

THE RETURN OF COALITION POLITICS AND ITS IMPACT

CHANDRA SHEKHAR AZAD'S VICTORY POTENTIAL RE-BIRTH OF DALIT POLITICS



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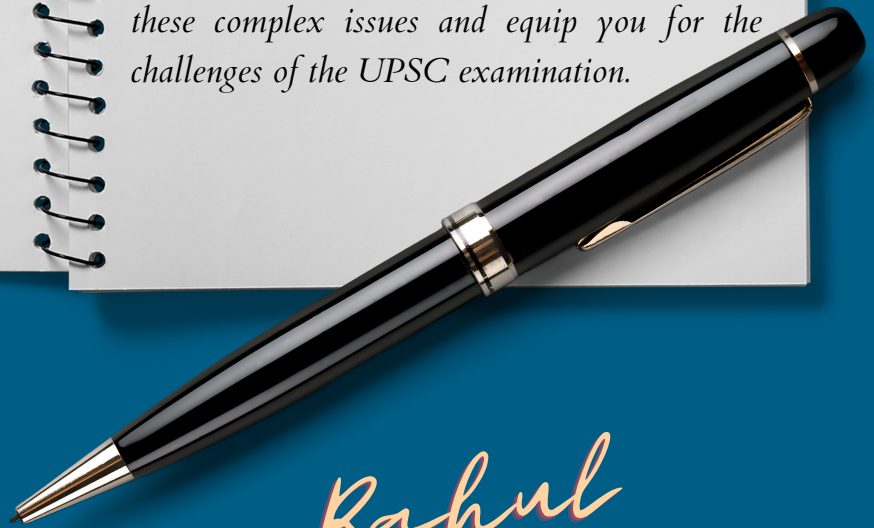
Welcome to the June 2024 edition of "Perspectives," your guide to the latest developments in political science and international relations, curated by the RausIAS PSIR team. This magazine aims to illuminate the complexities of current affairs for UPSC aspirants, grounding your understanding in the core principles of justice, equality, liberty, and development.

In this edition, we explore pivotal topics shaping the global and regional landscape. We analyze India's evolving neighborhood policy, advocating for a broader focus beyond Pakistan. We also delve into the strategic implications of the Russia-China alliance and the waning era of unipolarity in global politics.

Further, we discuss the emerging role of paradiplomacy, the current crisis of liberalism in India, and the renewed significance of India-Iran relations. The potential regional impact following the death of Iran's President is examined, along with an in-depth analysis of religion-based reservations in India.

Lastly, we address the growing importance of digital competition law in the contemporary digital age.

Join us in this edition of "Perspectives" as we provide the essential insights needed to navigate these complex issues and equip you for the challenges of the UPSC examination.



Rahul Puri

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DISRUPTION AND DISORDER WILL DEFINE EAST ASIA IN 2024

As the US's global leadership in upholding the rules-based order will be stretched, regional actors will have to rise to the occasion and maintain order and stability in 2024

Titli Basu (ORF)

As the 2024 election season unfolds, the Indo-Pacific geopolitics will be increasingly influenced by competing norms, narratives, values, and strategic realities, testing old alliances and alignments. **Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) winning for the third time has unsettled Beijing**, heightening regional tensions. While Taiwan's democracy is applauded, Beijing is working to weaken Taipei's diplomatic allies.

The **rules-based international order faces challenges from the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and the Red Sea situation**, increasing risks of strategic miscalculations. Despite Sino-US Defense Policy Coordination Talks aiming to prevent conflict, East Asian flashpoints remain hot.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasizes the importance of Sino-US cooperation. He argues that **Washington is creating an Indo-Pacific NATO** through its "five-four-three-two" strategy. The stakes in Taiwan's political future are high, with President Xi Jinping seeing unification as inevitable and President Biden framing the issue as a competition between democracies and autocracies.

China portrays Taiwan's election as a choice between "war and peace." Disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, and military presence in the South China Sea pressure Taiwan and the region. **North Korea's rhetoric destabilizes the inter-Korean balance**, and Russia's use of North Korean missiles in Ukraine complicates regional calculations. Increased military exercises highlight the importance of trilateral alliances shaping Northeast Asian politics and order. North Korea strengthens military ties with Russia and China against the US-led order, while the US and its allies enhance strategic coordination.

Beijing tries to leverage the China-Japan-South Korea trilateral framework to drive a wedge between Washington and its allies, but Tokyo and Seoul focus on regional trade, limiting its effectiveness. The 2024 elections in Taiwan, the US, and Japan will significantly influence regional geopolitics. Japan might see a leadership change due to domestic political dynamics, impacting its China policy.

