

SYRIAN CRISIS

After 13 years of civil war, and international players chipping in on both the sides, it's end of the road for dynastic regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, once a modern and growing country in West Asia. It's fashionable to call the ousting of a totalitarian regime good but nobody is sure as to what will come out of an armed rebellion of some rag tag organization supported by outside forces. Is this going to be a glorious era for Syria? End of a despotic rule should normally be followed with a democratic process. In this case, that seems to be a distant reality. Then too many cooks spoil the brother! There are too many countries involved in the turn of events in Syria that it could again slip into the hands of leaders who are oriented to fundamentalism and are not democrats. Syrians have suffered a lot in the civil war. Orphaned children living in camps, ethnic minorities like Kurds and many other groups are unlikely to see a change in their status. Despite the claims of the Syrian rebels that women will be free to wear what they want and so on, the public hanging of the relatives and officials of the Assad regime has started.

It's an unfortunate trend that in Islamic countries in the name of removing a despot and ushering in democracy – of the western kind – the global powers have ended up turning the entire Middle East into a cauldron. The lives of people there have become difficult with the rise of the fundamentalist groups and their growing control. This region is important for peace in the world as it's midpoint of the world and most of the global trade is routed through the region. Besides, the region remains the largest source of crude. The world needs to close conflicts in Ukraine-Russia and Israel-Hamas and ensure the Syrian crisis doesn't snowball into yet another conflict.

Addressing Hindu persecution in Bangladesh

Prashant Tewari

The escalating persecution of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh cloaked under the guise of political shifts and regime change, underscores an alarming resurgence of communal violence. With reports of systematic targeting and atrocities emerging over months, the role of the current regime, reportedly influenced by Jamaat-e-Islami, demands scrutiny. India, as the world's largest Hindu-majority nation and a protector of minority rights, cannot afford to stand as a passive observer.

Instead, it must respond with decisive and proactive measures to safeguard not only the Hindu minority in Bangladesh but also its own cultural and historical ethos. Reports of widespread violence against Hindus in Bangladesh reveal a pattern of calculated aggression. From desecration of temples and destruction of property to orchestrated violence, these acts are not isolated incidents but part of a broader, systematic campaign. The roots of this antagonism can be traced back to the Great Bengal Partition of 1905 when radical elements sought to establish an Islamic dominion in the region.

Although temporarily disrupted by Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, the vision of Darul-ul-Islam—a dominion governed by Islamic law—has been rekindled.

Under the current regime, these historical grievances have been weaponised to erode Hindu culture and population. What makes the situation more alarming is the reported nexus between the Bangladeshi government, Pakistan's ISI, radical jihadi groups, and influential ideologues like Jamaat-e-Islami. These forces seem united in their goal of reshaping Bangladesh's demographic and cultural landscape to align with extremist ideologies.

Mohammad Yunus and the Shadow of Global Influence

Central to this crisis is the controversial figure of Mohammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate who reportedly plays a significant role in the regime's ideological alignment. While his global reputation as a microfinance pioneer lends him an aura of credibility, his alleged affiliations with anti-Hindu policies and his ties with external powers, including China and certain factions in the United States, raise concerns.

These alignments have not only emboldened the regime but have also enabled it to criticise India under the pretext of democracy and human rights violations. This geopolitical manipulation, leveraging both soft power and hard alliances, directly challenges India's sovereignty and its role as a regional stabiliser. India must counter these narratives with truth and as-



sert its position as a defender of minority rights. The current crisis mirrors the challenges faced by India in 1971.

The liberation of Bangladesh under Indira Gandhi was driven by humanitarian and strategic imperatives—protecting millions of refugees and dismantling a regime that perpetuated genocide. Today, the targeting of Hindus in Bangladesh represents a similar humanitarian catastrophe and a strategic threat. India, home to the largest Hindu population in the world, bears a unique responsibility to safeguard its diaspora and kin. The Narendra Modi government has a historic opportunity to emulate the bold decisions of 1971, reaffirming India's role as a protector of justice and a regional powerhouse.

A Strategic Path Forward
India's response to the crisis must be multifaceted, encompassing aggression, diplomacy, and strategic recalibration.

India's security apparatus must transcend reactive measures. By identifying and dismantling rogue elements within Bangladesh that orchestrate attacks on minorities, India can send a strong message. Targeted strikes, similar to Israel's precision operations, could serve as a deterrent and emphasise India's commitment to protecting its Hindu diaspora. Bangladesh's economic reliance on India provides a powerful tool. By imposing strategic trade sanctions and mobilising international opinion, India can isolate the current regime, pressuring it to reconsider its policies.

Efforts must also focus on highlighting the human rights abuses faced by minorities in Bangladesh, garnering global support for the cause. Long-term stability in Bangladesh hinges on a government that respects minority rights and values democratic principles. India must support the emergence of a favourable and inclusive regime that can counter extremist ideologies. This approach, while controversial, aligns with India's

strategic and humanitarian interests.

