



“Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway.”

—Earl Nightingale



Vanishing J&K waters

The latest findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General should shake us out of our collective complacency. The numbers are deeply unsettling. Out of 697 natural lakes in Jammu and Kashmir, 518 have either disappeared or shrunk since 1967. That is more than 74% of these vital water bodies fading away within a few decades. This is not just environmental decline. It is a silent erosion of the region's ecological backbone. Beyond their ornamental features, lakes are living systems that support biodiversity, regulate water cycles and act as buffers against disasters. When they vanish, the consequences ripple far beyond their shores. The loss of flora and fauna, disruption of ecological balance and growing stress on water and food systems are all interconnected outcomes of this neglect. What makes the situation even more concerning is the state of Dal Lake, often described as the heart of Srinagar. Between 2007 and 2020, its water spread has reduced from 15.40 square kilometres to 12.91 square kilometres. A decline of over 10 per cent in just 13 years is not a statistic to be buried in reports. It is a warning sign in plain sight. The increase in floating vegetation, expansion of built-up areas and unchecked human activity reflect a pattern that is both visible and avoidable. This is not an overnight crisis. It is the result of decades of unplanned urbanisation, encroachments, deforestation and administrative gaps. Multiple agencies handling lake management without coordination have only deepened the problem. At the same time, weak monitoring, delayed projects and underutilised funds have ensured that even well-intentioned schemes fail to deliver. The consequences of this neglect have already been felt. The devastating floods of 2014 were not just a natural disaster. They were also a reminder of how degraded lakes and wetlands lose their ability to absorb excess water. Lakes act as natural sponges. When they shrink or disappear, the risk of floods increases. Climate insecurity is no longer an abstract concept. It is unfolding in real time. This is a cumulative failure spread over years and across departments. But that does not absolve responsibility. Instead, it presents an opportunity. The government must treat this as a turning point. What is needed now is a clear and structured approach. A comprehensive legal framework for lake conservation must be put in place. A centralised authority with defined accountability can ensure coordination among departments. Scientific planning, better funding and deployment of experts are equally critical as public awareness. Conservation cannot succeed without community participation. Encroachments, pollution and unregulated construction must be checked through both policy and people's involvement. The lakes of Jammu and Kashmir are not just water bodies. They are part of its identity and its future. If the current trend continues, the loss will not just be ecological. It will be civilisational. The warning has been issued. The question is whether we choose to act or continue to look away.

INDIA MUST LEAD SAARC

SHIVAJI SARKAR

The Iran–Israel conflict has abruptly exposed the fault lines in India's growth story, friendship—energy dependence, imported inflation, and policy vulnerability. With the Strait of Hormuz under threat, even a modest spike in crude prices can ripple through the economy, raising fuel costs, widening the trade deficit, and feeding directly into inflation.

It is just not the IMF, but the RBI and NITI Aayog also express deep concern. India was earlier seen by the IMF as a key global growth engine, the post-Iran conflict environment has sharply increased downside risks, with the Fund warning that such shocks are “asymmetric” and disproportionately hit energy-importing economies like India.

The IMF has also flagged arms imports or dependence on external powers citing the failure of Arab nations. The West Asia demonstrates that hundreds of billions of dollars of weapons and security shields bought from the US failed to provide security to the Gulf region. The rivalries and mutual distrust have not been able to create a low-cost security umbrella of their own. It may be a cue for the Indian subcontinent that has virtually dodged a rising South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The RBI's April 2026 Monetary Policy decision to hold the repo rate at 5.25 per cent reflects caution, not comfort. Its 6.9 per cent growth projection for FY27, against 7.6 per cent of budgetary speculation, already carries downside risks; sustained high oil prices could drag it closer to 6.7 per cent while pushing inflation towards 4.6–5 per cent, squeezing consumption.

