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Beyond the Hydrogen Train
Science, Technology and India's Journey Towards Energy Sovereignty – Part III

By Uday Kumar Varma

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The Economics of a New Energy Revolution

No discussion of hydrogen would be complete without addressing the question that ultimately determines the success of every new technology: can it become affordable?

At present, green hydrogen remains more expensive than conventional hydrogen produced from fossil fuels. Electrolysers are still costly, renewable electricity must be available at scale, and the infrastructure required for storage, transportation and refuelling demands substantial investment. These realities explain why hydrogen has not yet become a mainstream energy source.

Yet technological history repeatedly teaches the same lesson: today's expensive innovation often becomes tomorrow's ordinary utility.

Only two decades ago, solar electricity was regarded as prohibitively expensive. Few imagined that it would one day become among the cheapest sources of power in many countries. Lithium-ion batteries have followed a similar trajectory. As manufacturing expanded, scientific advances accumulated and economies of scale emerged, costs declined dramatically.

Hydrogen is likely to travel a comparable path.

India enters this transition with several natural advantages. It possesses abundant sunshine, rapidly expanding renewable-energy capacity and some of the world's most competitive solar tariffs. These strengths provide the essential foundation for producing green hydrogen at increasingly affordable costs. As domestic manufacturing of electrolysers, fuel cells and associated equipment grows, the economics are expected to improve further.

This is precisely the objective of the National Green Hydrogen Mission. It seeks not merely to promote a cleaner fuel but to create an entire industrial ecosystem encompassing scientific research, advanced manufacturing, skilled human resources, innovation, standards and exports.

The true value of the Mission therefore lies not only in producing hydrogen but in creating the capability to build a globally competitive hydrogen economy.

Beyond Railways: The Wider Hydrogen Economy

The hydrogen train has understandably attracted public attention because it is visible. The more profound transformation, however, is likely to occur elsewhere.

Steel is one of the world's largest industrial sources of carbon emissions. Hydrogen offers the possibility of replacing coal in certain stages of steel production, opening the path towards "green steel".

Fertiliser manufacture already depends heavily upon hydrogen, making the transition to green hydrogen both logical and potentially transformative. Refineries, chemical industries and long-distance freight transport present similar opportunities.

Hydrogen also offers promise for sectors where batteries face inherent limitations. Heavy commercial vehicles travelling long distances, ships crossing oceans, mining equipment operating continuously and perhaps even certain categories of aircraft require energy systems that combine high energy density with rapid refuelling. Hydrogen may provide one of the few viable pathways for decarbonising these difficult sectors.

Equally significant is hydrogen's ability to store renewable energy.

Solar power is available only during daylight hours, while wind energy fluctuates with weather conditions. Hydrogen enables surplus renewable electricity to be converted into a storable form of energy that can later be used whenever demand arises. In this way, hydrogen complements renewable electricity rather than competing with it.

It serves not merely as another fuel but as an important link connecting renewable generation, industrial production and energy security.

India's Opportunity

The global transition to clean energy is still in its early stages. No country has yet established undisputed leadership across the entire hydrogen value chain. This creates a rare opportunity.

India need not merely participate in this emerging industry. It can aspire to shape it.

Several favourable conditions already exist. The country possesses a rapidly expanding renewable-energy base, a vibrant engineering community, internationally respected scientific institutions and one of the world's largest domestic markets for future hydrogen applications. Its experience in developing affordable technologies at scale—from digital public infrastructure to pharmaceuticals and space missions—demonstrates that India has repeatedly succeeded in delivering innovative solutions under demanding economic conditions.

The challenge now is to integrate these strengths into a coherent hydrogen ecosystem.

Success will require continued investment in fundamental scientific research, sustained support for universities and national laboratories, encouragement of private innovation, development of specialised manufacturing capabilities, internationally benchmarked standards, and the creation of a highly skilled workforce capable of supporting this new industry.

The hydrogen economy cannot be built through government policy alone.

It will require the combined efforts of scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, industry, financial institutions and public policy working in concert.

Energy Security Is National Security

The significance of hydrogen extends beyond economics and environmental protection.

Recent geopolitical tensions have repeatedly reminded the world that energy dependence can become a strategic vulnerability. Nations that rely heavily on imported fossil fuels remain exposed to supply disruptions, price volatility and geopolitical uncertainties beyond their control.

The pursuit of clean energy is therefore not only an environmental imperative; it is increasingly an exercise in strategic autonomy.

For India, which imports a substantial proportion of its energy requirements, the long-term ability to produce clean fuels from domestic renewable resources carries implications extending well beyond climate commitments. It strengthens resilience, improves energy security and enhances national confidence.

There is another dimension that deserves equal attention.

The technologies associated with hydrogen—advanced electrolysers, fuel cells, catalysts, specialised materials, high-pressure storage systems, sensors and intelligent control systems—represent high-value manufacturing sectors in their own right. Countries that master these technologies will not merely reduce emissions. They will create new industries, generate skilled employment, secure intellectual property and participate in global supply chains that are only beginning to emerge.

The real competition, therefore, is not simply about producing hydrogen.

It is about mastering the technologies that make the hydrogen economy possible.

The Journey Ahead

History seldom announces the arrival of a new era with dramatic certainty.

