



If you're offered a seat on a rock-  
et ship, don't ask what seat! Just  
get on.

—Sheryl Sandberg



# Edit

## Sustaining cold desert

Ladakh has always occupied a unique place in India's geography and imagination. It is remote, fragile and strategically important. For long, development here moved slowly due to difficult terrain and harsh climate. But in recent years, there is a visible shift. New Delhi has brought itself closer to the cold desert than ever before and the region is now witnessing a steady flow of focused development initiatives. The work being done on ground under Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena deserves serious appreciation. The past week alone reflects this renewed attention. It has seen the announcement of 10 model border hamlets under the Vibrant Village Programme, with the foundation stone of the first such village laid at Chumur in eastern Ladakh. Alongside this, 15 Common Facility Centres have been inaugurated across the Union Territory to strengthen micro-enterprises, create livelihood opportunities for women and youth within their villages and reduce migration from remote areas. These two initiatives are not isolated projects. They represent a broader vision of building self-reliant and sustainable border communities. The model border hamlets are expected to become examples of climate resilient and tourism enabled development in high altitude regions. With better housing, homestay facilities and improved infrastructure, they aim to strengthen both livelihood and security in these sensitive areas. The Common Facility Centres add another important dimension to this effort. These centres will function as shared workspaces for weavers, spinners, tailors, artisans and women self-help groups. By providing modern tools and collective infrastructure, they will help local communities improve production quality and expand their reach to wider markets. More importantly, they will create opportunities for women and youth to earn a livelihood without leaving their villages. This can play a key role in reducing migration from some of the most remote parts of Ladakh. These developments come on the heels of yet another significant initiative. The inauguration of the country's first rock check dam over the Indus river at Upshi marks a new step in addressing one of Ladakh's most persistent challenges, water scarcity. Under the Sindhu Jal Samridhi Abhiyan, this eco-friendly intervention aims to improve irrigation facilities and strengthen water security for farmers in high altitude regions. The rock check dam is a simple yet innovative solution. Built using locally sourced stones without cement, it reflects an approach that is both sustainable and suited to Ladakh's fragile ecosystem. It is designed to slow river flow, create storage for irrigation and support agriculture during critical sowing seasons when water availability becomes limited. Taken together, these initiatives show a clear pattern of governance that is focused on ground realities. Whether it is livelihood generation, infrastructure creation or water management, the emphasis is on long term sustainability rather than short term fixes. Ladakh's development is not just about improving living standards. It is also about strengthening border resilience and ensuring that remote communities remain vibrant and self sustaining. What is important now is continuity. These initiatives must be followed through with consistent implementation and local participation. If this momentum continues, Ladakh could become a model for sustainable development in some of the most challenging terrains in the world.

## India & The World

# THE MYANMAR TEST

DR D K GIRI

Why Min Aung Hlaing, President of Myanmar chose Delhi as his first visit and what India must do next? Admittedly, in diplomacy, the first visit of a Head of State matters. It tells you who a leader trusts, fears or needs. At the same time, it can also be a confidence trick.

On Monday last, Myanmar's President landed in New Delhi. As said, it was his maiden visit since assuming office in April this year. He did not choose Beijing, nor Bangkok but Delhi. Why? And what should New Delhi do with this trust?

I pondered over this question since his visit. Because Myanmar is just not another neighbour. It shares 1,643 km long borders with India and presents a test of India's foreign policy; a test of geography, history, democracy and something I call 'strategic maturity' — the courage to act in our national interest without losing our national character. Let me explain. Why Delhi was his first port of call?

There could be three possible reasons, all practical. First, security: Myanmar's territory touches our troubled North-East — Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Insurgent groups have camps across the border: arms flow, so do drugs and refugees. President Hlaing knows this. So, he came with a promise: "We will not allow Myanmar's soil to be used against India's security interest". The statement was delivered in Hyderabad House, and it matters.

India has been Myanmar's quiet partner on counter-insurgency for 20 years: Operation Sunrise, intelligence sharing, and border fencing. No other country gives Myanmar that kind of help. China gives roads and loans, whereas India gives joint patrols. In a region where guns speak louder than talks, that counts.

The second reason could be connectivity. Two Indian projects are stuck in Myanmar for a decade. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project — to link Kolkata with Mizoram via Sittwe Port, and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway — our gateway to ASEAN. Both are 80 per cent done. Both need Myanmar's political push to finish. Hlaing's visit was also a signal, "we will unlock them". For India, this is not charity. This is our Act East Policy on Wheels. Without Myanmar, we cannot reach South-East Asia by land.

