

29-X NEWS  
EDITORIAL

Catalyzing Innovation –  
The RDI Scheme’s Promise  
for India’s Future

In a landmark move aimed at transforming India into a global innovation hub, the Union Cabinet has approved the Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme. This ambitious initiative, with a budget outlay of ₹1 lakh crore, is designed to stimulate private sector participation in research, development, and innovation, particularly in sunrise and strategic sectors. By providing both growth and risk capital, the scheme intends to create an enabling environment where Indian enterprises can experiment, innovate, and lead in cutting-edge technologies. The primary objective of the RDI Scheme is to reduce India’s dependence on foreign technologies and foster national self-reliance. The scheme focuses on key strategic areas like economic security, critical technologies, high Technology Readiness Levels (TRL), and sectors vital for the nation’s long-term sustainability and global competitiveness. Whether it is advanced manufacturing, green energy, space technology, or artificial intelligence, the RDI scheme aims to nurture industries that are pivotal for the future. A significant highlight of the scheme is the establishment of a Deep-Tech Fund of Funds, which will provide vital financial support to start-ups and companies working on breakthrough technologies. This fund is expected to bridge the gap between idea generation and market deployment, which has often been a hurdle for Indian innovators. By addressing both financial and operational risks, the scheme aims to accelerate the commercialization of research outcomes. The governance of the scheme will be under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), chaired by the Prime Minister, ensuring high-level policy direction and accountability. This also reflects the government’s commitment to integrating scientific advancement with national development goals. The RDI Scheme marks a paradigm shift in India’s approach to research and development. Instead of relying predominantly on public sector institutions, it empowers the private sector to become a major driver of innovation. This public-private synergy is crucial for competing in a technology-driven global economy. By investing in critical sectors today, India is laying the foundation for economic security, technological sovereignty, and global leadership tomorrow. The success of this scheme could very well define the trajectory of India’s growth in the coming decades, positioning the nation as a powerhouse of innovation and self-reliance.

Trouble within

For Iran, the war with Israel was much more than the death of 935 citizens and the assassination of the entire top echelons of its nuclear establishment, its intelligence agencies and the IRGC

SWAPAN DASGUPTA

There are many conflicts that, while not necessarily inconclusive, do not produce clear winners. The outcomes of the India-Pakistan conflict of 1965 and the Yom Kippur war of 1973 involving Egypt and Israel are still being debated. Unless the assertion of the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, of Iran’s “unconditional surrender” is viewed as a considered war aim of the US, it is likely that there will not be serious disagreements over the outcome of the 12-day war between Israel and Iran.

In all fairness, the US should be included among the adversaries of Iran. Operation Midnight Hammer, which involved the targeted use of ‘bunker busters’ to decimate three nuclear facilities, including the one located in the forbidding terrain of Fordow, was a turning point in the war. Regardless of what has subsequently been claimed by the Islamic Republic and its friends about the stockpiles of enriched uranium being removed from Fordow before the 20-minute raid on June 22, the mere fact that Trump could announce the ceasefire the very next day is revealing. Although the Iranians conducted a largely symbolic, face-saving, retaliatory missile attack on an American base in Qatar on June 23, it was clear to Iran that persisting meant courting disaster.

Since there were no face-to-face encounters between the two sides and, unlike earlier conflicts in the Middle East, no gain or loss of territory, a different yardstick will have to be employed in assessing where Israel and Iran stand today. It is significant that both the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, have claimed victories, with Iran insisting it will not discuss the future of its nuclear programme with the US. As for Israel, the Islamic regime has not yet reneged from its position of wanting the complete destruction of the “Zionist entity.” The Israel Defence Forces



may have destroyed the electronic countdown clock (of the destruction of Israel) in Tehran’s Palestine Square on the last day of the war — it has been replaced by a manual contraption — but the fantasy of the Ayatollahs liberating Jerusalem continues to motivate the shrinking band of the faithful in Iran.

The apparent unwillingness of the Iranian velayet-e-faqih (loosely translated as the rule of the clergy) to respond to the conflict with a necessary dose of realism owes greatly to the lurking fear of ‘regime change’. Although the idea of a foreign power liberating authoritarian regimes from tyranny stands utterly discredited following the US-sponsored misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the resulting civil war in Syria, ‘regime change’ has been bandied about quite loosely both in Washington and Jerusalem as a possible war aim. Trump suggested as much in one of his colourful social media posts, and Netanyahu addressed the same theme in his Nowruz address to Iran last year.

In the past year, the exiled Iranian Opposition has also been galvanised by the lobbying of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last Shah who was removed from the throne after a mass uprising in 1979, in Western capitals. It is not that the return of an autocratic monarchy holds any attraction for the Iranian people who have developed a sophisticated political culture — much of it subterranean — by waging an intellectual guerrilla

warfare with the custodians of the Islamic State and its strong-arm functionaries. The disparate community of exiles are predictably fractious, but a big section of them believes that the crown prince could be a cementing force in a constitutional monarchy. With the lapse of some 45 years since Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolution, the notion of a Pahlavi golden age has taken hold of the popular imagination, especially in the light of the hardships that have accompanied the US sanctions on Iran.

