

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

TERRORISM WORKS BETTER AS A TACTIC FOR
DICTATORSHIPS, OR FOR WOULD-BE DICTATORS, THAN
FOR REVOLUTIONARIES. — CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

AFTER PULWAMA

Money tap needs to be tightened, Pakistan's Great Wall of China needs to crack

AFTER THE PULWAMA attack in Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi once again confronts a problem that has persisted ever since Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons in the late 1980s. Put simply, it is about Delhi's inability to deter the Pakistan army from using proxies like the Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba to wage a war against India. For the Pakistan Army, nuclear weapons have provided the impunity to pursue a sub-conventional war against India. Over the last two decades, successive governments in Delhi have tried different things to enhance deterrence against Pakistan-sponsored attacks. They included political measures — comprehensive dialogue on all issues including Kashmir, economic cooperation and people-to-people contact. Efforts at peaceful persuasion were thwarted, as Pakistan pulled back repeatedly from significant political agreements. Among the coercive steps that India sought to pursue are the mobilisation of international diplomatic pressure against Pakistan, massing of troops on the land border and naval ships in the Arabian Sea, and the so-called surgical military strikes across the the Line of Control in Kashmir. None of these worked because of the political constraint imposed by nuclear weapons.

The danger of escalation to the nuclear level and the fear of international intervention in the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan have had a self-deterrent effect on Delhi. If Pakistan revelled in this dynamic, India has struggled to overcome the nuclear constraint. Any current effort to break out of this nuclear box would demand the political will to explore its brink. It would also demand a careful calibration of strategies. There is little point in speculating on the nature and type of Indian military response. For now, though, there is much diplomatic work to be done.

The withdrawal of the MFN status is unlikely to make much of an impact on a Pakistan that has never been interested in trading with India. Such steps, including the snapping of diplomatic relations, signal India's displeasure with Pakistan but achieve little. India should focus, instead, on targeting Pakistan's greatest current vulnerability — a troubled financial condition. Even as Islamabad desperately seeks international support to shore up its economy, the global Financial Action Task Force is considering the case for putting Pakistan on a black list that will trigger major sanctions. In nudging the FATF, at its meeting this week, towards this goal and in the broader effort to mount international political pressure on Pakistan, Delhi faces two problems — one external and the other internal. On the external front, China has emerged not only as Pakistan's most important economic partner but also its international political shield. Delhi can no longer remain silent and must signal its willingness to limit bilateral political and commercial ties with China, if Beijing continues to protect Pakistan on terror-related issues. But no external strategy can succeed if Delhi lets the internal cracks widen. For nothing will suit Pakistan more than a surge of communal violence in this country.

WHAT TERROR FEEDS ON

Mobs targeting J&K students target India and its young. That will be the terrible success of terror

THAT STUDENTS FROM the Valley had to lock themselves inside a hostel room in Dehradun on Sunday to protect themselves from a mob that had gathered outside, and that this is not the only incident of Kashmiri students feeling vulnerable, in Dehradun and elsewhere, after the Pulwama terror attack, is a shame. It is a reproach to the much touted idea of India. After all, what binds Kashmir to India is not military force or merely a political pact made decades ago. It is, among other things, the unremarkable and unselfconscious movement of people of J&K — students and those in pursuit of jobs, better opportunities or larger vistas — to other states. The idea of India is made up of, it is strengthened by, the possibility that they can find a home anywhere in this country, away from home. If that idea should become besieged or threatened by mobs wielding patriotism as a weapon against India's own, it would be the terrible success that the Pulwama suicide bomber aimed for. What else is the terror project, after all, but the bid to maximise the terror fallout.

The all-party meeting convened by Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday reassuringly brought together the political leadership behind a message of sobriety and restraint. There was no divisive or provocative rhetoric. There was condemnation of terror "in all forms", a vow to speak in "one voice" to fight the challenge. There were expressions of concern that the attack may lead to the harassment and targeting of Kashmiri students, and appeals to the government to ensure the safety of Kashmiris wherever they are in the country and to prevent communal polarisation ahead of polls. The Union government did well to immediately issue an advisory asking all states and Union Territories to provide security to Kashmiris and maintain the peace. More needs to be done. Those in positions of power and responsibility who are trying to blame the victim must also be advised restraint — like the Uttarakhnd minister, Madan Kaushik, who, instead of assuring safety to the besieged students from the mob in his state, told this paper that "Kashmiri students should refrain from making anti-national comments in social media... (that) are fuelling the public against them". This is not the time to find a reason to justify the lathi-brandishing mob or to allow it to set patriotism tests for others.

