

TRIAL IN ABSENTIA: 'Mukhbir'-A Soldier Without Uniform

Trial in absentia refers to the legal process in which a defendant is tried and convicted without being physically present in the courtroom. The term "absentia" comes from Latin, meaning "in absence," and this procedure can be applied in various legal systems under certain conditions. Although the absence of the defendant during a trial may seem counterintuitive to the principles of justice, it is sometimes deemed necessary, especially when the accused person's presence is unattainable or they deliberately evade legal proceedings.

The concept of trial in absentia has been used throughout history in various forms, particularly in cases where the accused is in hiding, abroad, or refuses to attend court. In ancient times, Roman law allowed trials in absentia, and this concept was carried into modern legal systems. However, its application varies widely depending on the legal traditions of different countries.

In the early stages of the modern legal system, trial in absentia was largely seen as a last resort when an accused person was unavailable, either due to flight, illness, or other factors. Today, many countries, including those within the European Union, the United States, and various Latin American nations, allow trials in absentia, though with strict safeguards to ensure fairness and to protect the rights of the defendant.

A fundamental principle of criminal law is that the accused has the right to be present during their trial. This principle is enshrined in various international human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). However, trials in absentia are considered an exception to this rule.

The defendant must be given fair notice of the charges against them, the proceedings, and the opportunity to prepare a defense. Legal representatives, such as defense attorneys, are often allowed to represent the absent defendant in court.

Before proceeding with a trial in absentia, authorities must demonstrate that they have made reasonable efforts to locate and compel the defendant to attend the trial. This may include issuing arrest warrants, contacting international law enforcement, and attempting extradition if the defendant has fled to another country.

If the defendant is absent, their legal rights must still be respected, meaning they should have access to legal counsel. A lawyer may be appointed to represent the defendant during the trial, ensuring that the accused's interests are defended. Many legal systems allow for the possibility of the verdict being appealed or reviewed in cases where the defendant was absent during the trial. This ensures that the defendant's rights to a fair trial are preserved even after the judgment has been passed. While trial in absentia may be necessary in some legal systems, it remains a contentious and delicate procedure. The process must balance the interests of justice with the need to protect the rights of the accused.

SAJJAD BAZAZ

Some time back, in a private discussion on fast changing habits with an educationist friend, we debated book reading culture losing its space to internet-based platforms. As we were busy pitching our opinions on the subject, one thing surfaced during the discussion that book writing, especially in the context of Kashmir, is gaining momentum as a new breed of authors is venturing into the areas of human interest stories in contemporary times.

Basically, Kashmir is a green pasture for journalists and writers. The place is full of anecdotes that need to be captured in true form so that misinformation campaigns about Kashmir and its people are neutralized. During the discussion, my friend asked me about "Mukhbir". I was clueless as I only knew how scary the word "Mukhbir" was during the three decades of militancy in Kashmir. "It is a book on Kashmir written by a decorated army officer serving in Kashmir for the last fifteen years," he said while giving some finer details of the book.

The title "Mukhbir" was enough for me to understand that the book must not be a routine in content describing history and geography of Kashmir conflict, but it will be full of first-hand accounts of situations confronted by the author while being in the line of his duty. My friend endorsed my guess and even shared its title page on WhatsApp which raised my curiosity to meet the author - Brigadier Sushil Tanwar, a highly decorated serving officer in the Indian Army who besides performing his soldierly duties with distinction, is also known as a prolific writer. He has a distinction of serving in United Nations peacekeeping in Africa.

Somehow, I was able to meet the officer in the context of his "Mukhbir" and in a candid conversation he spoke his heart out on Kashmir and the Kashmiris. He spoke more with a mind as an author, than a military mind. His assessment about the Kashmir affairs vouches for him as a knowledgeable man with wisdom.

I found the Brigadier possessing huge experience of serving in Jammu and Kashmir, which makes him a credible source of telling inside stories about the place and its people beyond military operations. I came across his

articles and papers on issues of national security published by leading think tanks of the country including the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) & Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS). He also writes regularly for newspapers and magazines of repute.