The possibility of Trump returning to power raises questions about alliance management amid ongoing conflicts. The run-up to the US presidential election will further polarise politics and test American democracy and institutions.

In geoeconomics, **G7 elites prioritise economic security, focusing on export control and de-risking strategies.** Effectiveness depends on enforceability, as seen in the US Steel and Nippon Steel deal. The IMF warns that de-risking strategies by major economies will have global impacts, and comprehensive reforms in China could generate positive spillovers.

Marching into 2024, US allies in East Asia must enhance their diplomatic efforts, matching resources and responsibilities, to counter authoritarian forces. Balancing national interests with regional stability and global security will be crucial in maintaining a resilient Indo-Pacific amidst evolving challenges and uncertainties.

WHERE DOES INDIA STAND WITH RESPECT TO THE G-7?

Suhashini Haider

The G7 was formed in 1975 as an informal forum for the leaders of the world's major industrialized democracies to discuss economic and political issues. G7 is an intergovernmental political forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Union (EU) is also represented within the G7 but is not a member state.

G-7 Summit Objectives: The summit aimed to bridge differences between the West and other regions, fund support for Ukraine, invest in Africa, address migration, climate change, and AI challenges. It included making \$50 billion available for Ukraine, focusing on clean energy investments in Africa, criticizing China's trade practices, and engaging with leaders from 10 countries, including India, on Global South concerns.

India's Role in G-7: India has been a key part of the G-7 process, gaining attention for its growth during the 2000s global financial collapse. As a significant member of the Global South and G-20 troika, Prime Minister Modi is a central figure at G-7 outreaches.

Importance for India: The G-7 outreach is vital for India to showcase achievements and perspectives. Prime Minister Modi emphasized India's democratic success, technology, AI for global equality, and addressing Global South concerns. He held bilateral meetings with several leaders, including a notable meeting with Ukraine President Zelenskyy and a brief interaction with U.S. President Biden.

India's Interactions: Modi had a less cordial meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau, highlighting strained bilateral ties but used the G-7 outreach to meet global leaders and set priorities for his new term.

Future of G-7: The G-7 faces criticism for being elitist and non-inclusive, lacking representation from major economies like China, India, and Brazil. It is challenged by the expanding BRICS group. The G-7's inability to influence significant global conflicts and geopolitical issues raises questions about its relevance. Future effectiveness and composition will be tested, with the next summit in Canada in 2025, and it remains to be seen if India will continue to participate on the margins.

A REBOOT AT G7

The great churn triggered by growing interdependence of the European and Asian theaters is accompanied by the rise of middle powers with influence. India can use this window to increase national power

C Raja Mohan

Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent visits to North Korea and Vietnam, along with this week's US presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, underscore the **deepening connections between European and Asian security**, offering new strategic opportunities for middle powers like India.

The new "Eurasian" geopolitics has four significant aspects. **First, Asia is no longer just a passive participant in European geopolitics;** it actively contributes. Historically, Asian resources significantly influenced European imperial powers, notably through Indian military contributions in the World Wars. Now, Asian states independently shape the balance of power in Europe, as seen in the responses to the Ukraine war, where both Russia and Western Europe are courting Asian nations for support.

Second, Asia has become a major arms supplier in European conflicts, exemplified by North Korea supplying ammunition to Russia and South Korea sending arms to Ukraine. China, while not supplying arms, supports Russia in other ways, and the US is pushing Japan to aid Ukraine. Putin's recent visit to North Korea and the signing of a mutual security treaty illustrate Russia's renewed interest in Pyongyang. North Korea, in turn, uses its relationship with Russia to maneuver among China, Japan, South Korea, and the US.

The Biden Administration has strengthened alliances with South Korea and developed a trilateral arrangement with Seoul and Tokyo. China has also revived trilateral cooperation with Japan and South Korea. Vietnam's hosting of Putin, Biden, and Xi within nine months highlights its strategic balancing act between China and the US, while renewing ties with Russia.

Third, as Asia's strategic maneuvering increases, Western dilemmas deepen, particularly in the US, where there's a debate over prioritizing military efforts in Europe versus Asia. Some Republicans argue the US should focus on Asia rather than Ukraine, while the Biden Administration recognizes China as the main challenge but remains committed to supporting Ukraine. This debate is expected to feature in the Trump-Biden discussion.

