



NEWS ANALYSIS

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BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

PM Modi's visit to Kuwait after 43 years

A chance to strike gold during the Kuwait visit

The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is set to visit Kuwait on December 21-22. The visit will be the first by an Indian Prime Minister in 43 years, the last being the visit by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1981. Mr. Modi was scheduled to visit Kuwait in January 2022, but the visit was postponed due to concerns about COVID-19.

The visit holds great significance not only for the bilateral ties but also the region, which is going through a very difficult phase of conflict and transition. Mr. Modi has visited all the other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) over the past 10 years, some more than once, and not having visited Kuwait was seen as a gap in India's West Asia engagement. This visit aims to not only plug this gap but also give a boost to the rather stagnant ties between the two countries which, otherwise, have much potential for a strong engagement.

A country with strategic significance

Why is Kuwait important? Despite being one of the smallest countries in the region, it holds significant strategic importance. Located at the north-east end of the Persian Gulf, it shares borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia and hosts important American military bases. It is the only monarchy in the region which has experimented successfully with democracy. On regional issues, it has generally maintained a neutral stance and has often been the interlocutor in resolving disputes.

Its wealth is owed primarily to its vast oil reserves, which are sixth-largest globally. It is also one of the founding members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

It also has one of the largest basket sovereign wealth funds. These funds, managed by the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), have grown at an impressive rate and are currently estimated to



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a retired colonel, is a former Director in the Ministry of External Affairs, a former Director in Military Intelligence (International Relations) and a former Research Fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi (IDSA), New Delhi

The Indian Prime Minister's visit, long overdue, has many opportunities to develop an important bilateral relationship

be \$924 billion (in March 2024), the fourth largest in the world after Norway, China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Untapped potential, existing links

India and Kuwait have always enjoyed friendly ties, built on a strong foundation of history and cultural bonds. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Kuwait following its independence from the British Protectorate in 1961. In fact, the Indian rupee was a legal tender in Kuwait till 1961.

Trade and people-to-people ties have traditionally been the main anchors of the bilateral ties. India has consistently been among the top trading partners of Kuwait, with the total bilateral trade with Kuwait during FY 2023-24 being \$ 10.47 billion. During FY2023-24, Kuwait was the sixth largest crude supplier catering to about 3.0 % of India's total energy needs. The KIA has invested indirectly in India with estimated investments of more than US\$10 billion.

During the COVID-19 pandemic too, India and Kuwait demonstrated a strong sense of brotherhood. India provided two lakh vaccine doses. During the second wave of COVID-19 in May 2021, Kuwait provided 282 oxygen cylinders, 60 oxygen concentrators, ventilators and many other medical supplies to India.

People-to-people ties form the other firm anchor. Out of a population of almost 4.9 million, around 1 million Indians not only form the largest expatriate group in Kuwait but are also among the most trusted. As a special gesture, a 'Festival of India' was organised in Kuwait in March 2023. A weekly Hindi radio programme, 'Namaste Kuwait' has been started by Kuwait National Radio since April 2024. And, 26 schools in Kuwait with over 60,000 students, follow the Central Board of Secondary Education curriculum of India.

When tragedy struck on June 12, in the form of

a fire in a residential building in Kuwait killing over 40 Indians, Kuwait rendered help and repatriated their mortal remains quickly.

Areas to elevate ties

Despite enjoying mutual trust and goodwill, India's ties with Kuwait – like with many others in the Gulf region – have not been able to transcend to the next level. Mr. Modi's visit, therefore, offers the perfect opportunity to set things moving. The signing of a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement with Kuwait could be the ideal start. An agreement on defence cooperation could be signed too. India has invited Kuwait to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, which Kuwait is likely to accept. An agreement between KIA and the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) in India could be mutually beneficial and give impetus to growth in India. Like the UAE, Kuwait could become an important partner for storing strategic oil reserves in India.

