

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The recently concluded India-Israel Defence Pact marks a new chapter in the evolving relationship between two nations bound by shared strategic interests, technological innovation, and security challenges. Over the past three decades, India and Israel have moved beyond conventional diplomacy to establish one of the most robust defence partnerships in the world. The latest agreement - comprehensive in scope and futuristic in vision - is not merely a military arrangement but a signal of mutual trust and geopolitical alignment in an era of shifting global power dynamics.

India and Israel first formalized diplomatic ties in 1992, and since then, defence and security cooperation have been the cornerstone of their relationship. Israel emerged as one of India's most reliable defence partners, especially during crises such as the 1999 Kargil War, when it provided crucial weapon systems and intelligence support. Over the years, this cooperation has expanded from arms trade to joint ventures, research and development, intelligence sharing, and counterrorism collaboration. The new pact builds on this foundation, introducing structured mechanisms for technology transfer, co-production, and joint innovation in advanced fields such as drones, cyber warfare, artificial intelligence, missile defence, and space-based surveillance.

One of the most significant elements of the pact is its focus on self-reliance - a goal aligned with India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision. Unlike past arrangements that primarily centered on procurement, this agreement encourages co-development and co-manufacturing, allowing Indian defence industries, both public and private, to work directly with Israeli defence giants. This will not only strengthen India's technological base but also generate employment and boost indigenous capabilities in defence production. For Israel, this partnership opens access to India's vast market and industrial ecosystem, offering opportunities for long-term collaboration beyond mere arms sales.

Strategically, the pact is also a response to regional security concerns. Both nations face persistent threats from cross-border terrorism and volatile neighbourhoods. For Israel, surrounded by hostile states and facing asymmetric warfare, India's vast experience in counterterrorism and mountain warfare offers valuable insights. Conversely, India stands to gain from Israel's cutting-edge defence technology, intelligence systems, and battlefield-tested innovations. The collaboration can significantly enhance India's operational preparedness, particularly in border surveillance, unmanned systems, and missile defence - critical for safeguarding its frontiers with China and Pakistan.

At the geopolitical level, the pact reinforces India's growing role as a balancing power in West Asia. It complements New Delhi's participation in emerging multilateral forums such as I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA), where technology, trade, and security converge. By deepening ties with Israel, India is also subtly recalibrating its Middle East policy - maintaining close relations with Arab nations while affirming its independent, interest-driven diplomacy. This balanced approach ensures that India's strategic autonomy remains intact even as it strengthens ties with diverse partners.

India must ensure that this cooperation remains transparent and cost-effective, avoiding over-dependence on foreign technologies. The transfer of sensitive technologies should translate into actual capacity-building, not mere assembly of imported components. Moreover, New Delhi must manage its ties carefully with other regional players to avoid perceptions of partisanship, especially given the complex political realities of the Middle East.

It combines India's strategic depth with Israel's technological prowess, offering a blueprint for resilient, future-ready defence collaboration. In this pact, both nations have found not just allies - but equals - in their quest for peace through strength.

Towards Dignified Work: Why India Must Implement Its Labour Codes Now

■ S.P. TIWARI

India's world of work stands at an inflection point. India's workforce must increasingly find place in formal employment, supported by written contracts, adequate wages, and comprehensive social protection, so that the gains of growth translate into secure and dignified livelihoods for all. The persistence of older regulatory frameworks has, in part, limited the pace of formalisation and the ability of enterprises to generate secure and quality jobs. The four labour codes enacted by Parliament between 2019 and 2020, on Wages, Industrial Relations, Social Security, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, represent the long-pending reform envisioned by the Second National Commission on Labour chaired by Ravindra Varma in 2002 with a mission to codify, simplify & modify then existing labour frame work. The Codes offer a comprehensive framework to modernise India's labour landscape and correct structural imbalances. Their uniform implementation across all States has now become an urgent national priority.