His article published in the Economic Times on July 02, 2021 headlined "A Serving Indian Army Officer Dons Pakistani Hat and Views the Kargil Through Rawalpindi Prism" is a masterpiece. "The article basically aimed to exploit gaps in Indian positions in the Dras-Mushkoh Sekt and capture the unoccupied heights across the Line of Control so that we could interdict movement on the Leh - Kargil National highway. Such was the cloak of secrecy that leave aside the political leadership even our Air Force and Navy were kept in dark," says Brigadier Sushil Tanwar.

The book has got great reviews and many publications have hailed the author for this piece of literary work, that too in hindi language, based on facts, not the fiction. The author has moved beyond cliches and stereotypes to present a narrative that truly reflects the ground realities of Kashmir.

A heart-touching collection of seventeen short stories, the 192-page book "Mukhbir" takes the reader to a fascinating world of complex human emotions. Each story brings to life not only the operational aspects of security forces but also the daily experiences of common Kashmiris.

There is a realistic description of intelligence operations and the human emotions involved in the stories, which holds the reader's attention without a blink of an eye. Author's nuanced approach to storytelling, his acute depiction of local culture, razor sharp sketches of characters and use of simple prose immediately strikes a personal chord with the reader. Precisely, the book presents a vivid account of various dimensions of the rich heritage of Jammu & Kashmir.

Stories like "Love Jihad" capturing the roller coaster ride of a Pakistani terrorist who falls in love with a girl in Kashmir; "Sena Medal" taking the readers for a deep immersive dive into the mind of a Rashtriya Rifles Company Commander and other wide-ranging true tales makes 'Mukhbir' a priceless read. The capturing of the moral dilemmas

and emotional trappings of not only the security forces, but also of the various segments of local population in Jammu and Kashmir through story-telling takes the readers on a pleasantly fascinating journey getting intimately identified with the characters.

A Tale of My "Mukhbir" "Give a dog a bad name and hang him" is a popular phrase. Though all of us understand the meaning of this idiom, I will still repeat it in the context of today's column. The given line is an old idiom and if any time this strikes your ears, then take it as a case of criticism. Precisely, this phrase describes a situation when someone is condemning the other person purely based on a false narrative or negative reputation. The net result is that these untrue charges ruin a man's reputation with no chance of ever re-earning it and respectability is lost once for all.

In the context of Kashmir, this phrase has been widely used since the day militancy erupted. Here, it is summed up in one word "Mukhbir". In most of the cases, the persons with this 'bad name' not only lost their reputation in public, but also got killed at the hands of gunmen. Some militant organizations owned these "Mukhbir" killings while as many remained a mystery. Even the families of these victims faced social stigma and always remained under the threat of militants. Pertinently, the "Mukhbir" label was slapped by the militant groups at sweet will on the persons accused of working for security agencies. Even this "Mukhbir" tag was used by the militant organizations as a weapon to make people fall in line with their designs or face the consequences. It was used by them as a convenient route for extortion. In this situation, people would easily fall in line to their dictate to save their reputation and escape being labelled as "Mukhbir".

While deliberating upon the "Mukhbir" culture in Kashmir which was driven at the back of armed militant organizations, I cannot resist sharing an untold story of my next door neighbour, Shahdeen (name changed) who fell to the "Mukhbir" tag in early nineties and lost his life. Shahdeen was a government employee in his late forties when he along with his only son, Majid (name changed), was abducted by unknown militants during a midnight raid on his house. Nobody in the neigh-

borhood was aware of the abduction until his wife informed in the wee hours about the midnight raid on their house by some masked armed men. In the first instance, it was believed to be a security forces raid. But why this family was raided, was most surprising for the neighbours. Certainly, the family was nowhere connected to any militancy related situation. His abduction by militants was not even thought about, as the everybody pointed his arrest possibly by security forces. Precisely, it was a dilemma.

The story of his abduction unfolded just before noon when his son Majid reached back home in a crippled condition as he was hardly able to walk. It was a shocker to neighbors when he narrated the tale of abduction by militants for being "Mukhbir" of security forces. Though the father-son duo had pleaded innocence, they were beaten to the pulp.

The words of Majid are still echoing in my ears. "Papa is badly injured and is bleeding profusely through mouth and nose. He needs immediate hospitalization. Please help," he said with tears in his eyes.