From India, helping Kuwait in building its infrastructure under Kuwait's 'Vision 2035' could be a good initiative. Setting up institutes of higher education, such as the Indian Institute of Technology and the Indian Institute of Management, and modern hospitals in Kuwait could boost people-to-people ties. Kuwait's request for additional seats for its airlines from India (in addition to 12,000 seats per week allotted), could be considered as a special exemption, despite Kuwait not fulfilling the required quota. Cooperation in space programmes including launching satellites for Kuwait would make good headlines too.

The scope for Kuwait-India ties is huge and the wish list endless. Hopefully, this visit will provide the perfect platform to kick-start a golden era in this very important bilateral relationship.

- ❖ The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is set to visit **Kuwait** on December 21-22.
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- ❖ An **agreement on defence cooperation** could be signed too.
- ❖ India has invited Kuwait to join the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**, which Kuwait is likely to accept.

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- ❖ Setting up institutes of higher education, such as the Indian Institute of Technology and the Indian Institute of Management, and modern hospitals in Kuwait could **boost people-to-people ties**.
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Siliguri corridor and its strategic importance for India

Siliguri corridor a crucial link, SSB presence boosts security, says Shah

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday highlighted the significance of the Siliguri corridor as a crucial link to Northeast India and said that the presence of the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) in the area came as an assurance to the entire country.

"Located between Mahananda and Teesta, the Siliguri corridor serves as an important link between the northeast and the rest of India. The presence of SSB in the area provides assurance and confidence to the rest of the country," Mr. Shah said. He made the remarks while addressing



Reassuring force: Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the 61st Raising Day celebrations of the SSB, near Siliguri, on Friday. PTI

the 61st Raising Day celebrations of the SSB in Siliguri.

He lauded the efforts of the SSB in securing the nation's borders with friendly countries such as Nepal and Bhutan. The SSB

guards the 2,450-km border with Nepal and Bhutan. Mr. Shah said that as the Home Minister, he was assured that the border would be protected as the SSB jawans were deployed there.

Referring to the SSB's efforts in tackling left-wing extremism, he said: "The SSB has played an important role in ending the menace of Naxalism in Bihar and Jharkhand. From this stage, I want to say that Bihar and Jharkhand are free of left-wing extremism."

He also commended the SSB for its unique initiatives in fostering cultural integration in the border areas. "This initiative strengthens the bond between the nation and its border communities," he added.

Mr. Shah virtually laid the foundation stones of eight construction projects related to the SSB in different parts of the country.



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- ❖ The Siliguri Corridor, often referred to as the "**Chicken's Neck**", is a narrow stretch of land in the Indian state of **West Bengal**.
- ❖ It connects the northeastern states of India with the rest of the country. Its geopolitical, strategic, and economic significance makes it a critical asset for India.

Significance of Siliguri Corridor

- The corridor is crucial for maintaining India's territorial integrity.
- Any compromise in the region can isolate the northeastern states from the rest of India.
- The area is vulnerable to external threats, especially given its proximity to the **China-Bhutan border** in the north and Bangladesh in the south.

Military Importance:

- ❖ The corridor serves as a vital supply route for the Indian Army, particularly for accessing forward bases in **Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh**.
- ❖ It is critical for India's preparedness against China, especially in light of past conflicts like the **1962 Sino-Indian War** and the ongoing border tensions.

Geopolitical Sensitivity:

- ❖ Its proximity to **China's Chumbi Valley** (a tri-junction of India, Bhutan, and China) poses a strategic challenge. Control over this area could jeopardize India's access to the Northeast.



Trade and Connectivity:

- **The Siliguri Corridor** is a gateway for trade between mainland India and its north-eastern states, facilitating the movement of goods and services.
- It connects to important international trade routes, including access to Bhutan and Nepal.

Tourism Hub:

- The region is a base for tourism to destinations like **Darjeeling, Gangtok, and Bhutan**, contributing significantly to local and national economies.

Developmental Integration:

- The corridor supports initiatives like the **Act East Policy**, which aims to integrate north-eastern states with Southeast Asia for economic development.

