

Yemen's woes

The Saudi airstrikes on Sanaa risk tipping the country back to pre-ceasefire days

The withdrawal of Houthi rebels from three of Yemen's ports as part of the December 2018 ceasefire agreement should have been the basis for further talks to expand the truce to other parts of the country. But while the withdrawal was under way last week, Houthis, who are reportedly getting support from Iran, carried out a drone attack on a Saudi pipeline, and in retaliation Riyadh launched airstrikes on Sanaa, the capital city controlled by the rebels, killing at least six civilians, including children. Yemen now risks falling back to the pre-ceasefire days of conflict with fighting having broken out in parts of the government-controlled south. What makes the resumption of hostilities more dangerous is the regional angle. Tensions are on the rise in West Asia over the U.S.-Iran standoff. The U.S. had earlier warned against possible attacks by either Iran or Iran-backed militias against American interests or its allies in the region, and has deployed an aircraft carrier and a bomber squad to the Gulf. Immediately after the pipeline was attacked, the Saudis blamed Iran for ordering it, an allegation which both Tehran and the Houthis have refuted. Whether Iran was actually behind the attack or not, the incident and the subsequent Saudi airstrikes show how the Yemeni conflict is entangled with the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia started its Yemen military campaign in March 2015 with the goal of driving Houthis out of territories they captured. Four years of war have devastated the country. According to the UN, at least 7,000 civilians have been killed. Thousands of others have died due to disease, poor health care and malnutrition. The blockade Saudi Arabia imposed on Yemen steadily worsened the country's hunger problem and health-care crisis. The country is on the brink of a famine. It's a shame that even when the ceasefire was holding, the Saudis did not halt bombing Yemen. Saudi Arabia appears to be frustrated that it is not able to defeat the Houthis even after years of heavy bombing. The Houthis, on their part, continue to provoke the Saudis through cross-border rocket and drone attacks. The Yemenis are stuck in between. The way forward is the Hodeida model. The December ceasefire took effect in the Red Sea port city and both the rebels and government forces stuck to it till the rebels pulled out last week. They should continue talks under international mediation and replicate the Hodeida model elsewhere in Yemen. For this to be achieved, the Houthis should decouple themselves from the regional politics, and stay focussed on resolving differences with the government and rebuilding the war-torn country, while Saudi Arabia should get out of Yemen.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Woes		misery, sorrow, distress, sadness, melancholy
Tipping		overturn, topple over, upset
Truce		Ceasefire, armistice, peace
Retaliation		Revenge, vengeance, reprisal, retribution
Breakout		Spread, start, suddenly, flare up
Resumption		Restart, re commencement, re-opening, renewal
Hostilities	Noun	Antagonism, enmity, animosity, belligerence
Stand off		Suspension of hostilities, tie, deadlock, impasse, stalemate
Deploy		Position, Station, install, locate, base
Refute		Disprove, prove false, controvert, debunk
Entangle		Twist, intertwine, entwine, embroil, mix-up
Devastate		destroy, ravage, pull down, write off, wipe out

Blockade	Barricade, barrier, obstruction
On the brink	very near, imminent, about
Provoke	instil, instigate, tempt, backfire
Replicate	copy, reproduce, duplicate, recreate
Decouple	dis-connect, separate, alienate, get rid of
Torn	destroyed.

Eye On the monsoon:

States must set up new recharging wells and improve existing ones on a war footing

As India awaits the arrival of the annual summer monsoon, hopes are particularly high for normal rainfall that is so vital for agriculture, the health of forests, rivers and wetlands. The India Meteorological Department has forecast normal rainfall of 96% of the long period average of 89 cm rain, with an onset date in the first week of June in Kerala. It has also signaled a significant possibility of a deficit. The monsoon bounty is crucial for the 60% of gross cropped area in farming that is rain-fed, and represents, in the assessment of the National Commission on Farmers, 45% of agricultural output. Given the erratic patterns of rainfall witnessed over the past few decades and their possible connection to atmospheric changes caused by a variety of pollutants, the distribution of monsoon 2019 will add to the insights. The southwest monsoon is a determinant of India's overall prosperity, and sustained efforts to make the best use of rainfall are absolutely important for farms, cities and industry. Considering that there has been a 52% decline in groundwater levels based on tests conducted last year over the previous decadal average, State governments should have pursued the setting up of new recharging wells and made improvements to existing ones on a war footing. They also have lagged in building structures to harvest surface water and helping farmers raise the efficiency of irrigation. The approach to the farming sector, however, has been influenced more by the imperatives of an election year, and the Centre's biggest intervention was to announce a cash handout to specified categories of small farmers.

A normal summer monsoon over the subcontinent brings widespread prosperity, but does not guarantee a uniform spread. This, as scientists point out, may be due to the effect of particulates released through various industrial and agricultural processes. Some of these aerosols suppress the rainfall and disperse it across the land, causing long breaks in precipitation, while others absorb heat and lead to a convection phenomenon that increases rainfall in some places. Such evidence points to the need for India to clean up its act on rising industrial emissions, and burning of fossil fuels and biomass in order to improve the stability of the monsoon. An equally key area of concern is freshwater availability for households, which, NITI Aayog says, account for 4% of available supplies, besides 12% used by industry. Urbanisation trends and the severe water stress that residents experience underscore the need for mandatory rainwater harvesting policies and augmented efforts by States to preserve surface water by building new reservoirs. Yet, governments are adopting a commodity approach to the vital resource, displaying deplorable indifference to the pollution and loss of rivers, wetlands and lakes that hold precious waters. This is no way to treat a life-giving resource.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Footing	Noun	Basis, Standard
Onset	Noun	Start, beginning, commencement, inception
Bounty		Reward, award/generosity, munificence
Assessment	Noun	Evaluation, valuation
Erratic		Uneven, irregular, unpredictable, fluctuating
Determinant		Responsible, Factor
Pursue		Continue, follow
Imperative		Important, vital, essential