This is a delicate moment. The mob that targets Kashmiri students must be stopped before it becomes more crazed, enlarges its target. As the government mulls its options, it is the duty of the administration and all political and civil society leadership to ensure that calm is maintained. Much is at stake, and on test.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



Needed: Policy, not reaction

India urgently needs a national security doctrine, clear red lines



ARUN PRAKASH

AS THE NATION mourns the tragic loss of 40 gallant CRPF jawans, killed in a "fidayeen" attack, our people are engulfed by emotions of grief, revulsion and anger. Stomach-churning visuals of the mangled CRPF vehicle speak of the technical expertise that went into the preparation of a powerful improvised explosive device (IED) as well as the detailed planning undertaken for this deadly ambush of the police convoy — this is certainly not the work of high school drop-outs or amateurs.

One of the first instances of a vehicle-borne IED being used in J&K, the success of this tactic could mark a new phase in the on-going counter-insurgency operations. For this reason, and for preventing a recurrence of such tragedies, it is vital that an urgent review be undertaken of the quality and timeliness of intelligence inputs and the standard operating procedures (SOP) being followed by the armed police force convoys; especially if different from the army's.

In moments such as these, there is never a dearth of melodramatic and inflammatory rhetoric about instantly "visiting retribution" and "exacting revenge" from Pakistan. However, rather than the scope for any knee-jerk or emotional response, this tragic incident provides India yet another opportunity for reflection and introspection about our management of crisis situations in general, and of Pakistan's role in Kashmir, in particular.

At the core of any cogitation about Pakistan, firm focus needs to be retained on the centrality of its "deep state" — the unholy nexus of its army's General Headquarters and the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) Directorate. This sinister entity is the self-appointed "guardian" of the Islamic state, and has an existential stake in keeping Kashmir ablaze through the steady, clandestine and deniable infusion of violence and terrorism.

The Old Testament contains a cautionary phrase, which warns: "If the trumpet giveth an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle?" Has India's political leadership, over the past 72 years, been sounding an "uncertain trumpet" by its woolly-headed thinking, lack of resolve and absence of a coherent long-term vision, thereby emboldening our adversaries? Crisis after crisis has caught our nation by surprise — unprepared and invariably in the reactive mode. Nothing

illustrates the barrenness of New Delhi's prevailing strategic culture better than the failure of the Indian state to evolve a strategy for resolution of the Kashmir imbroglio. They have allowed, instead, this issue to become a pressure-point for exploitation by our western and eastern neighbours, separately and in collusion.

A myopic vision and blinkered outlook also seems to have frittered away India's advantages in many domains. Given India's significant conventional superiority and Pakistan's geographic vulnerability, it is ironical that the latter should have been able to wage war on us four times since Partition. On a parallel track, was Pakistan's three-decade-long strategy of "bleeding India by a thousand cuts" — using terrorists and religious fanatics — premised, at first, on India's "strategic restraint", and then on its own nuclear capability. No sooner had India assumed that Pokhran II would bring strategic stability, than it was thrown off-guard by Pervez Musharraf's audacious but extremely foolish Kargil misadventure.

Amongst India's major missteps has been the coining of the euphemism "cross-border terrorism" to describe, what were clearly, "acts of war" by Pakistan. Acts which were committed through training and arming fighters on its territory, and then, launching them, under its army's covering fire, to wreak death and destruction on Indian soil. While this may have given India an excuse for exercising "strategic restraint", the folly was compounded by describing Pakistani perpetrators as "non-state actors"; providing Pakistan the opening to declare that they were Kashmiri "freedom fighters".

The Pulwama attack on our security forces marks just another step in the continuum of ISI's ongoing "grab-Kashmir" campaign; more such steps will, no doubt, follow. As a fresh general election looms, the Indian voter needs to focus on the vexed issue of national security. A subject which actually demands first priority on the government's and Parliament's time: National security has suffered neglect for decades due to the intense and sustained pre-occupation of our politicians with electoral politics. This neglect is evident in the yawning gap between political pronouncements and the voids, increas-

ingly evident, in our military capabilities — material as well as organisational.