Finally, the US wants Europe to take greater responsibility for its defense, a stance both Biden and Trump agree on. This means Eurasian nations should help balance Russia and China, easing America's burden. While Europe struggles to unify its defense efforts, Asian states like Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea are more willing to contribute to regional security. Europe is anxious about Russia but divided on China, balancing economic ties with strategic concerns.

The rising interdependence of European and Asian theatres is paralleled by the growing influence of middle powers like India. The US seeks strong security partnerships with these powers to counterbalance China and Russia, offering them an opportunity to enhance their national power and military capabilities. However, this strategic window is temporary, and India must swiftly modernize its defense industrial base and expand arms production to achieve true strategic autonomy.

MODI 3.0 AND THE LIKELY TRAJECTORY OF INDIA-WEST ASIA TIES

Given the strong convergence of economic and security interests, it is certain that India-West Asia ties are going to flourish further.

ALVITE NINGTHOUJAM (ORF)

Significant improvements were made with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Israel during Modi's previous terms, highlighted by External Affairs Minister Jaishankar's visit to Abu Dhabi, marking a vital strategic partnership.

India's partnerships with the Middle East (ME) will likely strengthen and expand in various sectors such as military-security, science and technology, and energy. Economic and energy cooperation remains crucial, with significant trade growth with Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel. The India-UAE CEPA aims to boost bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030, while Saudi Arabia's Strategic Partnership Council will steer trade and security ties, targeting \$100 billion in trade.

Economic ties with the ME are growing as both sides seek mutual investments to achieve socio-economic reform plans like Saudi Vision 2030. GCC became India's largest regional trading partner in FY 2022-23, with efforts to finalize a Free Trade Agreement.

Oil and energy trade remains vital, with over 50% of India's crude oil and 70% of gas imports from the Gulf. **Despite diversification, Gulf suppliers will continue to dominate India's imports.** Renewables are a new cooperation area, with agreements between India, Saudi Arabia, and UAE promoting clean energy. UAE's Masdar plans to acquire Ayana Renewable Power, boosting renewable energy collaboration.

India's growing role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) will enhance maritime security and naval cooperation with GCC countries. Joint exercises aim to ensure the safety of trade and freedom of navigation. Defence industrial cooperation, particularly in maritime technology, can be explored.

India-ME ties are expected to flourish due to strong economic and security interests. Formal groundwork since 2014 has set the stage for further bilateral ties. Mini-lateral partnerships, like the India-Middle East-Europe-Economic-Corridor (IMEEC), will expand cooperation. India should remain aware of regional security dynamics and China's growing influence in the ME.

FROM CHINA TILT TO A BALANCING WITH BEIJING AND DELHI

With Male facing increasing domestic and foreign policy challenges, Mohamed Muizzu is possibly aiming at a reconciliation with India

HARSH V. PANT & ADITYA GOWDARA SHIVAMURTHY

Mohamed Muizzu has pursued a "pro-Maldives" policy aimed at reducing the country's dependence on India, strengthening ties with China, and diversifying its foreign relations. This approach reflects his domestic political strategy, which leverages nationalist and religious sentiments. His party, which led the "India Out" campaign, has utilized anti-Indian rhetoric to consolidate its voter base in the Maldives.

The Maldives faces significant economic challenges, including a high debt-to-GDP ratio, low revenues, and declining foreign reserves. These economic difficulties have prompted a reassessment of the country's foreign policy. Muizzu's initial expectations from China have not fully materialized, despite signing multiple agreements and upgrading bilateral relations. **China has shown reluctance to invest heavily in the Maldives' infrastructure projects,** citing concerns over the country's increasing debt burden. Instead, Beijing has preferred to offer grants over loans.

In contrast, India has adopted an accommodative policy toward the Maldives, continuing to engage despite anti-Indian rhetoric and Muizzu's close relations with China.

India has increased its development assistance, replaced military personnel with civilian experts, and extended a \$50 million treasury bill on zero interest. These measures reflect India's intent to maintain engagement with the Maldives and foster mutual respect and cooperation.

Muizzu is now attempting to balance relations with both China and India rather than aligning solely with one. This strategic recalibration is driven by the need to address economic challenges and leverage competition between India and China to benefit the Maldives. The invitation extended by India for Muizzu to attend Narendra Modi's swearing-in signifies New Delhi's commitment to maintain bilateral ties, regardless of the ruling party in the Maldives.

While Muizzu's ties with China remain strong, he has recognized the importance of not completely alienating India. **By balancing relationships with both countries, Muizzu aims to maximize the benefits for the Maldives amid the ongoing regional competition between India and China.** This nuanced approach indicates a shift in his foreign policy strategy, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a flexible and balanced diplomatic stance.