More often, transformative changes begin quietly, almost unnoticed. A laboratory experiment, an engineering prototype, a modest demonstration project—these are frequently the first visible signs of revolutions that later reshape economies and societies.

India's first hydrogen-powered train should be viewed in that light.

It is not, by itself, a transformative achievement. Nor will hydrogen replace every existing source of energy. Like every major technology, it will find its appropriate applications alongside electricity, batteries and other clean-energy solutions.

Its deeper significance lies elsewhere.

It reflects a nation choosing to invest in scientific capability rather than technological dependence, in innovation rather than imitation, and in long-term capacity rather than short-term convenience.

As India celebrates another Independence Day, this may be the larger message carried by the quiet train that now runs across the plains of Haryana.

Political independence gave India the freedom to determine its own destiny. Economic reforms gave it the confidence to compete with the world. Scientific and technological leadership may well define the next stage of its national journey.

The story of the hydrogen train is therefore not fundamentally about railways. Nor is it only about clean energy. It is about whether India chooses to participate in the next industrial revolution as a purchaser of frontier technologies or as one of their creators.

That choice will shape not only the country's economic future but also its strategic influence in an increasingly technology-driven world.

The hydrogen train is not the destination.

It is the beginning of India's hydrogen journey.

UN Votes to Redraw the World: A New Map Gives the Global South Its True Size

By Dr. Santhosh Mathew

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“A map is not just a picture of the world; it is a picture of how we understand the world.” That idea has acquired a new significance at the United Nations, where the General Assembly has overwhelmingly backed a resolution calling for a more accurate representation of the size of the world's continents. In a remarkable vote, 164 countries supported the resolution, the United States voted against it and six countries abstained. Led by Togo with the backing of the African Union, the initiative seeks to correct the distortions created by the world map that generations have grown up with. Africa is set to appear much closer to its actual size, while Europe and North America will lose some of the visual prominence, they acquire on the familiar Mercator projection. What appears at first to be a technical debate among cartographers has therefore become something much bigger: a statement from the Global South that the map of the world should reflect the world as it actually exists. The resolution promotes the wider use of equal-area map projections, including the Equal Earth projection, developed in 2018.The purpose is not to declare one map the only correct map, nor does the resolution ban the centuries-old Mercator projection. It encourages the use of projections that preserve the relative area of continents when the purpose is to understand their actual geographical size. That distinction matters because every flat map of a spherical Earth involves some distortion. The real question is what a map chooses to preserve and what it chooses to distort. The Mercator projection preserves angles and directions, which made it exceptionally useful for navigation. Equal-area projections give priority to preserving the relative size of landmasses. In an age of satellites, GPS and digital cartography, the world no longer needs to depend on one projection for every purpose.

The Mercator map has a remarkable history. Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator introduced it in 1569 when European ships were venturing across oceans in search of new trade routes and territories. His objective was not to create a map that accurately compared the size of continents. It was to help sailors navigate. By preserving angles and directions, Mercator produced a revolutionary tool for maritime navigation. The map served its original purpose brilliantly. The difficulty came when a map created for sailors gradually became the most familiar visual representation of the entire planet. A navigation chart was transformed into a picture through which generations of schoolchildren came to understand the world. The distortion becomes obvious when we compare Greenland with Africa. On a conventional Mercator map, Greenland can appear almost as large as Africa. In reality, Africa is roughly 14 times larger than Greenland. The reason is mathematical. As the spherical Earth is projected onto a flat surface, areas become increasingly enlarged towards the poles. Greenland, located close to the Arctic, is therefore dramatically exaggerated, while Africa, much closer to the Equator, appears considerably smaller than its actual area. Europe and North America also acquire a greater visual size, while Africa and South America are compressed. The map is not “wrong” in the sense that Mercator failed at his original task. It becomes misleading when people use it to compare the actual geographical size of continents.

This is where the new UN initiative acquires its political and cultural significance. For the Global South, the problem is not merely that Africa looks smaller on a classroom map. Maps influence the imagination. Children encounter the world first through maps before they learn about population, resources, economic power or political influence. What appears large can unconsciously appear important; what appears small can seem peripheral. A cartographic distortion can therefore become a distortion of perception. The African argument is that a continent whose geographical reality is immense should not continue to be visually diminished simply because a sixteenth-century navigation system became the standard image of the world. Togo's initiative, supported by the African Union, reflects a broader effort to challenge inherited systems of representation. The resolution points to the educational, cultural, political, social and economic consequences of distorted cartographic representation. The campaign has also been supported by Africa No Filter, which has called for more realistic maps in school textbooks, digital platforms and news media.

The underlying argument is powerful: geographical representation is not politically neutral when the same visual distortion is repeated for generations. If maps help shape how societies understand the world, then correcting the map can also help correct an inherited imbalance in the way the world is imagined.