In 2001, India mobilised over a million men in response to a terrorist attack on Parliament. A delay in positioning certain formations not only revealed the ponderous nature of India's mobilisation plans, but also permitted Pakistan to counter-mobilise ahead of us. In 2008, a handful of seaborne terrorists held Mumbai hostage for 96 hours as India's security apparatus muddled its way through the crisis. The lapses during the 26/11 crisis could have been condoned, had the right lessons been learnt from them.

But as the Pakistani fidayeen attacks on the Pathankot air base, followed by the Uri and Nagrota army camps — and now, Pulwama — showed, little had changed. Whether it is kidnappings, hijackings, terrorist strikes or other assaults on India's sovereignty, we have been found wanting in an early and coherent response, because state functionaries lack SOPs for guidance. The September 2016 cross-border commando raids into Pakistan marked a welcome change that could have conveyed strong signals of national resolve and retribution. Regrettably, the absence of a policy underpinning that action and its exploitation for political gains, trivialised them, diluting their deterrent value.

We remain deficient in intelligence-analysis, inter-agency coordination, and, above all, a national security doctrine. Having created an elaborate national security framework, post Pokhran II, India has strangely shied away from promulgating a doctrine. Apart from diplomatic and economic steps that are being initiated, the current juncture would be apt for the urgent promulgation of a security-cum-defence doctrine. Such a document, whose public version defines India's vital interests, aims and objectives will not only become the basis for strategy-formulation, contingency-planning and evolution of SOPs, but also send a reassuring message to our public.

Setting in place clear "red lines" for adversary nations and non-state entities will mean that, in future, no further notice is required for instant punitive or retaliatory actions for any infringement of India's red lines.

The writer is a retired chief of naval staff



KURIAKOSE SAJU

THIS IS US

Shock tactics, a camera that doesn't let up, elevate 'This is America' above the rest

ON MAY 5, 2018, Donald 'Childish Gambino' Glover debuted his new single on the sets of NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. Almost simultaneously, he released the single's music video on YouTube. The single? *This is America*. The video? An intense visual statement on the United States of Trump, from the rampant mass shootings and gun culture to the racially-motivated police brutality and the increasingly apathetic young American who prefers selfies over self-awareness. Directed by Glover's long-time collaborator Hiro Murai, who also directs him in FX's award-winning *Atlanta*, the song and the video were a result of their combined world-weariness, a reaction to what was happening in the world around them.

Almost immediately after the track came out, the online world started analysing and cross-examining the four-minute long video. When Glover strikes a cartoonish pose while shooting someone in the head, he reminds viewers of Thomas D Rice's fictional theatre personality from the early 20th century, Jim Crow, probably the earliest instance of blackface in media. When he hands a smoking gun carefully to a child who appears off-screen while his victim's body is dragged unceremoniously off-screen, he's talking about how guns have more value in the country than human life. When he unloads the contents of a Kalashnikov into an unsuspecting gospel choir, he is referencing the 2015 Charleston church shooting. And that's just the first minute of the video.

Nine months later, Glover brought home not one but two Grammys for *This is America*, winning both Song of the Year and Record of the Year for the same track, making Grammys history in the process. Meanwhile, the music video has racked up almost half a billion views on YouTube, not to mention the hundreds of cover versions and remakes that poured in from across the world. There is *This is Nigeria*, *This is South Africa*, *This is Iraq*, *This is Malaysia*. There is even a superbly insightful Indian version called *This is Hindustan* by Gujarati comedy collective The Comedy Factory.

What makes *This is America* such a compelling music video? Gambino is not the first black artist to create a politically-charged music video about racial tension. Just a few months before *This is America* was released, hip-hop power couple, Beyonce and Jay-Z, both put out individual videos that took on similar issues. While Queen Bey released *Formation* that unapologetically celebrated blackness to its very core, Jay Z's music video for *The Story of OJ* shared the aesthetic of old Sambo cartoons from the '30s, in a way highlighting the stereotypical depictions of African-Americans in the media even today. However, the shock-and-awe tactics employed by Gambino and Murai coupled with some excellent cinematic decisions set the video apart from the others.