“IT’S TIME FOR INDIA TO RECLAIM ITS VOICE ON TIBET”

Suhasini Haidar

India must avoid ceding the centre stage in its own region on foreign policy and on Tibet issues

The U.S. lawmakers' visit to Dharamshala came just after the passage of the 'Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act' in Congress, awaiting President Biden's signature. Democrat and Republican co-authors of the Bill, invited by the Central Tibetan Administration, were part of the delegation.

New Delhi would have anticipated speeches criticizing China's repression of Tibetans, calling for renewed talks between the Dalai Lama's representatives and Beijing, and advocating for a Free Tibet. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi emphasized the U.S.'s clear stance on Tibet's freedom.

The presence of U.S. officials and lawmakers in Dharamshala is not new, but a public rally of this kind in India is recent. The External Affairs Minister hosted the delegation for dinner, and the Prime Minister met them, suggesting a considered decision by New Delhi. Allowing American politicians to promote a U.S. law and policy among the Tibetan refugee population in India may convey weakness and risks losing control over its foreign policy narrative on Tibet.

India has not publicly voiced concerns on Tibet's treatment since its actions since 1959, such as offering refuge to the Dalai Lama, speak louder. India recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region as part of China and has stopped articulating a 'One China' policy since 2010 due to China's actions.

India does not officially recognize the Tibetan Government or Parliament in Exile beyond organizing mechanisms for Tibetans. Prime Minister Modi invited the Tibetan Sikyong in 2014 but not in 2019 or recently.

If India wishes to adopt a more strident position on Tibet, Indian officials should have made the statements addressed by U.S. lawmakers. Allowing the U.S. delegation to speak from India could diminish India's influence in the region.

The problem of U.S. leaders sending messages to Beijing from India sidelines India in a significant matter. India's influence in South Asia is being reduced by U.S.-China contestations. India must reclaim its policy narrative, especially concerning the Dalai Lama's succession, without being overshadowed by other countries.

REIMAGINING INDIAN FEDERALISM

Shashi Tharoor

The return of coalition governance to New Delhi offers hope

On June 4, 2024, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fell short of a majority in the Lok Sabha, relying on regional partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to form a coalition government. This outcome could potentially revitalize India's federal structure, which has suffered under a centralized approach since 2014.

Centralized Federalism under Modi

Since 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has increasingly centralized power, undermining state autonomy. Actions such as imposing Hindi on southern states, using federal agencies against political opponents, and mismanaging funds like the PM CARES Fund have exemplified this trend. Additionally, the abrogation of Article 370 and fiscal policies that favor the central government over states have further strained federal relations.

Impending Challenges

The 91st Amendment, which ensures parliamentary constituencies are based on the 1971 Census, will lapse in 2026. The BJP's reluctance to renew this provision raises fears of disenfranchisement for southern states, potentially giving Hindi-speaking states a two-thirds majority. The Fifteenth Finance Commission's decision to base allocations on the 2011 Census has already exacerbated regional imbalances, sending more tax money from the south to the north.

Regional Parties and Coalition Dynamics

Despite the BJP's reduced majority, there are no clear signs that regional parties within the NDA will bolster India's federal structure. While these parties have secured cabinet positions and state-specific benefits, they are unlikely to champion cooperative federalism. Instead, their focus remains on local gains rather than strengthening the federal framework.

Modi's Shift in Federalism

As Gujarat's Chief Minister, Narendra Modi advocated for decentralized policymaking and competitive federalism. However, as Prime Minister, his approach has shifted towards centralization, contradicting his earlier stance on state autonomy.

Reviving Cooperative Federalism

To leverage the coalition government for cooperative federalism, opposition-ruled states, especially in the south, need to capitalize on the BJP's reduced majority. Reviving the Inter-State Council, an independent forum for consultation and coordination, could be a starting point. This council, envisioned in Article 263 of the Constitution and established in the 1990s, has degenerated under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Restoring its independence and authority is crucial for fostering cooperative federalism.



India's diversity demands a federal system that respects regional differences while promoting a sense of common belonging. Centralizing power risks fracturing the delicate bonds that hold the nation together. A renewed focus on cooperative federalism, facilitated by a coalition government and empowered forums like the Inter-State Council, is essential for maintaining unity and addressing the unique challenges of each state.

