the world may suffer the fate of the “Arab Spring.”

What position will Nepal take on the international stage? It's a cliché to say that the country is located between the two most pop-

**However, it's worth noting that he is first and foremost a politician. Educated at a prestigious polytechnic university in Bengaluru, India, in 2021 he became an independent candidate for mayor of Kathmandu and won the elections held the following year, thanks to his image as a figure outside the system, uncorrupted, and young. As mayor of the capital, he led programmes to modernise and reconstruct streets and neighborhoods, sometimes using controversial methods such as forced evictions. He also sought to portray himself as an uncompromising politician, acting in the interests of the entire country. He criticized both of Nepal's neighbours and their attempts to influence national politics. So, he is young, but with a lot of political experience for a person his age. During the term of the interim government, he repeatedly praised Prime Minister Karki; she was more reserved towards him (perhaps because of the ongoing campaign; she wanted to avoid accusations of bias), but she congratulated him immediately after the elections, and he in return thanked her for professionally managing the country for half a year and preparing the parliamentary elections. So which way will Balendra Shah and the new Nepalese government go? Will he succeed in making real changes that will set Nepal on a path to rapid development, as its neighbours have been doing for decades? Or will he concentrate on accumulating power and promoting a cult of personality around himself? History is full of such examples. However, it seems that this is an exceptionally favorable moment for Nepal: the former elite has been discredited, the population wants real change, and, moreover, is young and willing to make sacrifices for the country's prosperity.**



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moment for Nepal: the former elite has been discredited, the population wants real change, and, moreover, is young and willing to make sacrifices for the country's prosperity. People demonstrated this during and after the revolution, when the riots were not prolonged and the focus was on organising solidly conducted parliamentary elections.

To ensure Nepal's development leap, massive infrastructure investments and economic growth of 7-8% over many years are needed. Both of Nepal's neighbours achieved this a long time ago (though India still faces significant infrastructure challenges, particularly in the mountainous regions bordering Nepal) and are currently at a completely different stage. Implementing such reforms is difficult, but not impossible. There will undoubtedly be resistance from existing systems unwilling to change.

On the global stage  
From a global perspective, Balendra Shah's success or failure is significant. Similar protests have erupted in several other countries. In nearby Bangladesh, they led to the return to power of a group that had held power for decades, leaving no real change. In Madagascar, they ended with the establishment of a military dictatorship. If Shah succeeds in reforming the country, it will be the

ulous countries – China and India – and therefore has only two options: closer to Beijing or closer to Delhi. Previous governments tended to pursue a northeastern course, particularly KP Sharma Oli and his communist party. China, associated with economic success, has failed to contribute to Nepal's growth, limiting itself to showy investments and promoting its language and culture.

In this context, Balendra Shah has for years sought to portray himself as a primarily pro-Nepal politician, balancing influence and emphasising his country's independence. His Indian education and the cultural codes surrounding him align him with India and, indirectly, the West. From this perspective, one might expect Balen to pursue a “Nepal First” policy, perhaps publicly demonstrating independence from New Delhi, while de facto remaining slightly closer to India, treating it more strategically, while relations with China and other countries remain transactional.

It is in Nepal's best interest to ensure that this opportunity is not wasted, that real reforms are implemented, and that economic growth is ensured. Balendra Shah has the potential to accomplish this, but only time will tell.

# Middle East Crisis: New Delhi walks the Diplomatic Tightrope

■ TUSHI DEB

Is India recalibrating its approach to the West Asia crisis? Every time a conflict erupts in West Asia, the same question echoes across television studios and editorial pages: whose side will India take? With tensions around Iran spiralling into an open confrontation, the debate has returned with predictable urgency. Should India back Iran? Stand with Israel and the West? Or remain neutral?

But the question itself is flawed. Foreign policy is not conducted through moral slogans or ideological sympathies. It is conducted through the far less romantic calculus of national interest. Judged by that standard, India's position in the unfolding Iran crisis is neither confused nor hesitant. It is deliberate, as India cannot afford to choose sides.

There was a time when New Delhi's West Asia policy appeared relatively straightforward. In the decades after independence, India instinctively leaned toward the Arab world while maintaining a deliberate distance from Israel. That posture reflected both domestic political considerations and the moral vocabulary of the Non-Aligned Movement. But geopolitics rarely stands still. Over the past three decades, India's engagement with the region has undergone a quiet yet profound transformation. Today, India maintains a deep strategic partnership with Israel. Cooperation spans defence technology, intelligence

sharing, agriculture and homeland security. Israeli systems have become embedded in India's security architecture, from advanced surveillance technologies to missile defence platforms.