The new codes simplify and modernise 29 central labour laws, many dating back to the mid-twentieth century. They seek not merely to merge statutes but to make multiple definitions of workers/workmen employee into simple definition. Each code strengthens the rights and welfare of workers while providing clarity and predictability for employers.

Fair wages and dignity of labour

The Code on Wages, 2019 marks a historic step towards ensuring that every worker receives a wage that respects the dignity of labour. By introducing universal minimum wages and a national floor wage, it guarantees that no worker, regardless of occupation or location, is left without a basic standard of income. Elimination of schedule of industry pave the road for universal wages.

Timely payment provisions have been strengthened, eliminating delays that once pushed families into debt. Workers can now claim unpaid wages or bonuses more easily, and the burden of proof in such disputes rests with the employer; creating greater accountability.

At the same time, the Code streamlines compliance for enterprises. Electronic record-keeping, a single registration, and unified returns reduce paperwork, rationalise chances of manipulation.

Extending the social security net

The Code on Social Security, 2020 represents one of the most inclusive expansions of welfare in independent India. By consolidating nine major laws, including the Employees' Provident Fund Act, Employees' State Insurance Act, and Maternity Benefit Act, it establishes a unified system that covers both traditional and future of work.

For the first time, gig workers, platform workers, and those in the unorganised sector are explicitly recognised as part of the national workforce. Every worker is to be registered and issued a unique social security number through the e-Shram portal, enabling direct delivery of benefits such as health insurance, pensions, and maternity support. Central and State Social Security Funds will be created to ensure that workers like app-based delivery partners or construction labourers are no longer left outside the safety net and funds are managed in holistic manner.

The Code also introduces career centres, digital and physical platforms that will provide vocational guidance, counselling, and employment services. This institutional support links welfare with multiple employability, helping workers transition from insecurity to opportunity.

Safety, dignity, and equality at work

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSH Code) is a statement of care and responsibility towards those who build the nation. By broadening the definition of "establishment," the Code extends protection to millions previ-



ously uncovered by safety legislation.

It mandates free annual health check-ups for workers and requires employers to maintain safe, hygienic workplaces without any financial burden on employees. The formation of a National Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board ensures that safety standards evolve with changing industrial conditions.

The OSH Code makes important strides in gender equality. Women workers are permitted to work in all establishments and night shifts, provided adequate facilities and security arrangements exist, empowering more women to join and remain in the labour force. Migrant workers, too, gain recognition through a national registration system, enabling access to welfare schemes and mobility benefits and monitoring legal framework to ensure recent live and livelihood.

Facilities such as canteens and restrooms are now mandatory at lower thresholds, and contract workers are counted for determining such provisions. These measures reflect a shift from minimal compliance to genuine concern for worker welfare.

Dialogue and industrial harmony

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 brings clarity to the relationship between employers and employees, replacing three earlier Acts with a unified framework. It requires establishments with twenty or more workers to set up Grievance Redressal Committees, ensuring that disputes are resolved promptly at the enterprise level rather than festering into strikes or litigation. Trade unions gain recognition through the concept of a negotiating union or council, strengthening collective bargaining and giving workers an effective voice in shaping their workplace. Workers facing retrenchment are now entitled to 30 days' notice and adequate compensation, a humane reform that respects livelihood security. The establishment of a re-skilling fund for retrenched workers signals a forward-looking approach that values learning and adaptability in a changing economy. The provisions related to strike rights need to be revisited. Upgradation of workers limit for the industry upto 300 to get easier clearance for closure or lock outs should also be reconsidered.

Fixed-term employment, formally recognised by the Code, offers flexibility to industry while guaranteeing parity in wages and other social security provisions including gratuity in tandem with regular employees. It balances the needs of a modern economy with fairness and security for those who work within it.

Why implementation matters now

Evidence from several developing nations shows that labour reforms have played a key role in driving economic growth. In the face of a shifting global economy marked by rising tariffs and changing trade patterns, India must urgently implement its new labour codes. Simplified and transparent laws will attract investment, promote formal employment, and uphold worker dignity. Timely notification will pave the way towards India reaching developed nations tag.