THE RETURN OF COALITION POLITICS AND ITS IMPACT ON FEDERALISM IN INDIA

Louise Tillin

The return of coalition politics and the new electoral dynamics provide an opportunity for a renewed vision of federalism in India. Empowering inter-governmental bodies and fostering a cooperative approach can help restore trust between the Centre and the states, benefiting all parties and supporting India's diverse and dynamic democracy.

The 2024 general election has heralded the return of coalition politics in India, bringing the questions of federalism and Centre-state relations to the forefront. **The BJP's increased reliance on regional allies and its expanded presence in southern India offers a potential for a federal reset**, though its realization remains uncertain.

Historical Context and Recent Changes Since 2014, **significant changes have been introduced by the BJP in Centre-state relations.** The abolition of the Planning Commission and the establishment of Niti Aayog marked the beginning of Modi's first term, aiming to strengthen cooperative federalism. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 was another major reform in fiscal federalism. However, Modi's second term saw a shift towards centralization with the abrogation of Article 370, and the proposal of "One nation, one election" further emphasized a unification agenda.

Tensions and the Need for Balance The elections highlighted tensions over federalism, particularly with the pending exercise of delimitation, which raised concerns about a potential north-south divide.

Less populous, Opposition-dominated southern states feared a redistribution of parliamentary representation favoring the populous BJP-dominated northern states, threatening the fiscal federal pact. The return of coalition government introduces multiple centers of power, potentially restoring balance and trust in federalism.

Role of Regional Parties While regional parties are key power-brokers in the coalition, their focus has been on advancing their own interests and those of their states, often without a broader vision for federalism. This special-interest regional politics could threaten the wider federal bargain, extending the idea of a "double engine" government beyond the BJP.

Challenges to Federalism Coalition partners may not significantly diverge from the BJP's "one nation" vision. Historical support for centralizing policies by regional party members suggests that their presence in government may not necessarily advocate for stronger state interests. This period of political change, however, offers a moment for reflection and a potential reset of Centre-state relations, which is in the long-term interest of all parties.

Strengthening Institutional Dialogue Prime Minister Modi has called for cooperative Centre-state working relationships. Strengthening the institutional space for dialogue, particularly through empowering the Inter-State Council, is crucial. Established after the Sarkaria Commission's recommendations, the Council has largely fallen into abeyance. Granting it greater independence and statutory responsibilities would enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness in dispute resolution and policy coordination.

Building Trust through Delimitation To build trust over the delimitation exercise, a transparent process ensuring consensus among all states is essential. Learning from the consensus-building process that led to the introduction of GST, a similar approach can respect principles of representation and redistribution without diminishing state autonomy.

CHANDRA SHEKHAR AZAD'S VICTORY IN NAGINA

Dalit politics in India has undergone significant evolution since independence. Initially, Dalit leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar championed for the rights and social justice of the Dalit community, leading to the formation of the Indian Constitution which enshrines provisions for their upliftment. Over the decades, Dalit political movements have sought to address the systemic discrimination and socio-economic challenges faced by the community. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) under Kanshi Ram and Mayawati marked a significant shift, with Dalits asserting political power and influence. However, Dalit politics has faced challenges such as internal divisions, co-optation by mainstream parties, and the need to balance caste-based identity politics with broader socio-economic issues.

Chandra Shekhar Azad's victory in Nagina marks a significant moment in Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh. Despite a strong win in a reserved seat, Azad has maintained a distance from both the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), emphasizing his commitment to justice for the underprivileged irrespective of political affiliations. This independent stance has not been well-received by either alliance, with suspicions from some SP members about his political motives.

The BJP's dominance in reserved seats has diminished, with a notable shift in favor of the SP and Congress. The Azad Samaj Party (Kanshiram) has made significant inroads, particularly in Nagina, reflecting Azad's growing influence among Dalits and backward Muslims. This shift has been attributed to his grassroots activism, including his role in anti-NRC protests and his support for victims of police brutality.

Azad's independent victory and his ideological stance signify a potential re-birth of assertive Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh, challenging established political norms and emphasizing grassroots activism and constitutional rights.