The history of cartography itself demonstrates the relationship between maps and power. Empires mapped territories they controlled; colonial administrations mapped borders, populations and resources; explorers drew coastlines and trade routes; governments used maps to define political space. A map can tell people not only where a place is, but also how that place fits into a larger world. For much of the modern period, global maps were produced and circulated through institutions dominated by Western powers. The present debate does not require reducing the Mercator projection to a symbol of colonial conspiracy. Its original purpose was navigation, and its technical value remains undeniable. The important point is that the world has changed, while the visual convention remained remarkably persistent. The Equal Earth projection represents a different cartographic philosophy. It was designed by Tom Patterson, Bojan Šavrič and Bernhard Jenny to show continents in a way that preserves their relative areas more accurately. Africa becomes visibly larger; South America gains its appropriate geographical weight and the enormous scale of Asia becomes more apparent. Europe and North America remain exactly where they are; they simply appear in proportions closer to their actual land area. The new map does not magically produce a distortion-free Earth because no flat projection can do that. It makes a different compromise, one that is more appropriate when the objective is to compare the size of continents rather than navigate across oceans.

India's support for the resolution is significant in this wider Global South context. New Delhi has welcomed the effort to improve cartographic accuracy while emphasising that the objective should not be to impose one particular projection everywhere. Different maps serve different purposes. A navigation chart can use Mercator, while a map intended to teach students about the actual size of continents can use an equal-area projection. The principle is therefore not simply "replace Mercator with Equal Earth." It is "use a projection appropriate to the purpose and avoid presenting a distorted picture as though it were the only representation of reality."

The United States, which was the only country to vote against the resolution, strongly criticised the initiative. Washington argued that such a move was unnecessary and questioned the wisdom of the UN spending attention on historical map projections when the world faces wars, economic crises, climate change, migration and other urgent problems. That criticism raises an obvious question: can changing a map really make a difference? The answer depends on what we expect maps to do. If a map is merely a navigation instrument, the issue may seem trivial. If a map is one of the first tools through which billions of people learn about the world, the question becomes much more important. Representation shapes perception, and perception shapes the way people understand their place in the world. The UN resolution therefore should not be interpreted as the death of the Mercator projection. It is better understood as a challenge to its universal dominance. Mercator will remain useful for specific navigational purposes. The resolution asks governments, educational institutions and international organisations to give greater consideration to equal-area projections when geographical size is the subject being represented. That is a modest technical change on paper, but it carries a larger symbolic message. The world of the twenty-first century is no longer the world of sixteenth-century sailing ships. Satellites can photograph the Earth, computers can model it in three dimensions and digital platforms can switch between projections instantly. There is little reason to pretend that one centuries-old projection must serve every modern purpose.

The real significance of the vote lies in the fact that the Global South is increasingly questioning not only the distribution of economic and political power, but also the systems through which knowledge about the world has been produced and communicated.

Africa is not becoming larger because of this resolution. Europe is not becoming smaller. The geographical facts have never changed. What is changing is the representation of those facts. The new map simply asks people to see Africa as large as Africa really is, South America as large as South America really is and Asia in proportion to its enormous geographical reality. The debate also offers a lesson in humility. There is no perfect world map. Every projection involves choices. The important thing is to recognise those choices instead of treating a particular map as an unquestionable picture of reality. The Mercator projection was a masterpiece for navigation. Equal Earth is better suited to showing relative land area. Other projections will remain useful for climate studies, aviation, regional mapping and many other purposes. The future of cartography should therefore be plural rather than uniform, accurate rather than inherited.

For the Global South, this is ultimately about more than cartography. It is about visibility. It is about correcting a visual imbalance that has been repeated so often that it came to look natural. The UN vote gives that argument an international platform. A map cannot redistribute wealth, end wars or change the balance of geopolitical power. It can do something more subtle: it can change the mental picture through which people understand that power. “If the picture of the world is distorted, our understanding of the world will be distorted too.” That is the larger message behind this seemingly unusual UN resolution. The Earth has not changed since Mercator drew his map nearly five centuries ago. Our technology has changed, our geopolitics has changed and the Global South's voice has grown louder. Now the cartographic picture is being asked to catch up with reality. The world is not being redrawn; the way we see the world is.

New Growth Model—

By - Dr. Shivshankar Mishra

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A country of the demographic size of India should normally compare itself only with a country like China which on developmental parameters was like India until four decades ago. But the difference in character and quality of political governance between two countries made China surge ahead and India to lag behind. The leadership in China does not have open challenges as Indian leadership has under a voter-focused political system. The eristic and contrarian attitude of the opposition in India often creates legislative gridlocks. A growth-craving economy cannot afford it but it is inevitable to tolerate it with resultant lethargies and inefficiencies! China in the interregnum of four decades has leapt up more than ten times in every sphere of development, chiefly the economic and technological. It’s the technology in the last two decades that is helping drive the strategic moves and China has managed to master it. Therefore, we have abandoned comparing with China; instead, comparing ourselves with lesser Asian tigers likes the Vietnam. Vietnam is catching attention because it is spotted expanding its global supply chain role and effectively managing economic shifts. It is moving from low-cost assembly base to higher-value generating, deeper supply chain manufacturing platform. That yields it higher margins and helps in attracting huge FDI to join the global trade in AI-related hardware equipment. That presents a business model for India to emulate. Viet Nam's expansion is supported by multiple drivers. Industrial and manufacturing production remains a key variant, expanding by more than ten percent, while the services sector, domestic consumption and tourism support maintaining strong momentum. Agriculture also continues to make a stable contribution to overall economic growth. The compounding effect is that it has managed to achieve a higher GDP per capita in recent years, $5,066 per person, compared to India's $2,702 per person. Vietnam has managed to leverage its demographic advantage fully whereas India is faltering on this. In the age group of 15 & above, India registers overall unemployment rate at over 5% [4% in rural areas and 7% in urban areas];