For all first-time viewers, it was honestly the sheer shift in tone when Gambino fires that first bullet. That's the moment when everyone sits up. You're not a passive viewer anymore, you're involved. From there on, it just keeps getting darker and darker, no pun intended. While Gambino drops truth bombs after truth bombs, combining trap-heavy beats with gospel riffs, the camera doesn't let up for even a second, doggedly following him around.

you're involved. From there on, it just keeps getting darker and darker, no pun intended. While Gambino drops truth bombs after truth bombs, combining trap-heavy beats with gospel riffs, the camera doesn't let up for even a second, doggedly following him around. The background is filled with out-of-focus characters enacting the harsh realities of racial discrimination and egregious violence, characters that you probably only notice on your second or third viewing. The amount of detail that the creative duo have packed into each frame makes it ideal for repeat viewings, with the audience unlocking a new layer on each watch.

It also helps that this is Donald Glover in the video. Glover shot to fame playing the ridiculously apolitical Troy Barnes in the now-cult comedy series *Community*. Even for people who followed Glover's earlier foray into music, this was a major shift. Gambino's earlier tracks like *3001* and *Heartbeat* dealt with broken relationships and existential angst, and while immensely catchy, did not have the weight that this track did. It makes sense that Glover would make this tonal shift, you could already see him do it with his writing and dramatic skills in *Atlanta*. It'll be hard for Glover to top what he did with *This is America*, but this writer, for one, is very interested to see how he does it. Because he will. This is Donald, after all.

The writer is a filmmaker, writer and stand-up comic based in Mumbai

FEBRUARY 18, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

CHINA VS VIETNAM
A LARGE NUMBER of Chinese troops supported by artillery and aircraft invaded four northern provinces of Vietnam, Radio Hanoi announced. "In a large-scale invasion the Vietnamese troops fought back and killed at least 250 Chinese troops, according to a preliminary survey," the broadcast said. Peking's official Hsinhua News Agency said "the border situation has deteriorated with the reactionary Vietnamese authorities steadily escalating their armed incursions into China."

WAR WITHIN
AN EXPLOSIVE SITUATION has developed in the Hakumari-Shantipur sector of the Assam-

Meghalaya border where the central police forces — the border security force on behalf of the Assam government and the central reserve police force representing Meghalaya — are poised against each other in full battle array. Yesterday, Assam's commissioner of the division accompanied by the deputy commissioner of Kamrup district had visited the area by an IAF helicopter to study the police bandobast. The disputed territory, where Meghalaya has laid claim to about 400 sq kms of land, is largely inhabited by Garo tribals. Assam moving in a BSF battalion into the sector, it appears, has been prompted by Meghalaya's decision to go ahead with the elections in the Mynraw-Rambral con-

stituency of the Khasi Hills autonomous district council in which the Garo tribal inhabitants of this disputed area have been enrolled as voters. Assam fears that Meghalaya is trying to legalise its claim to the territory.

IMPERIAL NO MORE
THE IRANIAN STATE radio reported that the new revolutionary government had ordered the dissolution of the 12,000-man Imperial Guard, which had been fiercely loyal to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and had engaged revolutionary forces in last weekend's bloody battles. The last commander of the Imperial Air Force, General Amir Hussein Rabaei, is now a "prisoner of the revolution".



Backing a new West Asia

Far more important than the number of MoUs that India will sign with Saudi Arabia is Delhi's solidarity with Prince Salman's reform agenda



C RAJA MOHAN

SAUDI CROWN Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to India this week — as part of a larger tour of Asia including Pakistan and China — should mark the consolidation of two important trends and help initiate a significant third. The first relates to the trilateral dynamic with Pakistan and the second to the deepening of the bilateral relationship between Delhi and Riyadh.

The third is about extending support to Prince Salman's agenda for "reversing 1979", when tumultuous regional developments and the Saudi response to them began to alter the equation between religion and politics in the region, destabilise India's neighbourhood and change South Asia's inter-state relations for the worse.

But first to Pakistan. Partition injected a particular complexity to India's engagement with the Arabian Peninsula. The Subcontinent's historic relationship with the Gulf is deep and civilisational. In the colonial era, the British Raj in undivided India became both the provider of security and the facilitator of the region's economic globalisation.