A bolder proposition involves addressing the demographic realities of 1971 when Hindus comprised around 21 per cent of Bangladesh's population. Securing territories proportional to this demographic could provide a haven for minorities while addressing historical injustices. Such a solution would echo the decisive territorial realignments of 1947 and 1971, albeit adapted to contemporary challenges.

The Hindu community worldwide must unite against these atrocities. India, with its population of over one billion Hindus, should lead by example, adopting a robust stance to counter persecution. Strengthened solidarity, coupled with decisive government action, can set a precedent for minority protection globally.

Rebuilding Regional Stability

The crisis also necessitates a reevaluation of India's relationship with Bangladesh. Despite India's pivotal role in Bangladesh's liberation, successive regimes have displayed hostility and indifference. This lack of gratitude underscores the need for a recalibration of India's foreign policy toward its neighbour. Through a combination of economic, social, diplomatic, and military strategies, India must assert its dominance in the region.

The message should be unequivocal: any violence against Hindus or hostile actions will be met with resolute action. Israel's unwavering commitment to its sovereignty and people offers valuable lessons for India. Despite being a small nation, Israel has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of decisive measures in safeguarding its citizens. India, with its vast resources and geopolitical influence, must adopt similar strategies to protect its minorities and assert its regional leadership.

A Turning Point for India

The Bangladesh crisis represents more than a regional issue; it is a defining moment for India's foreign policy and its identity as a nation. By taking bold and proactive measures, the Narendra Modi government can reaffirm India's role as a defender of justice and humanity.

Protecting Hindus in Bangladesh is not just about addressing a humanitarian crisis—it is about asserting India's sovereignty, preserving its cultural identity, and ensuring regional stability. Instead of hoping for UNHRC intervention, the Indian government must rise to the occasion, transforming the crisis into an opportunity to redefine India's role in South Asia. With decisive action, India can prevent history from repeating itself, ensuring that justice prevails and that the legacy of protecting minorities endures.

BRAIN ROT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

SAKSHI SETHI

In a world saturated with endless entertainment, constant notifications and superficial distractions, the human brain faces unprecedented challenges. The term brain rot refers to the perceived decline in cognitive abilities or intellectual engagement due to excessive consumption of mindless or unproductive content.

While it is colloquial and not a clinical diagnosis, it describes mental fog, reduced attention span and diminished problem-solving abilities often linked to prolonged screen time or low-value content. Studies suggest that heavy screen usage can correlate with reduced grey matter in the brain, which may impair critical thinking and memory, particularly among younger individuals.

It also contributes to mental health issues like anxiety and depression, driven by constant comparisons and exposure to idealised online content. The rise of social media, streaming platforms and short-form content has revolutionised how we consume information and entertainment.

While these platforms offer unprecedented access to global knowledge, they also foster habits of passive consumption. Endless scrolling and binge-watching also lead to mental fatigue and reduced attention spans, making it harder for individuals to engage



with more complex ideas or tasks. Brain rot can also stem from a lack of intellectual stimulation. Activities that challenge the brain such as reading, problem-solving, or engaging in creative pursuits are often sidelined in favour of easier, low-effort distractions. Over time, this neglect can lead to a decline in critical thinking, memory retention and problem-solving skills.

The modern lifestyle, characterised by high levels of stress and constant multitasking, can contribute to cognitive decline. It is

often said that chronic stress impairs brain function, particularly in areas responsible for memory and learning which creates a vicious cycle where individuals turn to mindless activities to escape stress, further exacerbating mental stagnation. Moreover, a sedentary lifestyle, coupled with a diet lacking in nutrients essential for brain function, can also lead to cognitive decline. In maintaining mental clarity and overall brain health, physical exercise and a balanced diet play crucial roles.

The effects of brain rot are far-reaching and can manifest in various aspects of life. A lack of focus and motivation often results in decreased efficiency and the inability to complete tasks effectively. Overindulgence in passive entertainment stifles the ability to think creatively or generate original ideas. The overuse of escapist media can lead to a disconnect from real-world emotions and experiences, fostering feelings of emptiness or dissatisfaction.

Excessive reliance on digital communication can impair interpersonal relationships and the ability to engage in meaningful, face-to-face interactions.