This is not just a cyclical shock—it is a structural warning. Voices from NITI Aayog, including ex-CEO Amitabh Kant, are urging a faster pivot to renewables, but the immediate reality is stark: India remains deeply exposed to external energy disruptions. The question is no longer whether to diversify, but how long the economy can absorb repeated geopolitical shocks before growth, stability, and policy space begin to erode.

The IMF observes rising energy costs from the conflict are expected to fuel inflation, potentially causing central banks to maintain higher interest rates, which dampens growth. In other words, it says that the RBI cannot hold on to repo rate for long. The conflict is affecting supply chains and raising input costs for economies heavily reliant on energy imports. The IMF warns that actions like price controls should be avoided.

Independent Supply Chain?

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fence sector. Though that too has a high cost for profit repatriation on foreign exchange.

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India has to reclaim the pre-2016 SAARC regional leadership for a friendly economic and security alternative. The Iran war and the irony of the Gulf security failures call for a relook at the subcontinent for refurbishing Indian efforts. India has done well to ensure

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Questions on India tilt

Across regimes India has been tilting towards the West instead of building its strength in new regions like Africa. The policy for bypassing multilateral organisations like the WTO or the UNO has not helped it much. It is not a post-2014 Narendra Modi phenomenon, as often alleged in the political circles.

In 2005–06, India voted with the US and

shifted from its earlier strategic engagement with Iran—marked by the 2003 New Delhi Declaration—to a more US-aligned position.

The 2005-2006 votes marked a significant shift from the cordiality of 2001-2003, when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Tehran and signed the New Delhi Declaration, establishing a “strategic partnership” with Iran.

The SAARC Strength

The void created has now become a pivot of the discussion across the world. A “rogue” Pakistan, supporting various terrorist actions, including the World Trade Tower blast, is now at the centre of talks between Iran and the US – space that is believed normally belong to India.

Despite the balancing act, Iran is no more that close to India as it was about a decade back, when it was not only trading petroleum in rupee and reinvesting in India for merchandise purchases. A neighbour, Iran,

petroleum supplies to Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka during the Hormuz closure.

It may be a new beginning. The nations falter, do corrections and pave new ways. India has to evolve the new path to turn the region as the global engine. The eight SAARC nations, including Pakistan, can become the strength for a new energy, economic growth and enhancing security for the world.

India stands at an inflection point where external shocks are exposing internal policy gaps. Energy vulnerability, strategic drift, and weakening regional engagement cannot be addressed through incremental fixes. The lesson from West Asia is clear: dependence—whether on fuel, arms, or alliances—comes at a cost.

India must build resilience through energy diversification, stronger domestic capacity, and renewed regional leadership—reviving SAARC despite challenges. The choice is clear: react to crises or shape a stable, self-assured future.---INFA

Asha Bhosle: The Timeless Echo of India's Soul

LALIT GARGG

The sky of Indian music now feels unusually silent—somewhat emptier, somewhat more still. The playful bird of melody, the enchanting voice that sowed seeds of sweetness in millions of hearts for decades, may no longer be physically among us, yet her resonance has dissolved into eternity, becoming immortal. Asha Bhosle was not merely a singer; she was a stream of sound that embodied the very soul of India—flowing through every culture, every emotion, and every era. A legendary vocalist and a magical voice of countless aspirations, she created nearly 12,000 songs, setting a world record. Her passing due to cardiac arrest is not just the loss of an artist, but the end of an entire era of Indian sensibility. Yet, this end is not a conclusion—it is a transition into immortality, where an artist lives beyond the body, within their creations. Songs like “Abhi Na Jao Chhod Kar” now echo the heartfelt plea of millions. The voice that made even separation sound beautiful has now left the world in a state of emotional longing.

There was a unique vitality in her voice—it

could transform into the playful innocence of a young girl or the aching cry of a lover's soul. Her songs encapsulated the entirety of life—laughter, tears, love, pain, romance, and devotion—in a rare and harmonious blend. This is why her resonance transcended India, touching hearts across the globe. If Indian music were an ocean, Asha Bhosle would be the river flowing into it, carrying within her every genre and style. From classical to pop, jazz to ghazals, and even qawwali, she left her indelible imprint on every form. It is astonishing how a single voice could express such diversity with such ease—but she made it possible. She did not merely sing songs; she lived them. That is why her music is not just sound—it is an experience.