whereas for Vietnam, it is only 2% evenly distributed between rural and urban population. Amid a challenging global environment, the Vietnamese economy demonstrates resilience due to combining of solid macroeconomic fundamentals and diverse growth drivers. It has succeeded in positioning itself as a strategic manufacturing and technology hub in the global supply chain. There is a wide perception that Vietnam Government is persistently focusing on infrastructure development to foster country's transformation into a higher-value production and technology center. Such industrious image helps in garnering stronger and steady FDI flows. That makes it the role model for India to follow. Otherwise, on many other macro parameters India and Vietnam remain incomparable. There is a huge difference in scales. India's Total GDP is $3.96 trln whereas Vietnam stands at $0.5trl, almost 1⁄8th in size because of their inverse population ratio of 1:15.

Under the over-arching expanse and influence of AI technology, the global economic space is open for grab. It beckons countries having AI-related hardware equipments and services. Much in demand are products like higher versions of electronics, digital products, smartphones, machinery and automotive components. Vietnam equipped itself with what the market needs. That puts it ahead on the supply chain. India is trying to fix its response. That's the point that gives Vietnam a leading edge over India; the one in action mode and the other in decision mode.

It is important to understand the circumstantial advantages between the two countries. Modern Vietnam has emerged from a very turbulent past. Before 1976, it was divided into North and South Vietnam. North was a communist regime and South was a US backed rightist regime. The two parts were engaged in a protracted war for 21 years that almost devastated the economy on both the sides. The two parts were officially unified in 1976 and renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRVN). The new regime felt urgency to transform the country as fast as possible. The agenda it drew up consisted of efficient political governance, socio-economic and educational reforms. Education was made the top priority for the state to invest in; almost 20% of the annual budget. The educational blue print had in the focus the 'basic' level education so the later stages could automatically get a seamless facilitation. The mission statement aimed at creating creative minds from an early age. A comprehensive blue-print was prepared with the target points to facilitate critical thinking and an appropriate skill base. It was to reflect in the curricula. The appropriate pedagogy and teacher competencies were also the essential components of this agenda.

Reconstruction of a nation is always a daunting task but Vietnamese leadership accepted the challenge. The literacy rate went up from 5% to 84% by 1980. The socialist mindset of the government automatically retuned itself to adjust with the LPG environment of 90's and the new millennium started producing good results. Good skill based training and on-job training programmes helped in securing meaningful employments. Educated minds at work are always focused on productivity and quality, further re-enforcing their employability. Such qualified workers automatically became nationalist and community men. Steady incomes spurred living standards and a taste for life style. Working force focused on quality of life and wellness with healthy life styles, proper health care and education for the family. Such higher awareness automatically inspired them to trim the family size. Birth rate dropped. Shrinking population always eases the overall pressure on available resources. Vietnam benefitted from such positive demographic equillibrium. Expanding industrial work space always opens a demographic window of opportunities for the working age cohorts. Vietnam registers lowest unemployment rate with only one dependent on two working people.

It is such model that India should follow. India has an enviable talent pool of scientific and technological competencies; only the distributed entrepreneurial creativity needs to be consolidated and channelized to seize market opportunities. Government's focus needs to be trained on this cohort, shifting from the big business houses. They have grown complacent and mean.

The government data show that corporate giants garner more than three times the credit facility than the tilling farmers. The loan waiver for corporate is available almost for the asking and written off routinely. The volume of NPAs runs in billions. They are squeezing government resources and presents government perceivably despicable. The attention pyramid needs to be inverted. The youth from Millennials-to-GenZ-to-Genα are desperate because of the neglectful attitude of the government. Better to retrain a caring attention at them the earliest. It's not about a distant future but about the now and here situation. They are into AI and startups business, engaged in developing quality products. So as to enhance their capabilities, budgetary focus will have to move from big business to these small startups. The future generations shall need different type of mindset, attitude, capabilities and creativity; for which the hierarchical pyramid of education would have to be inverted; the primary education and its teacher quality occupying the top slot. Vietnam is going to age soon and forfeit its demographic advantage, leaving back its legacy of a worthy educational framework. India's demographic advantage is going to continue for another two decades for which it needs the policy frame to act faster by following Vietnamese mind frame for winning cutting edge power. That is necessary to grab the opportunity. That's not difficult and opens a window of hope to stand in global competition with full confidence.

The Houthi Offensive and its Implications for a Volatile Global Order

By Yash Swar

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With the Yemeni civil war set to enter its 13th year and the tenuous continuation of the 2022 UN mandated ceasefire, the country remains on a knife-edge. The collapse of the UAE backed Southern Transitional Council earlier this year and the recapture of territories held by this group by the Riyadh backed Presidential Leadership Council, contributed towards the internationally recognised government consolidating control over the areas not controlled by the Shia Houthi forces supported by Tehran. The lightning offensive undertaken by the AnsarAllah (Houthi) forces in September and the counter attacks launched by the government forces have caused massive upheaval in the trajectory of the civil war. The attacks on Riyadh's critical energy infrastructure, resulting from this re-emergence of kinetic warfare, have serious implications for global energy markets. These events have been examined through this article.