Govt Initiatives

Border Infrastructure Development:

- Investments in road and rail networks, including the **Bharatmala Pariyojana** and **Golden Quadrilateral**, aim to strengthen connectivity in the region.

Act East Policy:

- This policy focuses on improving trade and cultural ties with Southeast Asia, with the Siliguri Corridor acting as a vital link.

Integrated Check Posts (ICPs):

- Modern ICPs along the borders of Nepal and Bangladesh are being developed to streamline trade and security.

What is Gaganyaan mission ...?

'Gaganyaan-G1 to test capabilities ahead of manned flight'

Tiki Rajwi
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Gaganyaan-G1, the first of three uncrewed test missions that will lead up to India's maiden human spaceflight, is designed to mimic, end-to-end, the actual flight and validate critical technologies and capabilities including the Human-rated Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (HLVM3), S. Unnikrishnan Nair, Director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), has said.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) began the 'stacking,' or assembly, of HLVM3 at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, on December 18, coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the sub-orbital Crew Module Atmospheric Re-entry Experiment (CARE) mission of 2014.

Speaking to *The Hindu*

about the upcoming HLVM3-G1 mission, Dr. Unnikrishnan Nair said the integration of the crew module, which will fly aboard the mission, is progressing at the VSSC, which is ISRO's lead facility for launch vehicles at Thumba here. Once the crew module is ready, it will be transferred to the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), Bengaluru, for integration with the service module.

Orbital module

The service module and the crew module together make up the orbital module. "After a series of tests including thermo-vacuum tests at the URSC, the orbital module will be transported to Sriharikota to be placed aboard the launch vehicle," said Dr. Unnikrishnan Nair, who was the first Director of the Human Space Flight



S. Unnikrishnan Nair, Director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, with the CARE module and a scale model of HLVM3. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Centre (HSFC), Bengaluru.

The HLVM3-G1 mission will place the orbital module in a 170 km x 430 km elliptical orbit around the earth. It will subsequently be manoeuvred into a circular orbit. Once the orbital module de-orbits, the crew module, which has enhanced safety margins and multiple redundan-

cies, will separate for controlled re-entry into the earth's atmosphere and splashdown in the Bay of Bengal.

End-to-end mission

The HLVM3-G1 mission is designed to validate technologies and abilities needed for a manned mission. "It is designed as an end-

to-end mission covering lift-off, injection into orbit, 'circularisation' of orbit, re-entry and splashdown," Dr. Unnikrishnan Nair said. The G1 mission will also flight-test the humanoid robot Vyommित्रा developed by the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit (IISU).