Handout	Charity, Financial support, donations
Particulates	minute separate particles, dirt
Disperse	Break up, split up, disband
Precipitation	Rain, snow
Convection	The process in which heat moves through gas liquid
Augment	increase, enlarge, expand
Deplorable	disgraceful, shameful, dishonourable

Fire and laissez-faire:

Fix accountability for Surat tragedy, and update the fire safety protocol country wide:

The deadly fire in a Surat coaching centre that resulted in the death of 22 young people highlights the gap between India's dreamy visions of smart cities and the cruel reality of urban chaos and lawlessness. Images of students leaping from the blazing building in a bid to escape will remain imprinted on the public consciousness; many more teenagers were hopelessly overpowered by the flames within the premises, while a lucky few escaped with their lives. These young Indians are the latest victims of a culture of laissez-faire urbanization that city governments have bred and which the courts allow to be pursued without severe penalties. India's abysmal record on fire safety is reflected in the death of 17,700 people countrywide in fires in both public and residential buildings during 2015, according to the latest available data from the National Crime Records Bureau. Periodically, high-profile cases such as the Uphaar cinema blaze in Delhi that killed 59 people in 1997, and the Kumbakonam school fire in Tamil Nadu in 2004 in which 94 children perished shock the nation, but even these are not strong enough to persuade governments to make fire safety the priority it should be. Neither has prolonged, aggressive litigation by the affected families in the Uphaar case made a difference, because the criminal culpability of the administrative machinery and officials who sanctioned unsafe buildings, often in return for bribes, remains largely unaddressed.

The Surat fire cannot be called an accident, since there are reports of notices having been served to the builder on the risks, but not pursued by the Fire Department. Civic officials have displayed unforgivable indifference, since two deaths occurred in another coaching centre in the city late last year. That tragedy should have led to a comprehensive review of public buildings. The present inquiry into the disaster should go into any deviations from the sanctioned plan for the commercial building housing the coaching centre, and the role of urban planning officials in allowing it to come up. Ultimately, litigation on fire disasters goes to the courts, and it is essential for the judiciary to send out the message that there will be no tolerance to corruption and evasion in the enforcement of building rules and fire safety. Beyond suspending a few officials and filing cases against the building owners, there is a need to make an example of sanctioning and enforcement authorities. The unwavering message must be that Indians demand accountability. Mandating compulsory insurance for all public buildings against fire risk and public liability can bring about a change to the way architects and builders approach the question of safety, since the insurer would require a reduction of risk and compliance with building plans. At least, that would be a start to rewriting India's shameful record on fire safety.

Words

Laizzez – faire
 Chaos
 Leap
 Bid
 Overpower

Kind

Meaning

free enterprise, free trade, non-intervention
 dis-order, dis array, may-hem, confusion
 jump, vault, spring over, spring, bourd over
 attempt, try, endeavour, effort
 overcome, overwhelm, affect, move, stir

Pursue	follow, run after, erase, track
Abysmal	very bad, awful, flagrant, disgraceful
Perish	dil, come to an end, pass away, kick the bucket
Prolong	lengthen, extend, draw out
Culpability	Blame, guilt, fault, catch, in)
Litigation	Proceedings, legal action, law suits
Disaster	tragedy, catastrophe, cataclysm
Deviation	difference, divergence, irregularity
Evasion	Avoidance, elusion, circumvention, dodging
Unwavering	Steady, fixed, resolute, firm
Mandate	authority, endorsement, approval
Compliance	cooperative, complaisant, acquiescent, biddable

Mandate and after:

The editorial, "For a rediscovery of India" (May 24), has tossed a new catchword into the BJP's camp: "sabka vishwas (the trust of all)." Despite the editorial's attempt to strike a balance between uncritical praise and fair criticism, one feels that the purported objectivity seems marred by two sweeping and unambiguous assertions. One is attributing the outcome to an "electoral endorsement of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism". I don't think many people who voted for the BJP will even remotely be aware that such an ideological world view exists in the first place. It will be a mistake to seek and confirm the existence of an overarching pull factor that drew voters towards the ruling party. The pre- and post-poll surveys pointed to the high level of trust that large segments of society reposed in the leadership of Mr. Modi. The other troubling finding is the claim that Mr. Modi's first term was "marred by arrogant pride and hateful prejudice". This appears to be a sweeping denunciation that can be countered. Despite his popularity, no Prime Minister in independent India has been as viciously targeted by his opponents as Mr. Modi, sometimes overstepping the boundaries of decorum.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Catchword		slogan, battle cry, catch phrase
Purported		claimed, professed, avowed
Mar		spoil, impair, disfigure, blemish
Un ambiguous		clear, explicit, lucid, limpid
Assertions		declaration, berald, professing
Outcome		result, aftermath, up shots, consequence
Endorsement		Support, backing, approval, agreement
Repose	Noun	rest, inactivity, sleep, slumber
Denunciation		criticism, broadside, obloquy, calumny
Counter		oppose, combat
Vicious		harmful, virulent, vitriolic, detrimental