Brief history of the civil war

The Houthi forces who captured Sanaa in 2014, marking the beginning of the civil war and the ouster of the Hadi government, have since maintained their occupation of north western Yemen. The rise of a de facto Zaydi Shia state supported by Iran on its borders was a strategic nightmare for Riyadh with the Saudis intervening in the civil war in 2015, leading a coalition of Arab powers to subdue the Houthi insurgency and restore the internationally recognised government to power. These efforts resulted in a protracted and costly conflict leading to one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the century. The UN mediated ceasefire in 2022 gave some respite from the conflict though the Houthis shifted focus, concentrating their operations against Israel linked shipping in the Bab el Mandeb Strait in the period following the October 7 Hamas terror attacks and Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip. With the Houthis widening their attacks against nearly every ship traversing the Strait, the US and its allies launched Operation Prosperity Guardian to protect against these attacks. This operation is widely considered to have failed in meeting its strategic objectives.

Analysing the Houthi offensive and the Saudi response

The nearly week-long operations witnessed AnsarAllah capturing approximately 2100 sq kms of territory on the western coast of Yemen, establishing its independent control along the entire coastline overlooking the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb Strait. The most significant victory attained by the Houthis in this onslaught is the occupation of the strategic port city of Mokha. This has been accompanied by the annexation of Zuqar and Perim islands in the Red Sea, thereby attaining the ability of controlling transit through the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el Mandeb Strait. The UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs reported the deaths of hundreds of civilians in this assault and the displacement of more than a hundred thousand citizens. Most of them have fled to Aden, the seat of the Riyadh backed government. Tareq Saleh, the nephew of late former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the leader of the National Resistance Forces (a constituent unit of the PLC), has suffered setbacks too. The NRF was compelled to shift its command centre to a 'safe location' on the west coast.

The Houthi offensive covered both the mainland Red Sea coastal towns and the islands in the Bab el Mandeb Strait. The key coastal town of Dhubab, towards the south of Mokha also fell to the Houthis. This two-pronged approach has provided AnsarAllah with significant leverage over the shipping routes passing through the Red Sea and the group can now exercise greater control over them. While their leadership has clarified that the group would not attack international shipping, the world community remains sceptical of these assertions. As the Houthis advance towards Taiz, their escalating attacks on Saudi Arabia have heightened concerns about the possibility of a larger conflagration. While the 2022 ceasefire has been violated on numerous instances since July, these recent AnsarAllah attacks mark a paradigm shift in the scale and ferocity of operations. The Houthis targeted Saudi Arabia's East-West energy pipeline, rendering it dysfunctional, and effectively halting Riyadh's energy exports to its consumers in Europe and India. The East-West pipeline is crucial in bypassing the Strait of Hormuz and its closure has worsened the state of energy markets already reeling from the effects of the Iran war.

The collapse of the 2022 ceasefire was propelled by the Houthis' declaration of a maritime embargo against the Saudis in July, accompanied by missile and drone attacks against Saudi civilian infrastructure, fuel tankers and oil facilities. The Houthis claimed that this was in retaliation to the Saudi blockade of their ports and airports and a strike on Sanaa allegedly conducted by Riyadh. The recent spate of attacks has been damaging to the Saudis and they have responded by launching dozens of airstrikes across the governorates of Taiz, Hodeidah, Marib and Jawf. The Houthi military spokesperson has accused the Kingdom of carrying out over 300 strikes in Yemen. Undeterred, the Houthis have continued their attacks on civilian and energy infrastructure in Saudi Arabia using cruise and ballistic missiles and drones. They have targeted Aramco facilities in Yanbu and also, allegedly, fuel tankers near Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport, rendering it temporarily in operational.

What does this mean for the future?

The Houthi takeover of the Red Sea coast enables the group to exert control over the Bab el Mandeb Strait and they can now threaten international shipping at will. While they have earlier disrupted transport through this route, with control over the entirety of the coast as well as the islands in the Red Sea, AnsarAllah would be able to halt traffic even by the usage of short range projectiles and enforce any blockade with greater effectiveness. Their alliance with Iran also provides Tehran with crucial leverage against the West, specifically the USA, as the Shia nation has practically gained the ability of closing two complementary strategic maritime chokepoints simultaneously. This offensive conducted by the Houthis has shifted the tide in the civil war, igniting a largely frozen conflict and bringing the war to Riyadh's doorstep by imposing serious economic costs upon the Kingdom.

The endemic corruption in the government forces and their lack of operational readiness have been exploited by the Houthis under their leader Abdul Malik al Houthi. With the retreat of Saudi backed forces in Yemen, attacks deep inside Saudi territory and the ineffectiveness of the Kingdom's military in deterring these assaults, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman now needs to find a way to subdue the Houthis. How the theatre of conflict in Yemen progresses will undoubtedly have ramifications for the fate of regional stability and the global order.