Majid was allowed to go home by the abductors and promised to release his father after he gains consciousness. The neighbors were clueless as the militant driven "Mukhbir" culture had scared the common man. Once a person would be labelled "Mukhbir", the community's spontaneous reaction was to impose social boycott against the accused person and his family. Meanwhile, by evening the bullet-ridden body of our innocent neighbor Shahdeen was thrown on the roadside in the vicinity. A pall of gloom descended on the whole neighborhood as the community was not ready to accept that he was a "Mukhbir". However, militants released posters claiming responsibility of executing the "Mukhbir" and warned people of raising any hue and cry over the killing. Basically, the story of Shahdeen losing his life to "Mukhbir" tag is not an isolated incident. There are many Shahdeens who fell to the bullets of militants because the phrase "Give a dog a bad name and hang him" was applied to them as a death warrant.

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India's AI Breakthrough: Powering the Future with Affordable Innovation

India is witnessing a transformative revolution in Artificial Intelligence, and at the heart of this change is the visionary leadership of PM Modi. For the first time in India's history, the government is directly fostering an AI ecosystem where computing power, GPUs, and research opportunities are available at an affordable cost.

The Modi government has ensured that AI is not just for a privileged few and were not dominated by big tech companies and global giants. Through ground-breaking policies, Modi government is enabling students, startups, and innovators to access world-class AI infrastructure, creating a truly level playing field. Be it the IndiaAI mission or establishing Centers of Excellence for AI, all these initiatives by Modi government intends to improve the country's ecosystem.

Let us have a look on what Modi government is doing to make India a Global AI Leader:

IndiaAI Mission: Pioneering Accessible AI

Marking a significant step towards bolstering India's AI ecosystem, the Modi government in 2024 approved the IndiaAI Mission with allocation of ₹10,300 crore. This funding slated over the next five years, is poised to catalyze various components of the IndiaAI Mission.

Backed by a high-end common computing facility, the India AI mission is now closer to customising indigenous AI solutions for the Indian context using Indian languages. The AI model is beginning with the computation facility of roughly 10000 GPUs. Soon the remaining 8693 GPUs will be added.

GPU Infrastructure and Open GPU Market

Within 10 months of the launch of India AI Mission, the nodal ministry has been able to get an unprecedented response & create a high end & robust common computing facility of about 18,693 Graphic Processing Unit, GPUs. It is about nine times of what Open Source Model DeepSeek has & about two third of what ChatGPT has.

Notably, the Modi government has pioneered the opening of India's GPU marketplace and it is the first government to open the GPU marketplace in India, enabling small startups, researchers, and students to access high-performance computing resources, unlike major countries where the AI market is often dominated by large industry players.

The Modi government will make available 18,000 high-end GPU-based compute facilities for AI development to entities in the country in the next couple of days and out of that, 10,000 are already available. The government has also selected 10 companies that will supply 18,693 GPUs.

Additionally, India will develop its own Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) in the next three to five years, and a domestic foundational AI platform can be expected in the next 10 months.

The government will soon launch a common compute facility where startups and researchers can access computing power.

While global GPU access costs around \$2.5-\$3 per hour, the Modi government will offer it at just \$1 per hour. The researchers, startups, academicians, colleges, IITs, all of them can have access to this compute power, and they can start foundational models.

IndiaAI Dataset Platform: Enabling AI Innovation with Open Data

Data is the fuel that drives AI research and innovation, and without rich, diverse, and abundant datasets, even the most skilled data scientists and developers face limitations. Recognizing this, the Modi government has been actively working to make open datasets accessible to the larger research community.

The government through the IndiaAI Dataset Platform aims to streamline access to high-quality, non-personal datasets, creating a unified data platform that enables seamless access for Indian startups and researchers, accelerating AI-driven innovation. This AI dataset platform will have the largest collection of anonymised data which will drive innovation and enhance capabilities of AI applications.

Establishment of AI Centres of Excellence

In 2023, the Modi government announced the establishment of three AI Centres of Excellence (CoE) focused on Healthcare, Agriculture, and Sustainable Cities in New Delhi. The Budget 2025 announced setting up a new centre of excellence for AI for education with an outlay of Rs 500 crore. The CoE for AI in education is the fourth such centre to be announced.