In a time when automation and digitalisation threaten to displace traditional jobs, the codes provide a framework for balanced growth, one that preserves human dignity even as technology advances. Implementation across all States would create uniform standards, reduce ambiguity, and easy access to jobs.

The way forward

The four codes form the backbone of India's ambition for a Viksit Bharat, a developed, self-reliant nation that combines economic dynamism with social justice. They transform inspectors into facilitators, replace outdated and overlapping laws with clear, consistent ones, and place worker welfare at the centre of economic policy. The spirit of these reforms with some riders lies not merely in consolidation but in compassion, ensuring that every worker, from the factory floor to the digital platform, enjoys dignity, safety, and security. For workers, they promise fairness and opportunity. Implementing these codes swiftly and uniformly is therefore not only a matter of administrative urgency but of national commitment, to build an economy where growth is shared, work is respected, and every hand that contributes to India's progress is protected and avail ease of living.

(The author is the National General Secretary, Trade Union Co-ordination Centre)

VandeMataram: One Song, One Soul, One India

■ DR SACHCHIDANAND JOSHI

*"Mother, I bow to thee!
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Cool with the winds of delight,
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
Mother free.
Glory of moonlight dreams
Over thy branches and lordly streams
Clad in the blossoming trees,
Mother, giver of ease,
Laughing low and sweet!
Mother, I kiss thy feet
Speaker sweet and low!
Mother to thee I bow."*



Nearly twenty years before this translation appeared in Karmayogin on 20 November 1909, the song 'VandeMataram' had already woven itself into the soul of Indian unity. Sung at rallies and whispered in homes, it charged the hearts of millions to rise above provinces and creeds. BankimChandra Chatterjee words called a nation to dream together, and Aurobindo's rendering in English became the bridge for new generations and the world to hear India's cry for freedom. The poem's publication in Karmayogin did not just translate a song; it crystallized a movement, lending voice and vision to an idea that for two decades had been uniting India beyond every divide.

People first heard VandeMataram rise like a hymn in 1896, when Rabindranath Tagore gave it a voice at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. That evening, the audience fell into a spell - the notes were not of defiance, but devotion. Ten years later, in 1905, as Bengal convulsed under the Partition, Tagore's nephew Abanindranath Tagore painted Bharat Mata - a saffron-robed woman holding a sheaf of grain, a book, and a rosary - the visual embodiment of Bankim's verse. This song was not merely the imagination of a poet; it was the anguished cry of a soul nurturing the intense will to survive and protect the Motherland, a yearning held deep within for years. When the British Administrators were forcing people to sing "Long Live the Queen," Bankim Chandra Chatterjee penned this anthem in a single night. It was the poetic expression of decades, even centuries, of suffering, a fervent call to awaken a nation that had become semi-conscious from enduring prolonged pain.

From the Congress convention to the gallows of Lahore, VandeMataram became the breath of rebellion. Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, BatukeshwarDuttand many more shouted it as they faced death. Subhas Chandra Bose made it the marching tune of the Indian National Army. It was sung in rallies and whispered in jails; it united monk and soldier, scholar and farmer; Hindu, Muslim, people of all religions and beliefs shared chant that carried both prayer and protest.

It was not Sri Aurobindo, who first translated it, Many Indian and English scholars translated the song into English. It had also been translated into various Indian languages including Urdu. W.H. Lee, a British who was in Indian Civil Service,

translated it into English in 1906. When it was prohibited even to utter the word VandeMataram, it was translated anonymously. However, the English translation by AurobindoGhose, is appended along with the original song in Bengali. No other song has travelled across generations and geographies, crossing every hue and stratum of Indian life, and yet remained at the heart of what it means to be Indian. Through subjugation and sorrow, through reform and revolution, VandeMataram endured - not as a slogan of rage, but as a salutation of love.