Human-rating

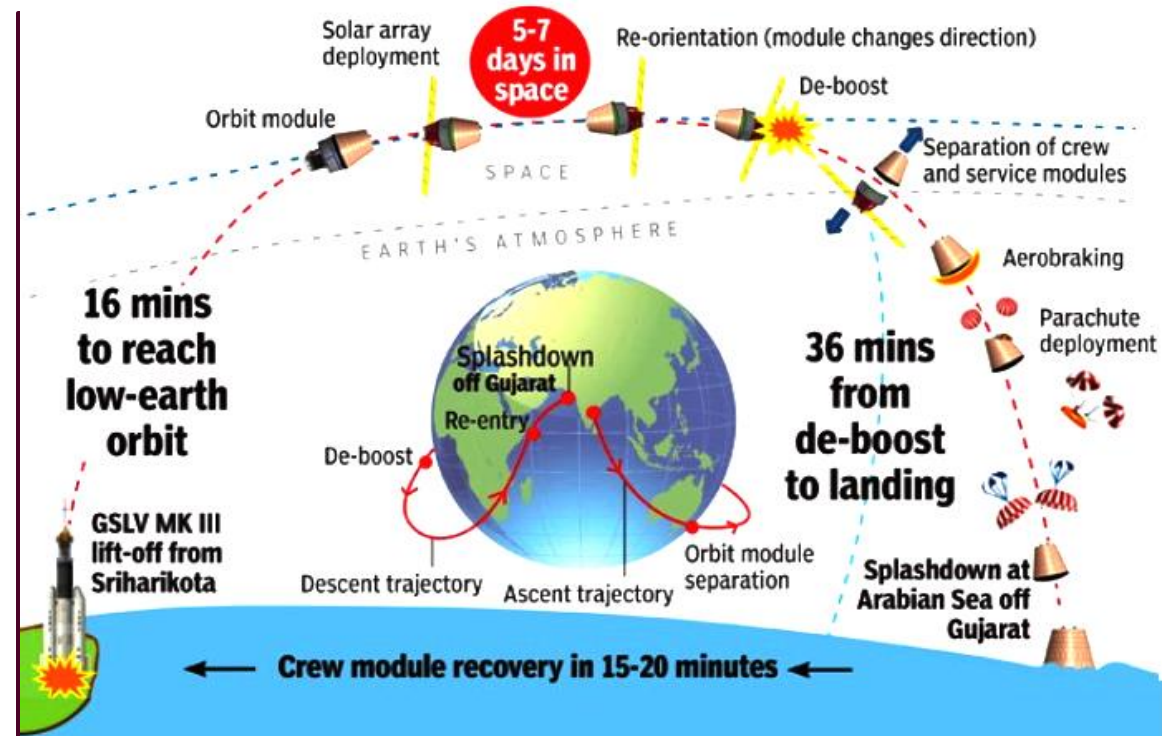
The ISRO recently announced that the human-rating of the LVM3 vehicle has been completed and all systems have been "tested for enhanced reliability." The related tests had taken close to three years, according to Dr. Unnikrishnan Nair.

The launch vehicle components – the S200 solid rocket boosters, the L110 liquid stage and the C32 cryogenic stage – have arrived at Sriharikota after clearing the human-rating process.

Compared to the conventional LVM3 (formerly known as Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mk-III), the HLVM3 has distinct features. "The aerodynamic configuration is different. Normally, you have a bulbous payload fairing atop the vehicle protecting the satellite. Here, we have the crew escape system at the very top. Inside it will be the orbital module. The crew module is connected to the crew escape system. The overall height of the vehicle has increased by around 10 metres to 53 metres," Dr. Unnikrishnan Nair said.

The ISRO is planning two more uncrewed missions – G2 and G3 – before the actual manned flight. These two test missions will be identical in their parameters, Dr. Unnikrishnan Nair said.

MANNED MISSION



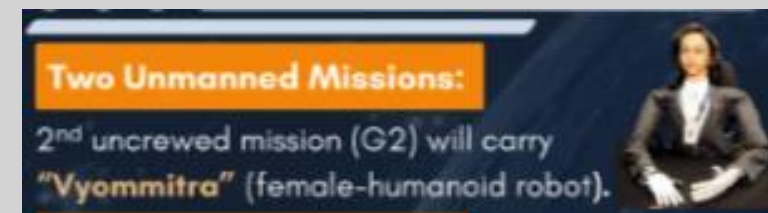
COST: Less than
₹10,000 cr

LAUNCH:
2022

India to be the 4th nation to launch a manned spaceflight mission after the US, Russia and China

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- ❖ The **HLVM3-G1** mission is designed to validate technologies and abilities needed for a manned mission.
- ❖ It is designed as an end-to-end mission covering **lift-off, injection into orbit, 'circularisation' of orbit, re-entry and splashdown,**
- ❖ The G1 mission will also **flight-test the humanoid robot Vyommitra** developed by the ISRO Inertial Systems Unit (IISU).

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Q)The impact of communalism can be detrimental to social harmony, peace, and the overall development of the nation. Examine the causes and impact of communalism in India.