At the same time, India has carefully cultivated ties with Iran, fully aware of Tehran's geographic and strategic importance. Iran offers India a crucial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia through the development of Chabahar Port – a project that allows New Delhi to bypass Pakistan and establish overland trade routes into Eurasia.

The third pillar of this equation is India's increasingly consequential partnership with the United States. Over the past two decades, New Delhi and Washington have moved from wary acquaintances to strategic collaborators. Defence agreements, joint military exercises and high-end technology cooperation now define the relationship.

The result is a diplomatic triangle: India must simultaneously engage Iran, Israel and the United States – three actors whose interests often collide. In such a landscape, the expectation that India will openly align with one side in a regional war reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of contemporary Indian diplomacy. The economic stakes alone make alignment risky.

India imports the overwhelming majority of its crude oil, and the stability of West Asian energy supplies remains critical to its economic health. Any large-scale disruption in the Persian Gulf reverberates instantly through global markets, pushing up energy prices and placing immediate

pressure on India's economy.

For a country that must contain inflation, sustain growth and protect the purchasing power of millions, turmoil in West Asia is not a distant geopolitical drama. It is an economic fault line.

There is also a human dimension. Millions of Indians live and work across the Gulf region, sending home billions of dollars each year. India remains the world's largest recipient of remittances, receiving a record \$135 billion. Roughly 38 per cent of these inflows originate from the Gulf Cooperation Council economies. The safety, employment and livelihoods of those millions form a central component of India's national interest. Any diplomatic stance that jeopardises relations with Gulf states carries immediate and tangible risks. These realities explain why New Delhi has consistently resisted the temptation of ideological alignment in West Asia.

Instead, India has embraced what policymakers increasingly describe as strategic autonomy – the ability to maintain productive relations with multiple competing powers without becoming tethered to any single geopolitical camp. This doctrine marks a departure from the rhetorical non-alignment of the Cold War era. While non-alignment often carried moralistic overtones, strategic autonomy is unapologetically pragmatic. It recognises that the global order is no longer defined by rigid blocs but by shifting coalitions and overlapping interests.

Under this framework, diplomacy is not a choice between friends and enemies. It is the art of managing multiple partnerships simultaneously.

Critics occasionally dismiss this posture as diplomatic hedging. They argue that a rising power should demonstrate clearer ideological leadership. Yet such criticism ignores a simple truth: the first responsibility of any government is to safeguard its national interests.

Grand declarations may satisfy domestic audiences. They rarely produce strategic advantage. India's cautious approach has, in fact, often given it a unique advantage – the ability to maintain lines of communication even when rival powers refuse to speak to one another. In a volatile region like West Asia, that ability can itself become a source of influence.

There is also a broader geopolitical shift underway. The world is gradually moving away from rigid alliances toward a more fragmented and multipolar order. In such an environment, flexibility becomes a strategic asset. Countries that tie themselves too rigidly to one camp risk losing room for manoeuvre as alliances evolve. India's diplomatic tradition has therefore evolved toward preserving maximum strategic space.

Seen in this light, the question of whether India will take sides in the Iran conflict begins to appear misplaced.

New Delhi will engage all stakeholders. It will call for restraint, encourage diplomatic solutions and safeguard its economic interests. It will coordinate with partners when necessary while maintaining dialogue with adversaries when useful.

But it will resist being drawn into the sim-

plistic binary of 'us versus them'.

For Indian diplomacy, the real challenge is not choosing between Tehran and Tel Aviv or between Iran and Washington. It is navigating a turbulent region while preserving India's autonomy and influence.

That requires patience, prudence and occasionally the willingness to disappoint those who prefer dramatic gestures over careful statecraft. Over the decades, India's Middle East policy was framed around two broad binaries: the United States versus the region, and Israel versus the Arab world. Far less attention was paid to the region's internal rivalries – between Arabia and Persia, between monarchies and revolutionary republics.

Today, New Delhi approaches the region with greater realism. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly emphasised, “We believe in the ideology of 'India First'.” India supports the resolution of all disputes through dialogue and diplomacy.

That principle remains the anchor of India's West Asia policy. Engage with all. Align with none. In an increasingly polarised world that constantly demands loyalty tests, such restraint may appear unspectacular. But it is precisely this strategic sobriety that allows India to protect its interests while expanding its diplomatic room to manoeuvre.

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