A Call for Action on 9/11 Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

By - Vappala Balachandran

The author is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat

It is time to worry about global terrorism. Greg Millar wrote a special article in The Washington Post (12 September) on the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, that al-Qaeda has set up in Afghanistan "at least eight training sites over the past three years, taking advantage of the Taliban's return to power in Kabul and the security void created by the 2021 U.S. military withdrawal, according to U.N. reports and security officials".

Simultaneously on September 11 CIA released 71 declassified 9/11 related "President's Daily brief products". Among the collection was a 4th December 1998 warning on "Bin Ladin preparing To Hijack US Aircraft and Other Attacks." Another one dated 23 June 1998 said that Bin Ladin would try multiple attacks, as he did in 1992.

Yet the attacks killed 3000 and humiliated America. The implications were discussed by the now defunct "National Advisory Council on South Asian Affairs" (NACSAA) on 19 June 2003 through a full day workshop on "United States, South Asia and the War against terrorism" at the Cosmos Club in Washington DC.

In those days NACSAA was a vibrant body of US nationals of South Asian origin residing in America who would frequently meet to discuss common South Asian problems with the US State Department. These meetings were also attended by high level South Asian diplomats, US think tank representatives, outside invitees and the concerned State Department officials.

Among the US thinktank experts assembled on 19 June 2003 were Stephen Cohen (Brookings), Walter Anderson (SAIS -Johns Hopkins), Bob Hathaway (Woodrow Wilson Center), Peter Galbraith (National Defence University), Hussain Haqqani (Carnegie), and Amit Pandya (Open Society Institute).

I was invited to speak on the new measures adopted by the George W Bush presidency to contain terrorism after the disastrous 9/11 attacks. This was before the National Commission (popularly known as 9/11 Kean-Hamilton Commission), created on 27 November 2002 could submit their report on July 22, 2004.

In my address I discussed the various stages of "Intelligence Cycle" without which no intelligence alert could become policy to initiate action. This gave a wrong impression of "Intelligence failure": "Information available with any odd organization on terrorists or support service providers would assume importance and become actionable only if conveyed promptly to the concerned service for further action. Also, the service receiving the information must initiate prompt action. In a perfect system all agencies pool their information at horizontal and vertical levels to evolve a total picture. Gaps in information are plugged by 'arbitration'."

I told them that on several occasions agencies produced varied, incomplete or even conflicting intelligence on security related subjects needing an able arbiter to sort out the differences to obtain a fuller picture for the decision makers. This was the process of "intelligence arbitration".

"Thus, when the 'Phoenix memo' was received, the process of arbitration should have started, calling for a wider investigation by tasking other FBI wings or CIA. This process of arbitration should have also started when the National Intelligence Council (NIC) received a Library of Congress report in Sept 1999 that a suicide bomber of Al Qaeda's "Martyrdom Battalion" could crash land an aircraft packed with high explosives into the Pentagon, CIA headquarters or the White House. The arbitration process should have started with the CIA cable of 27 Aug 2001 that two 'bin Laden related individuals' had entered the US".

Twenty-five years later we now find from the 71 declassified "9/11 related President's Daily brief products" that adequate preventive action could have been taken had an effective body of "Intelligence Arbitration" set up in America before 9/11. The same, was the case with our 26/11 attacks over which at least 16 prior intelligence alerts were received by Maharashtra Police from 2006.

An effective "intelligence arbitration" could have averted 9/11 in America by setting up a vigilant airport security. A similar process in Mumbai could have prevented 26/11 by establishing an effective coastal patrolling.

India–New Zealand FTA: From Market Access to Market Presence

By - Janvi Singhi and Dr. Simran Keshwani

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India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has largely settled the legal question of market access. The more vital one is how such access will be utilized. The harder question is what firms will do with it. Signed in April 2026, the agreement provides Indian exporters with duty-free access over New Zealand's tariff lines, while India has provided tariffs liberalization over 70% of its tariff lines that encompasses approximately 95% of the total value of the trade between the two countries. As the agreement gets closer to implementation, the efficacy of the FTA would depend less on the tariffs schedules themselves but more on the ability of the companies to turn the preferential access into actual customers, distribution networks, investments, and upkeep relations in terms of supply chains.

Although starting from a relatively small size, trade between India and New Zealand is slowly growing. The total trade of goods and services between India and New Zealand was NZ$3.95 billion in the 12-month period to December 2025. Both governments believe that they can double their trade to NZ$7 billion by 2030.

Yet an FTA does not automatically create exporters. A tariff preference has value only when a firm knows it exists, can establish origin, meets product standards, completes the required documentation, finds a buyer and can deliver competitively. For smaller firms, these transaction costs can determine whether a negotiated preference is actually used.

India's experiences with other free trade agreements offer valuable insights. Under the Australia–India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), which has been in place since December 2022, exporters can get instructions on some key aspects such as tariff classification, preferential treatment, rules of origin and certification. Moreover, the agreement allows for advance rulings in terms of tariffs, origin and custom valuation.The lesson is not to reproduce the Australian model. It is that negotiated rules become economically meaningful only when firms can navigate them predictably.