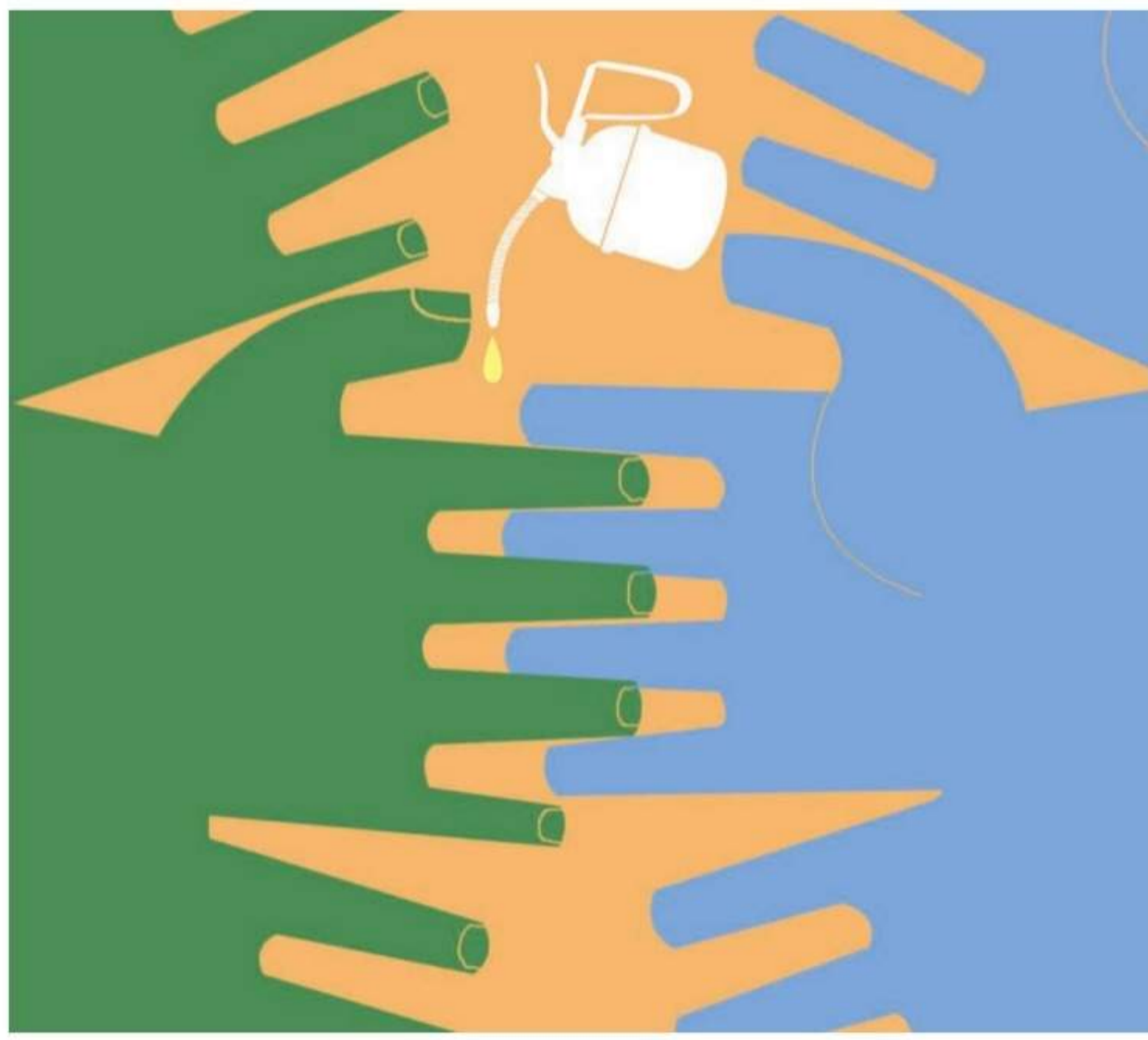
After Partition and Independence, Pakistan sought to mobilise political support from the Middle East in the name of shared religious identity. After Britain granted independence to the smaller Gulf kingdoms and withdrew most of its military forces from the east of Suez at the turn of the 1970s, Pakistan stepped in to pick up some of security slack in the region. (The US, of course, was the main force that filled the vacuum left by Britain.)