The government also revealed plans for 5 National Centres of Excellence for Skilling, designed to equip youth with industry-relevant expertise. These centres will be set up with global partnerships to support Make for India, Make for the World manufacturing.

India's Foundational Large Language Models

India is not only developing a robust AI ecosystem but has already made significant strides in creating foundational AI models. The government has ensured that India's AI advancements are indigenous. IndiaAI has launched a significant initiative to develop indigenous foundational AI models, including LLMs and SLMs, through a call for proposals.

One of the standout achievements is Digital India BHASHINI, India's AI-led language translation platform which seeks to enable easy access to the internet and digital services in Indian languages, including voice-based access, and help the creation of content in Indian languages.

BharatGen the World's First Government Funded Multimodal LLM Initiative. BharatGen, is a generative AI, was launched in India in 2024, in Delhi. The initiative is designed to revolutionize public service delivery and boost citizen engagement by developing a suite of foundational models in language, speech, and computer vision. BharatGen includes a consortium of top AI researchers across premier academic institutions in India.

Sarvam-1 AI Model, this innovative large language model is optimised explicitly for Indian languages, addressing a critical gap in the AI landscape. Sarvam-1, boasting 2 billion parameters, supports ten major Indian languages, demonstrating its potential to revolutionize various applications such as language translation, text summarization, and content generation.

Chitralekha is an open-source video transcription platform developed by AI4BhRat. Leveraging advanced AI models, Chitralekha empowers users to generate and edit audio transcripts in various Indian languages effortlessly. The platform's open-source nature encourages community contributions and fosters innovation in AI-powered video processing.

SML's Hanooman has unveiled Everest 1.0, a versatile multilingual AI system designed to cater to various Indian languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and Telugu. The system currently supports 35 languages and is poised to expand its language capabilities to 90 shortly.

India Leads Global AI Talent and Skill Penetration

AI Talent Pipeline & AI Education Beyond Metro Cities Under the IndiaAI Future Skills initiative, AI courses will be expanded across undergraduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. programs. Additionally, fellowships are being provided to full-time Ph.D. scholars researching AI in the top 50 NIRF-ranked research institutes.

To ensure inclusive access to AI education, the government is setting up Data and AI Labs in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. These labs will offer foundational AI courses to a broader demographic. A model IndiaAI Data Lab has already been established at the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) in Delhi.

India Ranks 1st in Global AI Skill Penetration

According to the Stanford AI Index 2024, India leads globally in AI skill penetration. India ranks first globally in AI skill penetration with a score of 2.8, surpassing the US (2.2) and Germany (1.9). The country has also witnessed a remarkable 263% growth in AI talent concentration since 2016, positioning itself as a major global player in AI.

India also leads in AI Skill Penetration for Women with a penetration rate of 1.7, followed by the US (1.2) and Israel (0.9). This achievement signifies India's ongoing efforts to bridge gender disparity in AI skill development.

Growing Presence in AI Innovation

When it comes to innovation and technology, Indian youth are among the best. India has emerged as the fastest-growing developer population globally, ranking second in public generative AI projects on GitHub. India is positioning itself as an innovation hub for AI, housing 16% of the world's AI talent and demonstrating rapid adoption of AI skills.

India among Top 5 Fastest-growing AI Talent Hubs

The "India Skills Report 2024" by

Wheebox forecasts that India's AI industry will reach USD 28.8 billion by 2025, with a CAGR of 45%. Additionally, the AI-skilled workforce in India has seen a 14-fold increase from 2016 to 2023. India stands among the top five fastest-growing AI talent hubs, alongside Singapore, Finland, Ireland, and Canada. The projected demand for AI professionals in India is anticipated to hit around 1 million by 2026.

India's GenAI ecosystem Grows Remarkably Amid Global Downturn

According to a report by NASSCOM in November 2024, India's Generative AI ecosystem has grown remarkably amid a global downturn. It said that Indian GenAI startup funding, at about USD 51 million in Q2FY2025, saw over 6 times rise quarter-on-quarter, led by B2B and agentic AI startups. The evolution of the Indian GenAI ecosystem from experimental use cases to scalable, production-ready solutions is reflected in its growing maturity.