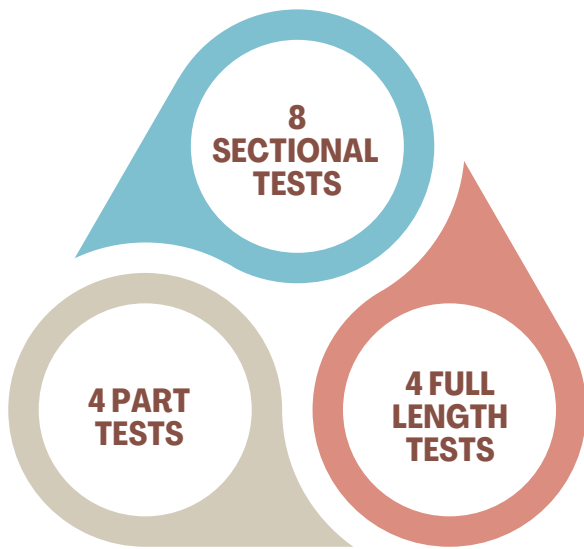
Azad's approach contrasts with that of the BSP under Mayawati, who moved away from the Bahujan matrix to a more inclusive Sarvajan formula, which some believe diluted the party's focus on OBCs and impacted its electoral strength. Azad's emphasis on the Kanshiram formula, focusing on the underprivileged across all communities but avoiding power-sharing with upper castes, has resonated with many Dalits.

In Saharanpur, **Azad is seen as a successor to Mayawati, inspiring confidence among young Dalit voters with his activism.** Despite this, some elders remain loyal to Mayawati, viewing Azad as a potential future leader. BAMCEF members highlight the temporary nature of the current political shift, stressing that sustained support will depend on the actions of other leaders like Akhilesh Yadav and their commitment to protecting constitutional provisions and reservations.

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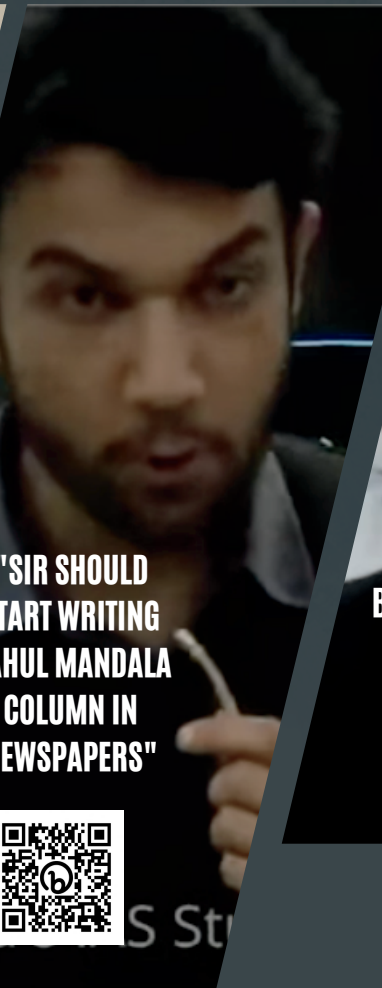




"WORDS CAN NOT EXPRESS THE GRATITUDE WE HAVE FOR SIR"



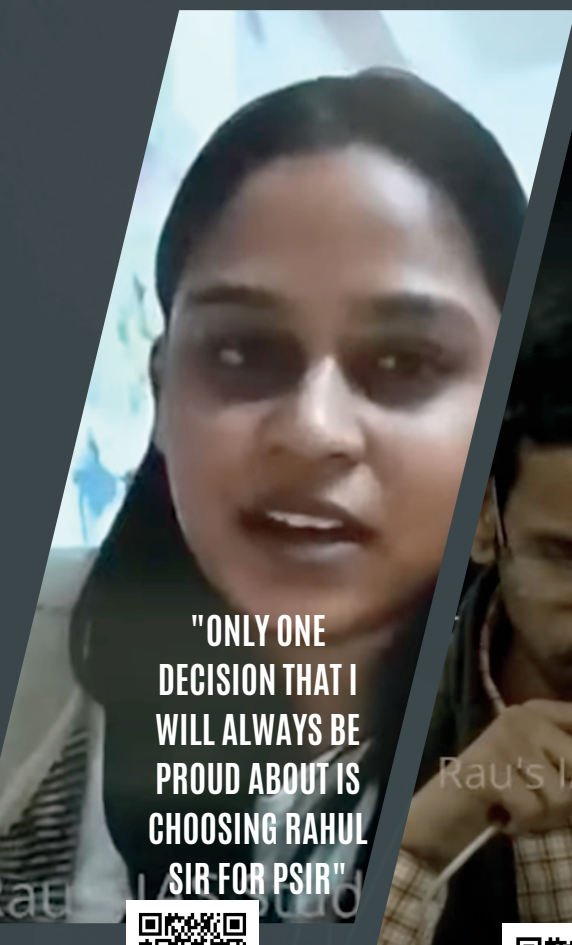
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