Third: balance: China has entered the Myanmar theatre in a big way. Twenty-one billion USD is invested in projects under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. Kyaukpyu Deep-Sea Port is also financed by China. Beijing is supporting oil and gas pipelines to Yunnan, as well as in arm sales, political cover at the UN.

Myanmar knows dependence is dangerous. So, every Myanmar leader, even from the military, keeps one window open to India. It is a balance. Hlaing's Delhi visit tells Beijing, "We have options"; and it tells Washington, "Do not lecture us". So, he came, not for love, but for leverage. Every country, for the sake of independent foreign policy, seeks to balance rival powers. India does it in the name of multi-alignment. So could Myanmar.

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Tagore. General Aung San, father of Aung San Suu Kyi, studied at Shanti Niketan. U Thant, the Burmese UN Secretary-General, was a friend of Nehru. In 1948, India was the first to recognise Myanmar's independence. In the 1950s, we were both leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement. Our peoples crossed the border for weddings, funerals, and festivals.

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weekly. If we deliver roads, power, and ports, Myanmar's army will have a reason to call Delhi.

Second, play to our strengths. As China builds hard infrastructure, India can build soft infrastructure — IT, pharma, education, democracy training. Give 1000 scholarships to Myanmar's students. Train their civil servants, especially in E-Governance. A Myanmar officer who

ues. But, let it be said, values without geography are a lecture. Values with geography is a policy.

Here is the ground reality. If India backs off, China fills the vacuum in 24 hours — more arms, more ports, more surveillance on our North-East. The refugee flow into Mizoram and Manipur will double. Insurgents will get new sponsors. And the people of Myanmar still will

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It is true that New Delhi faces the democracy dilemma in Myanmar which puts principles versus national interest. The question is, should India support democracy revival in Myanmar, even if it costs us? Many in the West say yes. They want India to sanction the junta, like America does. They quote our democratic val-

not get democracy — they will just get a Chinese one.

So, Myanmar tests India's statecraft. Every neighbour of India poses a different challenge. Pakistan tests our patience; China tests our power; and Myanmar tests our balance. Can we secure our borders without becoming a bully? Can we compete with China without copying China? Can we stand for democracy without sacrificing our security interests?

Myanmar's President's visit gave us a chance to answer these questions. They are: India will work with whoever governs Myanmar, to secure our North-East, complete our connectivity, and prevent the Indian Ocean from becoming a Chinese lake. This is our Neighbourhood First. That is Act East. For India, Myanmar is not a problem to solve. It is a relationship to manage. We do so with history in our heart, geography in our mind and strategy in our hand. ---INFA

# Drug Addiction: The Silent War Against The Youth of India and National Future

LALIT GARGG

India today stands among the countries with the largest youth population in the world. Nearly 65 percent of its population is below the age of 35. This youthful demographic is India's greatest strength, its most valuable asset, and the cornerstone of its bright future. The nation's achievements in science, technology, industry, education, sports, and innovation have been driven largely by this vibrant young generation. Yet, ironically, this very segment of society is increasingly falling into the trap of substance abuse.

Addiction is no longer merely a personal weakness or a public health concern; it has emerged as a serious threat to national security, social stability, economic development, and cultural values. The periodic seizure of narcotics worth millions and even billions of rupees across different parts of the country demonstrates that drug trafficking has evolved into a vast and highly organized international criminal network. Border states such as Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and several northeastern states have become particularly vulnerable due to cross-border smuggling. Frequent interceptions of large consignments of heroin, opium, charas, cocaine, and synthetic drugs by security agencies indicate that India is increasingly being viewed as a lucrative market for narcotics.

According to reports from the National Crime Records Bureau and various government studies, millions of young Indians are addicted to one form of substance abuse or another. A comprehensive

survey conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment revealed that crores of Indians consume tobacco, alcohol, and other intoxicating substances, with a significant proportion being young people. What is especially alarming is the growing penetration of drugs into schools and colleges. Several states have reported cases where adolescents have been used in drug distribution and trafficking networks.