Addressing brain rot requires a multifaceted approach that emphasises mindfulness, discipline and a commitment to personal growth. Setting boundaries for screen time and being intentional about the type of content consumed can help reduce the effects of brain rot. By choosing educational or thought-provoking material over passive entertainment the mind can be stimulated; by prioritising physical health such as regular physical exercise, a balanced diet and setting goals for personal and intellectual growth learning can help foster mental resilience and creativity. They will also help reduce stress and combat mental inertia.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

The imperative of continuous learning in India's AI-driven future

Sumit Shukla

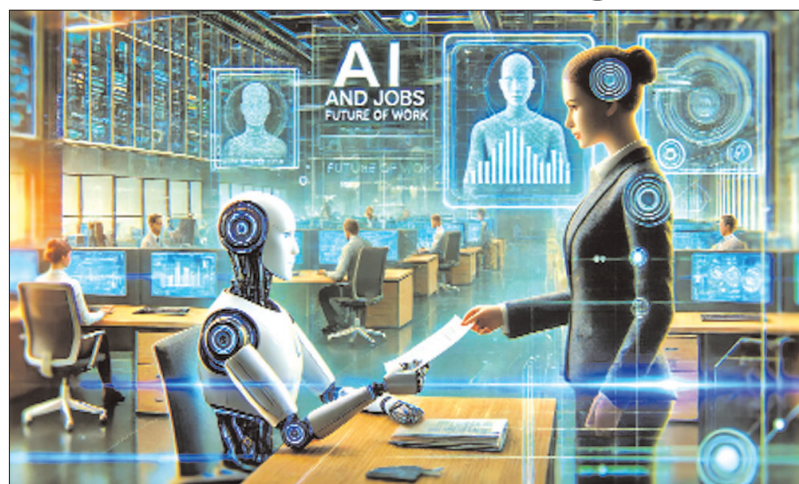
Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives and work, making continuous learning essential to stay relevant. The rapid adoption of automation and advanced digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), is not just transforming industries but also reshaping the skills employers expect from their workforce. By 2027, it is projected that 80 per cent of engineering roles will require employees to undergo training and development to meet the changing demands brought about by AI advancements, according to Gartner.

In India, the demand for skilled professionals in technology-driven fields, especially AI, is growing significantly. Reports by BCG and NASSCOM indicate that the AI market in the country could grow to \$17 billion by 2027, with an annual growth rate of 25–35 per cent. However, this growth is accompanied by a stark shortage of experts in advanced technologies. NASSCOM estimates that over a million skilled

engineers specialising in AI and related technologies will be needed in the coming years. Alarmingly, the talent gap could rise from 25 per cent to nearly 30 per cent by 2028, emphasising the critical need for skill development among both new graduates and experienced professionals.

One significant challenge is the disconnect between formal education and the practical skills required in the job market. Every year, approximately 1.5 million engineering graduates enter the workforce in India, yet only a fraction secure jobs aligned with their field of study. This mismatch is not due to a lack of opportunities but stems from the gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted in academic institutions and the hands-on skills sought by employers. Beyond technical expertise, companies now prioritise candidates with interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, essential for thriving in collaborative and dynamic work environments.

The India Skills Report 2024 highlights this concern, noting that while some states, such as Telan-



gana, have made strides in job preparedness among the 18 to 21 age group, critical skill gaps persist. For roles reliant on AI and emerging technologies, the gap ranges from 60 per cent to 73 per cent. These statistics underscore the urgent need for educational institutions to revamp their curricula to better align with industry demands.

Updating academic programmes is vital to bridging this gap. Universities and colleges must incorporate

industry trends and practical learning experiences into their courses. Today's workforce needs to think critically across disciplines and understand the broader implications of technology on economic, social, and cultural contexts. Flexible and continuous education plays a pivotal role in closing the divide between academic knowledge and the realities of the job market.

Digital learning platforms offer a promising solution in this context.

With over 50 per cent of Indians actively using the internet, online education provides accessible opportunities to acquire new skills. Edtech platforms specialising in skill enhancement allow individuals to enroll in tailored courses and programmes, preparing them for rapidly evolving job landscapes.

The benefits of continuous learning extend beyond career advancement. Employees who are adaptable and committed to enhancing their knowledge contribute to organisational innovation and help businesses navigate shifting market dynamics. For instance, as AI becomes more integrated across industries, the demand for experts in these technologies will continue to rise. Forward-thinking companies are already investing in employee training programs to stay competitive and ensure their teams are equipped to handle emerging challenges.

Despite these efforts, many traditional educational institutions struggle to meet industry needs. Relying heavily on lecture-based teaching, these institutions often fo-

cus on theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical skills. Students have limited access to industry-standard equipment or opportunities for hands-on problem-solving, leaving them ill-prepared for the workforce. Integrating real-world applications into academic learning bridges the gap between theoretical instruction and practical expertise, ensuring graduates are ready to meet employer expectations.

Upskilling is not just about addressing current deficiencies—it involves cultivating a mindset of continuous improvement. In a world where industries evolve rapidly and the shelf life of skills is shrinking, professionals must adapt to new technologies and methodologies quickly.

Skills once considered indispensable can become obsolete within a few years, making the ability to learn and relearn critical for success in today's professional environment. For individuals and organisations alike, embracing continuous education is a strategic move to navigate the present and excel in the future.