It is for historians to dig for tell-tale remains, not bigots

Normally, digging at historic sites is done by an archaeologist and historians in search of a lost civilisation or an ancient city or some signs of mythological events. But nowhere in the world, in the modern age, is an excavation done underneath a place of worship of one religion to find the remains of a place of worship of another religion. While digging in search of historical facts is a secular act, and is done using internationally recognised scientific methods, digging to establish the presence of a place of worship of one religion in a place of worship of another religion is, clearly, a non-secular act. Therefore, it is absolutely puzzling why the former Chief Justice of India (CJI), D.Y. Chandrachud found nothing objectionable or illegal in a survey in a place of worship of a particular religion by another religious group. In his oral observation, the former CJI, said, in 2022 (he was the CJI then), "a survey may not necessarily fall foul of the Places of Worship Act." He made this tricky observation in the Gyanvapi mosque case.

Clarity in the Act, yet challenged

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act was enacted by Parliament in 1956 in the background of a strident movement by Ram Jannabhooni supporters which heightened communal tensions in Ayodhya and many other parts of north India. The government of the day apprehended the imminent outbreak of violence in different parts of the country due to the raising of claims over the places of worship of a particular minority community. This Act bars the conversion of places of worship of any religious community into a place of worship of a different religious community. It declares that the religious character of a place of worship existing on the 15th day of August 1947, shall continue to be the same as it existed on that day.

The Act further provides that any suit and appeal seeking to convert the religious character of a place of worship existing on 15th August, 1947 pending before any court or tribunal shall abate on the commencement of the Act. It also states that no suit or appeal relating to this matter shall lie in any court after the commencement of the Act, and any suit alleging that the religious character of a place of worship has been converted after 15th August 1947 will be determined in terms of this Act.

But the constitutionality of this Act is under challenge in the Supreme Court of India. A petition was filed in 2020 challenging the constitutional validity of the Act on the grounds



P.D.T. Achary
a former Secretary-
General of the
Lok Sabha

that the date of August 15, 1947 was fixed arbitrarily and that this Act takes away judicial review.

The contention that the date of August 15, 1947 was arbitrarily fixed in the Act to prevent the conversion of a place of worship is a specious one. This is the day when the transfer of power from the British government to the Indian government took place. Naturally, this was the earliest date the government could think of for the purpose of this Act. In any case, the Government of India could not have chosen April 21, 1526 when Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodhi in the battle of Panipat and captured Delhi and Agra and laid the foundation of the Mughal empire. Nor could it have chosen, arbitrarily, a later date and kept the field open for a set of religious fanatics to make reckless claims on the places of worship of another religion. Therefore, by all accounts, the date chosen by Parliament in this enactment was the most reasonable one.

The second ground cited in the petition is that the Act takes away judicial review which is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution of India and any enactment which alters it is unconstitutional. This contention, needless to say, is without any merit. The Act declares that from the commencement of the Act, all pending suits, appeal or proceedings seeking to convert a place of worship of one religion existing as on August 15, 1947 into that of another religion or altering the religious character of a place of worship shall abate. It is the legislative policy of the government to declare through a law that certain types of suits shall abate under certain circumstances. It is not the same as stating that "no court shall have any jurisdiction in respect of any suit arising from the place of worship of any religion". The latter legislative assertion can be interpreted as an exclusion of judicial review which would, no doubt, be unconstitutional. But that is not the case here.

On the lower courts

Subsequent to the above quoted observation of the former CJI, lower courts in the State of Uttar Pradesh are ordering surveys in mosques to determine their religious character with great alacrity. It has led to violence in Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh in which some lives were lost. The lower courts do not seem to have bothered to check whether it was an order of the Supreme Court or a mere observation of the CJI during the hearing. The fact is that such observations from the Bench have no significance as those are not a part of any judgment of the Court.

Besides, it is a matter of common logic that when the law has barred any kind of conversion of the religious character of a place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, then what is the relevance of ordering or carrying out a survey to determine its character? Legally, its character is what existed on the date as above. So, where is the need for a fresh survey?

A close reading of the provisions of the Act would reveal that what has been prohibited is not merely the act of conversion but also fresh surveys to establish the religious character of a place of worship. As that stands settled, any attempt to resurrect the dispute and get an order from the court would be clearly in violation of the Act.