There are many sources of opposition to the regime in Iran. By far the most potent is the brewing frustrations of Iranian women. Apart from the institutionalised gender inequality that has constrained Iranian women, there is growing anger over the obligatory insistence on the hijab and its rigid and brutal implementation by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Basij. In 2022, it was the heavy-handed implementation of the dress code that led to the death of a young woman in police custody. The resulting mass movement against the regime was put down brutally and added to the alienation of a modern generation of young Iranians from the regime. This estrangement haunts the mullahs.

Whether or not those at the helm are aware of the regime’s social fragility is not known. However, a marked feature of the recent war was the remarkable extent to which Israel was able to bank on a network

of Iranian dissidents to both pinpoint the movements of the Iranian leadership and set up drone facilities within the country, sabotaging Iran’s network of missiles. It is said that the regime arrested some 700 Mossad agents operating within Iran. Whether those arrested were really in the pay of Israel’s dreaded intelligence arm or were mere political opponents of the regime will never be known. However, Israel’s ability to establish an effective fifth column owed much to the disquiet against the regime. Maybe it is also a pointer to the fact that hatred of Israel isn’t a national consensus, either in Iran or in Lebanon and Syria.

For Iran, the war with Israel was much more than the death of 935 citizens killed in the bombing and the targeted assassination of the entire top echelons of its nuclear establishment, its intelligence agencies and the IRGC. The regime hasn’t admitted the extent of its leadership loss but the mere fact that the public funerals of the fallen leaders are still going on tells a story. The regime’s loss of face has been monumental. During the entire war, it (and the people) watched helplessly as the IDF demonstrated its total control of the skies.

Iran had banked on keeping Israel under permanent pressure through what it called the “ring of fire”. The plan was that the Hamas offensive on October 7, 2023, would be accompanied by attacks on the IDF along six other fronts: the Arab minority within Israel, the Arabs in Judea and Samaria (also called the West Bank), the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, a Syrian attack along the Golan Heights, a missile offensive from the Houthis in Yemen and, finally, missile attacks from Iran. Unfortunately for Tehran, the whole plan collapsed. The targeting of Hezbollah through rigged pagers and walkie-talkies was a masterstroke and neutralised the most formidable non-State adversary. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria was unanticipated but fortuitous and the Arab revolts in the West Bank and inside Israel never materialised. In the end, Iran was the last jihadi standing.

Lessons from the Phules

The wounds that Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule had tended to are still fresh. Today, when education is equated with employment, one wonders what response would Jyotiba and Savitribai have to it

JYOTI DALAL

The film, Phule, not only visibilised the age-old tensions of caste and gender but also laid open the matrix that these divisive structures share with education. The wounds that Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule had tended to are still fresh. Today, when education is equated with employment, one wonders what response would Jyotiba and Savitribai have to it.

Fashioned by the writings of Thomas Paine, would Jyotiba and Savitribai have reduced the notion of empowerment through employment? But weren’t they also showing what education fundamentally stands for? The Phules knew that the deep-seated perils of society cannot be addressed through the instrumental goals of education, which, in the form of economic solutions, can appear to give some relief but cannot replace the core values that have the potential of social churn.

The contemporary discourse has reduced education to serving the outcome of employability. This has become the central objective of education, foreshadowing its inherent goal of enlightenment and empowerment. The inherent value of education in creating self-awareness



and growth has little or no effect on these times. This can be experienced in the conventional educational institutions, which unabashedly focus solely on catering to the job market.

The assumption that the asymmetries and inequalities will be resolved once employment is taken care of is a preposterous assumption. After all, the values associated with education for employability are largely instrumental and can be conveniently attained without engaging with the social contradictions or the times that one is living through. Education for enlightenment, which works

towards critique and creation, cannot be carried out within the complacent, narrow world of individuals; it demands inhabiting in and engaging with one’s context, not a departure from it.

By instituting a confusion between education for enlightenment and education for employment, the present discourse has obscured the former in favour of the latter. This conjured-up opposition posits education for enlightenment as an adversary, allowing our sensibilities to renounce the essence of education for being esoteric. The positing of this opposition has welded a strong

link between employment and education.

Realising education’s emancipatory potential depends on our translation of what we mean by education for real life — an apt objective put forward by the National Education Policy 2020. What can be more real than addressing the fissures that constitute the social — be they the age-old asymmetries that still afflict us or the fresh wounds that the present xenophobic, conflict-inclined world is throwing at us.

It calls on NEP 2020 to think beyond education as a means of employment and engage with the problems of our times, manifest in the form of discriminations along the lines of caste, gender, class, religion and other social identities. In the spirit of the Phules, it is important to strengthen the link between education and empowerment, which, when affirmed, will pave the way for individual emancipation. The present discourse has diluted education while also depoliticising the times we live in by making employment primary and letting it usurp the goals of enlightenment.

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