To understand its endurance, one must return to its origin - to a modest home in Bengal, on a luminous day that would change India's destiny. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), one of the earliest graduates of Calcutta University, had entered government service as a Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector. His job gave him access to British Archives and Gazettes - records that revealed a forgotten saga: the San'yasi Rebellion (1763-1780), when ascetic monks had risen against imperial oppression across Dhaka and North Bengal. That story of renunciation turned into resistance inspired BankimBabu's later novel, Anandamath. But before the novel, came the song. By the 1870s, the British Empire had begun enforcing its loyalty rituals - demanding that Indians stand for "God Save the Queen" at official gatherings and schools. To Bankim, this was not just political coercion - it was spiritual submission. A proud civilization was being trained to bow before a foreign sovereign.

It was in this moment of quiet rebellion that on Sunday, 7th November 1875 - Akshay Navami - at his residence near Calcutta, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee took up his pen. In what his contemporaries called a "transcendental mood," he wrote VandeMataram in one sitting - as though the song had descended upon him rather than been composed. When others sang to the Queen, he sang to the Motherland. He answered imperial command with spiritual surrender - not to a crown, but to a conscience, where others bowed to a monarch, BankimChandra Chatterjee bowed to the soil. That was his rebellion. Not a sword drawn, but a song born. He knew sword does not live but the words are eternal.

VandeMataram was not composed for an hour of anger, but for an age of awakening. It was not addressed to a ruler but to a realm - to rivers, fields, orchards, and winds. It was a hymn that reclaimed India's spiritual sovereignty long before she claimed her political one. As Anandamath reached readers, the song leapt from the novel into the nation's bloodstream. At the 1896 Calcutta Congress, Tagore's voice gave it wings. Within a decade, the streets of Bengal echoed with it during the Swadeshi Movement of 1905. VandeMataram then was an act of defiance. The British banned it; students were expelled; protesters were arrested. But repression only deepened reverence. In Calcutta, schoolchildren stood barefoot in the rain to chant it. In Dhaka, women embroidered it onto their saris.

Aurobindo Ghosh called it "the Mantra of India's rebirth." Sister Nivedita wrote that to hear it was "to hear the very breath of India herself." The song's power was its universality - you did not need to know Sanskrit to feel it. By the 1920s and 30s, VandeMataram was the code of courage. In prison cells, revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh etched it onto the walls. In the Andaman Cellular Jail, it echoed through corridors like a psalm of pain. Subhas Chandra Bose made it the INA's battle cry. For his soldiers, the chant was not a melody

but a mandate. Even as Mahatma Gandhi advised restraint in mixed gatherings, he admitted that VandeMataram had become sacred - "a song sanctified by sacrifice."

The strength of VandeMataram lies in its imagery - a nation not of boundaries but of breath. Its motherland is not a battlefield but a being: fertile, radiant, nurturing. When Abanindranath Tagore painted Bharat Mata in 1905, he gave that being a face - serene, spiritual, self-sufficient. The painting, like the song, was both aesthetic and political, sacred and subversive.

Bankim's genius was to elevate patriotism into prayer. To love India was to revere her; to worship the land as mother; not merely occupy it as territory.

The Anthem of Freedom

By the time India neared independence, VandeMataram had become inseparable from the idea of India itself. Yet, in the Constituent Assembly, a debate arose: which song would represent the new Republic? In 1947, "Jana Gana Mana" was chosen as the National Anthem for its linguistic universality. But VandeMataram was declared the National Song, with equal honour. Nehru called it "the song of our awakening." Only its first two stanzas - describing nature, not deity - were adopted for official use.

One Soul, One India

It is not a sheer coincidence that when the nation is celebrating 150 years of the song 'VandeMataram', it is also celebrating 150 years of the greatest unified of India - SardarVallabhbhai Patel. While the song 'VandeMataram' described India's unity in word, it was Sardar Patel, who brought it to reality after independence. In 1947 we got the freedom but the biggest task of unifying the country and bringing all the princely states together was still pending. Without their integration the freedom of the country was meaningless. It was the Iron Man of India Sardar Patel who took up this task single handed and unified the country. How could we have imagined our own motherland 'sujalamsuphalam' if she is fragmented into different parts and ruled by the different princely state rulers. It was the valiant effort and deep routed commitment of Sardar Patel who made this country 'sukhadam, varadham'.