The Places of Worship Act 1956 has been hailed as a law which protects secularism in the Ayodhya judgment of the Supreme Court. Wiser, the Court has now put a blanket ban on all litigations relating to the places of worship till it finally determines the issue of the constitutionality of the Act.

Protection of a fundamental right

Quite apart from the issue of constitutionality or otherwise of the Places of Worship Act, a religious denomination has the fundamental right, under Article 26, to manage its own affairs in matters of religion. Worshipping in a mosque or a church is a matter of religion and any kind of interference by any outsider in that place of worship can be treated as a violation of the fundamental right of that religious denomination. The court, while ordering a survey of such a place of worship, is in fact committing a violation of Article 26 of the Constitution. The object of this Article is to protect the right conferred on a religious denomination. So, even if the Act was not in existence, a survey or excavation in a place of worship being used by a religious denomination for the purpose of finding out the religious character of that place would be a violation of Article 26.

It is possible that beneath some mosques lie remains of temples. And beneath the remains of temples there may be the remains of Buddha or Jain viharas. History has sequestered in the womb of earth these tell-tale remains for an archaeologist and a historian to chronicle the history of this nation, and not for bigots to kindle revanchism and poison the minds of generations of unwary people. It is a great pity that judicial misdirection is refining the retaliatory instincts of people fed on the falsehoods of manufactured history.

❖ **Communalism basically an ideology** which is **A belief that people who follow the same religion have common secular interests** i.e. they have same political, economic and social interests. So, here socio- political communalities arise.

❖ **A notion that, in a multi-religious society like India, these common secular interests of one religion is dissimilar and divergent from the interests of the follower of another religion.**

Factors responsible for growth of Communalism in India:

- ❖ **The “Divide and Rule”** policy of the British Government served their colonial interest. The partition of India was the ultimate outcome of their politics.
- ❖ **A number of communal and sectarian political parties** and organisations are present in India. Muslim League, Jamaat—Islami, Hindu Mahasabha, Akali Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad are directly or indirectly responsible for the emergence of communalism
- ❖ **Indian Muslims have developed a tendency of isolationism** even long after the creation of Pakistan. They remain aloof from the mainstream of national politics.
- ❖ **Mass poverty and unemployment** create a sense of frustration among the people. It generates backwardness, illiteracy, ignorance, etc.
- ❖ **The unemployed youth** of both the communities can be easily trapped by religious fundamentalists and fanatics.
- ❖ **The two major communities of India have been suspicious towards each other**. The Muslims complain of the threat of Hindu cultural invasion upon their lives and have become more assertive of their rights.

- ❖ **Communal tensions in India** sometimes are highly intensified due to the rule of two neighbouring theocratic countries. These countries try to create communal problems in the border states.
- ❖ Both the Union and the State Governments often **fail to prevent communalism in the country**. Due to lack of prior information, they fail to take any preventive measures.

Ramification of Communalism:

- ❖ **Genocides:** With mass killings, the real sufferers are the poor, who lose their house, their near and dear ones, their lives, their livelihood, etc. It violates the human rights from all direction. Sometimes children lose their parents and will become orphan for a lifetime.
- ❖ **Ghettoization and refugee problem** are other dimensions of communalism induced violence, whether its inter country or intra country.
- ❖ It becomes a **threat for the unity and integrity of the nation** as a whole. It promotes only the feeling of hatred in all directions, dividing the society on communal lines.
- ❖ **Minorities are viewed with suspicion** by all, including state authorities like police, paramilitary forces, army, intelligence agencies, etc.

Recommendations of Committee on National Integration

- o Joint celebration of community festivals
- o Observing restraint by Hindus while taking processions before the mosques
 - o Formation of peace and brotherhood communities at local level to prevent antisocial elements from engaging in communal riots
- o Respect for religious customs, rituals and practices

Intolerance can lead India to get collapsed from being a secular country to communal. And India is known to the world by the term “**diversity**”. It is beautiful when the people irrespective of their differences are co-existing.



Thank you

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