India is leading in AI Adoption

According to a recent report compiled by BCG, India is leading in AI adoption, with 80% of companies identifying AI as a core strategic priority, surpassing the global average of 75%. It revealed that 69% of Indian companies plan to increase their tech investments in 2025, with one-third of these companies set to allocate over \$25 million to AI initiatives. This reflects the nation's drive towards a comprehensive digital transformation agenda.

According to the Randstad AI & Equity Report 2024, AI has made rapid inroads into workplaces in India, with seven in 10 employees using some form of AI at work in 2024, up from 5 in 10 a year earlier.

The Continuous Rise of Indian AI

By leveraging AI-driven technologies such as autonomous agents, small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are unlocking efficient ways to scale, delivering personalised customer experiences and optimising back-office operations. According to a report by 'Salesforce', as many as 78% of small and SMBs in India using AI have reported revenue growth. 93% of Indian SMBs surveyed said AI has helped increase revenues.

AI Market Growth in India

India's AI market is experiencing exponential growth, as highlighted by the BCG-NASSCOM Report 2024. The AI market will grow at CAGR of 25-35%, emphasizing innovation and job creation potential. While AI automates routine tasks, it generates new job opportunities in data science, machine learning, and AI-driven applications.

Growing Network of Accelerators

India is home to 520+ tech incubators and accelerators. India has the third-largest number of active programs in the world, with 42% of programs set up in the past five years to support the needs of Indian startups.

Accelerators like T-Hub MATH provide AI startups with crucial guidance on product development, business strategy, and scaling. For instance, in the initial months of 2024, MATH had over 60 startups under its fold, and five of them are under discussion for funding.

Parenting with Purpose: The Key to Holistic Child Development

DR. KANIKA GUPTA

Parental involvement is the cornerstone of a child's holistic development. From the moment a child is born, the parents' presence, guidance, and support profoundly influence their physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth. In today's fast-paced world, where work-life balance is a challenge, the role of parents in fostering their child's potential is more critical than ever. This article delves into the multifaceted aspects of parental involvement and its lasting impact on a child's life.

The Role of Parents in Cognitive Development

Parents serve as a child's first teachers, laying the groundwork for intellectual development. Activities such as reading bedtime stories, solving puzzles together, or engaging in educational games stimulate a child's brain and enhance problem-solving skills. Regular conversations with parents even simple ones about daily events expand vocabulary and foster critical thinking. Studies show that children whose parents actively engage in their learning process perform better academically and are more likely to develop a love for lifelong learning.

Emotional and Social Growth

A child's emotional well-being is heavily influenced by their relationship with their parents. Providing a safe and nurturing environment allows children to express their feelings without fear of judgment. This openness helps them develop self-confidence and emotional resilience. Parents also play a crucial role in teaching social skills from sharing and empathy to conflict resolution. By modeling respectful and cooperative behavior, parents equip their children with the tools to navigate social interactions effectively.

Physical Health and Well-Being

Parental involvement is pivotal in establishing healthy habits. Encouraging a balanced diet, regular physical activity, and good hygiene practices lays the foundation for lifelong well-being. Parents act as role models; when children see their parents making healthy choices, they are more likely to adopt similar behaviors. Additionally, parents who monitor their children's screen time and encourage outdoor activities contribute to their physical and mental health.

Parental Involvement in Education

Active participation in a child's education significantly boosts their academic success. Attending parent-teacher meetings, helping with homework, or volunteering at school events shows children that their education is valued. This involvement fosters a sense of accountability and motivation in children. Moreover, parents who collaborate with teachers can identify and address learning challenges early, ensuring that their child receives the necessary support.

Challenges in Modern Parenting

Modern life presents unique challenges to parental involvement. The prevalence of technology and social media often distracts both parents and children, reducing meaningful interactions.

Additionally, demanding work schedules leave many parents with limited time to engage with their children. However, small efforts such as having family meals, setting aside gadget-free time, or planning weekend activities can make a significant difference in maintaining a strong parent-child bond.

Parental involvement is not about striving for perfection but about being consistently present in a child's life. Simple, everyday actions like listening, encouraging, and showing interest can profoundly impact a child's development. As parents navigate the challenges of modern life, seeking support from extended family, community resources, or parenting workshops can provide valuable assistance. Ultimately, the investment of time, love, and effort in raising a child is one of the most rewarding and impactful contributions parents can make to society.

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