India and New Zealand already have some of the necessary infrastructure. The Customs Cooperative Arrangement allows for efficient data sharing and cooperation in the area of trade

facilitation, customs procedures, modern technologies, and good practices in this industry. The two countries also have a trusted-trader framework through the Mutual Recognition Arrangement between India's Authorised Economic Operator programme and New Zealand's Secure Exports Scheme. The implementation challenge is therefore less about creating another institution than connecting existing mechanisms to firms.

A practical solution would be a firm-level FTA pathway: one accessible system through which an exporter can identify its tariff classification, preferential rate, rules of origin, documentation and applicable standards. India's existing digital certificate-of-origin infrastructure provides a foundation for such an approach. The objective is simple: reduce the administrative distance between deciding to export and successfully claiming the preference.

The next difficulty involved is the creation of inter-sector relationships. Agriculture provides an example to study. The agreement opens up New Zealand's possibilities of accessing products like apples, kiwifruit, and manuka honey; however, sensitive agricultural spheres remain protected by India. The agreement also stipulates agricultural productivity partnerships and establishing Excellence centers, which would promote cooperation in agricultural technologies with focus on planting materials, agricultural practices, and food security issues.

This approach might signal a new stage in relationships since New Zealand would not only be a supplier of agricultural products; it would also train Indian partners in agricultural technologies. Again, the same principle might be applied in pharmaceutical and other spheres, which would get certain privileges under the deal.

The services sector also helps to achieve further economic integration. The treaty encompasses 118 service sectors and enables the possibility of bringing in up to 5,000 Indian experts at the same time, and also permits the annual entry of 1,000 people under working-holiday arrangements. India's strengths in information technology, engineering and professional services can be combined with New Zealand's strengths in education, tourism, agriculture, and specialized services.

Existing partnerships provide opportunities, but the implementation process should aim at ensuring that small businesses also get benefits from the policy. Many Indian high-tech companies operate in New Zealand and vice-versa. Also, the Indian community has professional and business networks which allow less informed firms to find partners and enter the market.

The UAE experience offers a second implementation lesson. India–UAE CEPA demonstrates the value of maintaining structured business-government engagement after an agreement has been negotiated. For New Zealand, regular engagement with MSMEs and businesses could help identify problems with customs, standards, mobility and market access before they become persistent barriers. The objective should be feedback and problem-solving, rather than another layer of bureaucracy.

This means that we should assess implementation based on what can be measured. The state should monitor the use of preferences, the number of first-time exporters, the involvement of MSMEs, the use of services, the time necessary to resolve customs & standards questions, professional mobility, repeat transactions and the conversion of investment commitments into operational projects.

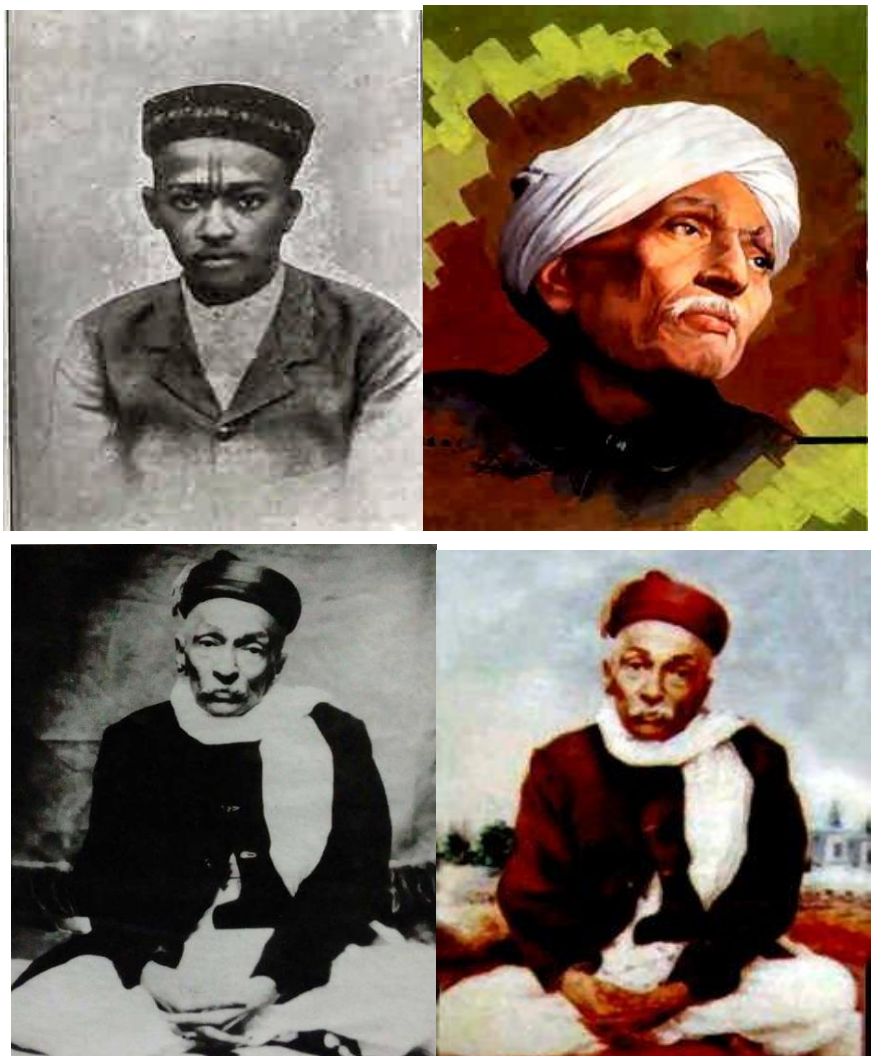
The previous FTAs from India have taught us that Australia emphasizes the need for making trade rules accessible for businesses; the UAE showcases how vital it is for the government to maintain a close dialogue with businesses. New Zealand needs to apply a method, tailored to its small size and strengths in terms of agriculture, services, Indian community, and its place in the Indo-Pacific region. With the FTA in place now, it is time to put it into practice by establishing sectoral relationships and extending the participation to other firms. Access to the market is yet to be negotiated.