The escalating drug menace also carries a significant national security dimension. Many security experts believe that after repeatedly failing in direct military confrontations, Pakistan has increasingly resorted to proxy warfare tactics such as terrorism, counterfeit currency, and drug trafficking to destabilize India. For years, Punjab has witnessed the smuggling of narcotics across the border through drones and other sophisticated means. Jammu & Kashmir, too, is now experiencing the growing impact of this threat. As terrorism-related incidents decline, the spread of narcotics is emerging as a new weapon aimed at weakening the nation's youth and eroding the vitality of society.

In this context, the "Drug-Free Jammu & Kashmir" campaign launched in the Union Territory has gained considerable significance. Under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, the initiative emphasizes not only administrative action but also community participation. Its most notable feature is the effort to involve educational institutions, social organizations, religious groups, and ordinary citizens. The support extended by communities in districts such as Kulgam and elsewhere underscores an important re-

ality: a challenge as complex as drug addiction can only be overcome through collective action.

The most tragic and devastating impact of addiction falls upon the younger generation. Youth symbolizes energy, creativity, ambition, and dreams, but addiction destroys these possibilities. Once trapped in substance abuse, an individual gradually loses physical health, mental stability, financial security, and social respect. Self-confidence erodes, while depression, stress, and criminal tendencies often take root. Addiction does not merely destroy an individual; it destabilizes entire families. Economic hardship deepens, relationships deteriorate, and social harmony is disrupted.

Drug abuse is not driven by trafficking alone. Its roots also lie in social, economic, and psychological factors. Unemployment, uncertainty about the future, intense competition, family conflicts, social fragmentation, loneliness, mental stress, and negative peer influence often push young people toward substance abuse. The rise of consumerist culture has further promoted a mindset of instant gratification and artificial pleasure. In the absence of purpose, direction, and positive motivation, individuals become more susceptible to destructive habits. The connection between addiction and crime is equally profound. Numerous studies have shown that theft, robbery, violence, road accidents, and other criminal activities are increasingly linked to substance abuse. Many young addicts turn to crime to finance their addiction. This not only undermines law and order but also creates an atmosphere of fear and insecurity within society.

Governments at both the national and state

levels are making sustained efforts to address this challenge. Joint operations by the Narcotics Control Bureau, the National Investigation Agency, the Border Security Force, and state police forces have dismantled several major drug syndicates. Special drives in Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Jammu & Kashmir have intensified the crackdown on traffickers and their networks. In this struggle, social and spiritual movements have an equally vital role to play. Laws can create deterrence, but lasting transformation comes only through awareness, self-discipline, and moral awakening. Revered spiritual leader Acharya Tulsi transformed de-addiction into a mass social movement through the Anuvrat Movement. By promoting self-restraint, ethical conduct, and personal discipline, he inspired millions to embrace a life free from addictions. His campaign achieved remarkable success in many regions.

Similarly, Acharya Mahashraman, through his historic Ahimsa Yatra, has inspired millions across India and neighboring countries to renounce intoxicants. One of the central objectives of his extensive foot journeys has been to awaken moral consciousness and encourage young people to adopt a drug-free lifestyle. Covering thousands of kilometers, he has carried the message from village to village and city to city that freedom from addiction is not merely a matter of protecting health—it is the foundation of self-development, family well-being, and nation-building. The need of the hour is a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy to combat addiction. Border surveillance and technological security mechanisms must be further strengthened. Advanced systems

should be deployed to prevent drone-based smuggling. Swift judicial processes must ensure stringent punishment for traffickers, creating a strong deterrent effect. Anti-drug education should become an integral part of school and college curricula. Greater opportunities in employment, sports, skill development, and cultural activities should be created so that youthful energy can be directed toward constructive pursuits. Simultaneously, rehabilitation centers must be expanded and upgraded to provide effective treatment and reintegration support.

For Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, and other affected regions, the fight against addiction is no longer merely a social reform initiative; it has become a matter of national security and nation-building. This battle cannot be won by governments and law enforcement agencies alone. Families, educational institutions, religious organizations, social groups, the media, and responsible citizens must join hands to transform it into a people's movement. Just as the Swachh Bharat Mission succeeded through public participation, the dream of a Drug-Free India can also be realized through collective commitment and sustained effort. India's youth are its greatest national asset. If this immense human potential falls prey to addiction, the country's progress will inevitably suffer. However, if the youth are nurtured to become healthy, disciplined, aware, and purpose-driven, India can emerge as a powerful global leader. The fight against addiction, therefore, is not merely a social campaign—it is a solemn commitment to securing the future of the nation.