Born on September 8, 1933, Asha ji lived music as a spiritual discipline. Creating an independent identity under the towering shadow of Lata Mangeshkar was no easy feat. Many talents faded into obscurity under that immense presence, but Asha ji turned struggle into strength. She expanded the musical legacy inherited from her father, Deenanath Mangeshkar, through her relentless effort and courage. Despite personal upheavals, social pressures, and intense competition, she never allowed the flame of her voice to dim. Her association with O. P. Nayyar proved to be a turn-

ing point, after which there was no looking back. Her achievements went far beyond popularity—being honored with the Grammy, receiving the Padma Vibhushan, and having her name inscribed in the Guinness World Records for recording the highest number of songs are testimonies to her lifelong dedication and extraordinary talent. Yet, above all, her greatest achievement remains the boundless love she received from her listeners—a love that continues to live through her songs.

The most remarkable aspect of her music is its timelessness. Songs like “Piya Tu Ab To Aaja,” “Dum Maro Dum,” “Chura Liya Hai Tumne,” and “Dil Cheez Kya Hai” still feel as fresh today as they did when first released. Her songs carried not just melody, but a living soul that infused meaning into every word, making them eternal. For her, music was not merely an art—it was the very breath of life. Just as life is impossible without breath, existence without music becomes dull and meaningless. Through her songs, she demonstrated that music is not just entertainment—it is nourishment for the soul. In every composition, one can sense a subtle devotion, a deeper meaning of life, and a sacred purity of emotions.

Today, as we remember her, it feels as though not just a person, but an entire era has

come to an end. After legends like Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh, and Kishore Kumar, her passing marks the fading of yet another luminous flame of India's golden musical tradition. Yet, such artists never truly vanish—they live on in their creations, breathe within their melodies, and echo through generations. Tributes expressed by Mohan Bhagwat further affirm that Asha Bhosle was not just a singer, but a symbol of India's cultural consciousness. Her contribution extended beyond entertainment—through her songs, she expressed Indian identity, sensitivity, and the celebration of life itself. Her passing is undoubtedly an irreparable loss, but her voice, her rhythm, her vitality, and her spirit will continue to resonate eternally in the soil of this nation. That is her true immortality—and her greatest legacy.

Asha Bhosle's personal life was as full of struggles as it was of resilience, courage, and unwavering self-belief. Born into a family devoted to music, she faced hardships from a young age, yet transformed every challenge into strength. Despite living under the towering presence of Lata Mangeshkar, she carved her own distinct identity—an achievement that reflects her extraordinary personality. Through personal upheavals, societal criticism, and family complexities, she never al-

lowed her inner strength to weaken. Her liveliness, boldness, wit, and celebratory approach to life made her not just an artist, but a living inspiration. She symbolized the rare ability to move forward with a smile in every circumstance—an art that transforms ordinary individuals into extraordinary beings. Her talent was significantly shaped by three major composers—O. P. Nayyar, Ravi, and R. D. Burman. One of her iconic songs, “Mera Kuch Saamaan Tumhare Paas Pada Hai,” earned her a National Award and remains deeply cherished.

In her voice lived not just sound, but a divine vibration, an invisible magic, and the power of deep spiritual practice. At times it would enchant the sweetness of romance, and at others, it would pierce the soul as the pain of separation. Through her singing, she made Indian music not only melodious and entertaining, but meaningful, emotional, spiritual, and deeply inspiring. Her songs carried philosophy, sensitivity, and an intimate spiritual touch—breathing life into every word, making music not just something to hear, but something to live. Truly, Asha Bhosle was an eternal stream of melody—one that elevated Indian music to global consciousness and will continue to inspire generations to come.