Different Ways of Expression

Thus, VandeMataram remained India's eternal invocation - not of policy, but of pride. Post-Independence, the song found new avatars. In 1952, the film Anand Math, directed by Hemen Gupta, brought it to the silver screen. LataMangeshkar's crystalline voice, guided by Hemant Kumar's stirring score, turned VandeMataram into an anthem of cinematic immortality.

Half a century later, in 1997, A.R. Rahman's "MaaTujhe Salaam" rekindled its fire for a global generation. Mixing Hindustani ragas with world music, Rahman reminded Indians abroad that the Mother still waited for their song. His voice bridged centuries - from Bankim's quill to Rahman's synthesizer, the sentiment remained the same that every age sings the same mother in a different tune.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, VandeMataram has experienced a renaissance of meaning. The Prime Minister frequently invokes it at national events, seeing in it not nostalgia, but narrative - a civilizational reminder that India's freedom was born from faith, not fury. Through programs like AzadiKaAmritMahotsav, school competitions, and cul-

tural campaigns, the government has revived the song among youth. Digital choirs, drone-light shows, and orchestral renditions now accompany its melody at official events.

When Chandrayaan-3 landed on the Moon, social media erupted with "VandeMataram from the lunar soil." The anthem that once defied an empire now saluted the universe. From time to time, critics have questioned the song's imagery - reading its invocation of the Goddess as exclusionary. But they misunderstand the Indian idea of the divine. In our culture, the Mother is not theological but terrestrial. She is the air we breathe, the water we drink, the language we speak.

The first two stanzas - officially adopted - describe rivers, fields, and winds. The Mother is nature herself. VandeMataram is not about any religion or subscribes to any particular belief - it is about reverence. It celebrates not dominion, but devotion for the motherland. Not conquest, but compassion.

Why It Still Matters

In an age of fractured identities, VandeMataram offers unity through emotion. It reminds Indians that nationhood is not an ideology but an inheritance. It asks nothing but gratitude - a sentiment beyond politics, beyond creed.

It also redefines nationalism - not as chest-thumping pride, but as quiet service. In Bankim's vision, to bow to the Mother is to protect her rivers, forests, and children. As VandeMataram turns 150 in 2025, India celebrates it in new forms. AI-driven symphonies visualize its verses through satellite imagery - rivers flowing to rhythm, crops swaying to chorus. Schoolchildren from across states sing it in 22 languages. Artists remix it into rap, classical dance, and fusion.

Technology has not diminished its sanctity; it has amplified it. The Mother now speaks in code, but her song remains the same. At its core, VandeMataram is not political poetry - it is philosophy. It calls upon Indians to merge duty with devotion. To be born on this soil is fortune; to serve it, dharna.

Bankim's invocation of the Mother anticipated the environmental, spiritual, and moral questions of our time. To sing VandeMataram today is to remind ourselves of balance - between progress and preservation, power and peace. Few songs in history have outlived empires. VandeMataram did. Banned, debated, dissected - yet undefeated. Because songs that spring from soul cannot be silenced.

From colonial prisons to Olympic stadiums, from Bengal's riverside to the moon's surface, its echo endures. Soldiers whisper it before battle; children hum it before school prayers. It is India's first language of love. When BankimChandra Chatterjee wrote VandeMataram on that Akshay Navami afternoon in 1875, he could not have known that his pen would outlast empires. That his hymn would become a nation's soul.

Today, as India rises again - confident, plural, ancient, and young - the Mother still listens. She asks no offerings, only remembrance. Every time we sayVandeMataram, we remind ourselves that freedom without gratitude is hollow."

The Mother is free. The children must now prove worthy as Sri Aurobindo wrote: "For nations are not built by armies alone, but by those who can hear the voice of the Mother and bow to her with love." VandeMataramm, Mother, we bow to thee.

(The writer is Member Secretary of IGNCA)