

REPUBLIC DAY, A MOMENT TO PAUSE AND REFLECT

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Dear Readers

The Indian republic is in its 75th year – the year had, in fact, turned seminal four days before the country celebrated its republican ethos. Jan 22 was a rare watershed – not any other milestone that is part of the regular ebbs and flows of democracy. As this paper's editorial ([A seminal milestone, the journey ahead](#), IE January 23) pointed out, “January 22, 2024 will no more be just another day in the life of a nation. It will be the moment when a temple was consecrated in Ayodhya... A political movement that began as a challenge to the ruling consensus, having made its way to the system's centre, stamped its dominance and become the establishment, has now, almost 10 years later, brought a never-before convergence — of popular will, state power, religion”. January 22, as the editorial noted, “asks the nation for nothing less than a new self-description”.

Of course, the [BJP](#) juggernaut paved the way for this moment. The demand for the temple has been one of the defining elements of the party's politics for more than three and a half decades. The party, as this paper's contributing editor, Pratap Bhanu Mehta noted, has kept its promise. But [as Mehta pointed out](#) (IE, January 22), the consecration caught in its sweep virtually the entire political system of the country. True, the Opposition questioned the consecration, most of its top leaders stayed away from the ceremony. Yet, even they have been “obliged to pay allegiance to Ram...The Ram whose role in Indian cultural and spiritual life was one whose centre was everywhere and circumference nowhere, has now been anchored to a centre. Ram has been transformed from a radiant glow of righteousness, compassion, and imaginative power into something merely instrumental: A litmus test for national loyalty.” The editorial framed the challenge for them: “The BJP's political opponents, who, even as another parliamentary election draws closer, have yet to find the language to fight it, or to regain their own lost equilibrium”.

PM Modi has urged the need to temper victory with humility – “vijay” with “vinay”. The “grand temple” will inaugurate a new and a better era for the country he has said and envisioned it “as an emblem of Viksit Bharat”. It is a call to “all of us citizens, to pledge to build a capable, magnificent, and divine India,” he has said. This paper's columnist and RSS ideologue Ram Madhav ([Temple for Viksit Bharat](#), IE, January 27) also framed the consecration in the language of nation building: “The restored historic temple will infuse new life into the Temple of Prosperity of our people”.

The task will face the challenge of history. For, as this paper's editorial pointed out, “The temple that has been consecrated at Ayodhya was built not on a clean slate, but on a troubled back story that must be acknowledged and remembered if it has to be transcended... The BJP-led movement has vanquished its political opponents and won the day, but its government's slogan of ‘sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas’ will not automatically segue into ‘sabka mandir’ or ‘sabke Ram’. For that, much work still needs to be done”.

That's why the sobering words of social scientist Suhas Palshikar ([Turning on a new page with erasures](#), IE, January 23) about the erasures, already in the air for some time – the violence against plurality, the demand for homogeneity and the amnesia about what happened on December 6 – must have the ears, even of those who may not agree with it.

The litmus test for Viksit Bharat, as this paper's columnist, agriculture economist Ashok Gulati and his colleague at ICRIER Shyma Jose, [point out](#) (IE, January 22) will also lie in how

effectively it course corrects on the economic front, especially increasing employment and improving the lives of people in rural areas: “We have seen from the government data itself that in rural areas, real wages in fact have had negative growth in the last five years of Modi-2 period. This needs urgent attention and further research to create more employment-intensive growth processes”.

Most importantly, as this paper’s Republic Day editorial ([Restating the Republic](#), IE January 26), pointed out “any attempt to recast and remake the nation, howsoever tall or righteous its claims, must necessarily be tested against the touchstone of the values and ideals enshrined in the Constitution that, 75 years later, continue to animate and nourish the Republic”.

Stay well.

Kaushik Das Gupta

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Bigg Boss 17 finale is finally here with top five finalists - Ankita Lokhande, Mannara Chopra, Munawar Faruqui, Abhishek Kumar, and Arun Mahshetty - competing for the prestigious trophy. The show began on October 16 with various contestants and will feature electrifying performances by couples, including Samarth-Isha and Neil-Aishwarya. Hosted by Salman Khan, the grand finale promises a star-studded event.

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