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India is Proud of:

Sadguru Shri. Gurudev R. D. Ranade

A philosopher, a mystic, former Vice Chancellor of Allahabad University (3 July 1886 – 6 June 1957)



Bharat had never been devoid of Saints. In fact she is what she is- a Punya-. Bhumi- a holy land, on account of the Tapasya of her Saints. Other lands had their Saints and Sages no doubt. But Bharat appears to be a land of their special choice The number of Saints in Bharat and the heights reached by them is really phenomenal. They carried the brilliant touch of spirituality wherever they went and brought new spiritual awakening in their wake, even among the common people. Like ancient and medieval Bharat, modern Bharat also had her Saints and Sages. These Saints opened the flood gates of spirituality, and released a fresh flow of the same, flooding gradually all the parts of Bharat, and trying to reach other lands as well. They have been great power-houses of spirituality from which spiritual energy is being transmitted and supplied to all the people of the world. They have been thus successfully resisting the great onrushing flood of godless Immaterialism.

Dr. Rambhau Ranade was such a Saint, one of the precious gifts of dear Bharat, to the modem world. He was born on 3rd July 1886 at Jamkhandi in Bijapur District. His pious mother brought him up in a holy atmosphere. While still at school, he came into contact with Sri Bhausaheb Maharaj, the great Saint of Umadi, who blessed him with the divine Nama (1901) and thus sowed the seed of his later spiritual greatness.

Rambhau's school and college careers were equally brilliant which enabled him to win scholarships and gold medals in different examinations. He pursued his spiritual Sadhana also,

along with his study as a result of which he had wonderful spiritual experiences even in those early days. A great urge "to find intellectual justification for these spiritual experiences" prompted him to study philosophy both Eastern and Western. He worked as Professor of Philosophy in the Fergusson College, Poona (1914) and Willingdon College, Sangli for ten years. He was twice a victim of protracted illness of a dangerous type from which he could get a cure through the all-abounding grace of his Sadguru. This illness, however, proved a blessing in disguise as it intensified his spiritual Sadhana and granted him rare spiritual experiences associated with supreme bliss.

The year 1918 brought great domestic calamities to Prof. Ranade which also resulted in intensifying his devotion and Sadhana. In 1922 he had a dream-vision which directed him to Nimbal, a small Railway station between Sholapur and and Bijapur. He built a small house there with the intention of settling down. It has now assumed the form of a small Ashram and has become a place of pilgrimage. Prof. Ranade delivered, from time to time, valuable series of lectures. They were) On Upanishdic Philosophy, at Bangalore On the Bhagavadgita, at Nagpur, On Vedanta, at Calcutta, On Hindi Mysticism, primarily at Allahabad and On Karnataka Mysticism, primarily at Dharwar. All these series were originally designed to be published in the form of books. Out of these, the first, the second, the fourth and the fifth series have been published in book form, while the third is in the form of notes only. In 1933 Prof. Ranade published his great work on Mysticism in Maharashtra. He was the President of the Indian Philosophical Congress held in Nagpur in 1937. Prof Ranade's first monumental work A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy was published in 1926.

It instantly brought him international fame and attracted the attention of Dr. Ganganath Jha who invited him to join the Allahabad University (1927). Prof Ranade served the Allahabad University as Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Vice Chancellor. Dr. Ranade's stay at Allahabad enlarged his intellectual horizon and enriched his spiritual experience. After retiring in 1946 he made Nimbal his permanent place of residence. The life of Sri Gurudev was God centered, God inspired, God possessed and God intoxicated. It was soaked in Bliss Divine. Really such a God-man "is a circle whose centre is everywhere and Circumference nowhere". But God, encased in this God-man, appeared to work especially through two centers, one in North India and Allahabad and the second in South India, at Nimbal. Both were Holy Confluences where many a streams met, received proper purification and departed on its pilgrimage towards the Divine Ocean.

A mystic"' according to Sri Gurudev, may be a philosopher but is not necessarily so. His mystic experience is sufficient for his own elevation into Divinity; but if he philosophises, he may raise thinking humanity into a Divine Kingdom of Ends" It had been his long-cherished aim to gather multi-coloured flowers of the Mystic Garden and present a garland of them to the Lord. He wanted to write a general work on Pathway to God, with references to the philosophies and religions of the East and the West, to which subject he had devoted the major part of his life. Sri Gurudev would certainly have realized this dream, had he been blessed with a few more years of precious life. But God willed otherwise and he left for his heavenly abode in June 1957.

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