Although India was a preferred security partner for some Gulf countries, non-aligned India had little interest in continuing the strategic legacy of the Raj. At the political level, India's emphasis was on solidarity with Arab nationalism and against neo-colonialism and Western imperialism. Given its preference for "secular republics" in the Middle East, an element of defensiveness inevitably crept up in India's relations with the religiously conservative monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia.

Riyadh became the moving force behind the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation that was set up in 1969 to unite the region's conservative regimes as a counter to Soviet-leaning Arab nationalists. The forum's hostile rhetoric on the Kashmir question (at the instigation of Pakistan) congealed the perception in Delhi that Saudi Arabia and the conservative monarchies were "pro-Pakistan". In reality, though, the Kashmir issue was never much of a priority for the Saudis.

Thanks to Delhi's diplomatic tradition that privileges the "literal" over the "practical", Delhi did little to develop an interest-based relationship with Riyadh. Yet, there were real problems that limited India's possibilities in Saudi Arabia. These included growing divergence over regional issues such as Afghanistan, India's embrace of the Soviet Union, the deep dependence of the Gulf kingdoms on the West, and Saudi support for radical Islam beyond its borders since the late 1970s.

The end of the Cold War, India's economic reforms, and the growing economic interdependence — thanks to India's ever growing oil imports and manpower exports — generated greater interest in the Gulf monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, for limiting the political differences with India and expanding



C R Sasikumar

bilateral economic partnerships.

As the gap in national economic capabilities between India and Pakistan began to widen since the 1990s in favour of Delhi, Saudi Arabia was happy to de-hyphenate its engagement in South Asia. That, in turn, allowed Delhi to stop viewing the Saudi kingdom through the political lens of Pakistan.

The concrete and public expression of the Saudi desire to de-hyphenate came during the visit of King Abdullah to India in 2006 — the first by a Saudi monarch in five decades. Prince Salman's visit now is an opportunity for Delhi to construct a solid and comprehensive partnership on the foundation laid over the last decade.

On his part, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought a refreshing non-ideological approach to India's engagement with the Middle East in general and the Gulf kingdoms in particular. On top of it, his personal rapport with the region's leaders like Prince Salman and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ), the effective ruler of the United Arab Emirates, has set a very dynamic tone to India's relations to the Arab Gulf.

Beyond the traditional focus on strengthening cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector, there are many new possibilities from Prince Salman's ambitious agenda for modernising the economy of the Saudi kingdom. Equally important has been the expansion of the bilateral agenda for cooperation to counter terrorism.

Saudi Arabia is also interested in bilateral defence cooperation and eager to develop bilateral strategic coordination on regional affairs. The possibilities seem to be limited only by the Indian bureaucracy's capacity to deliver on the agreements signed at the political level.

That brings us to the third dimension of Prince Salman's visit — about "reversing 1979". Prince Salman has often proclaimed his commitment to reverse the hugely neg-

ative consequences of 1979. Four developments in 1979 — the seizure of Mecca's Grand Mosque by militant Saudi Salafis, the overthrow of the Shah of Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini, the Shia revolt in eastern Saudi Arabia and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan — shook the Saudi rulers to the core.

Faced with new internal and external threats, the House of Saud began to promote a more conservative Islam at home and support Sunni extremism abroad. This included support to the jihad in Afghanistan and the American and Pakistani war against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Gen Zia-ul-Haq took advantage of the new regional dynamic push Pakistan towards Islamic conservatism.

In an interview to the *Guardian* in 2017, Prince Salman said Saudi Arabia had not been a "normal country" after 1979. He added that the policies that it pursued after 1979 are now a drag on a productive Saudi future. Prince Salman vowed to overcome the deviations of 1979 and return Saudi Arabia to "moderate Islam". "We are simply reverting to what we followed — a moderate Islam open to the world and all religions," he said.

Many observers, especially in the West, are sceptical of the potential for real change in Saudi Arabia. Delhi, in contrast, has every reason to strongly support Prince Salman. After all, India continues to suffer the consequences of 1979.

Far more important than the number of MoUs that India will sign with Saudi Arabia this week is Delhi's visible and unstinted solidarity with Prince Salman's reform agenda at home and his effort to promote religious and political moderation in the region.

The writer is Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"China and the US should protect their relations together. A sound relationship would benefit the US"

— GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

The attack, its aftershocks

Pulwama strike mirrors changes in, and has implications for, the dynamic in Kashmir, Pakistan and the region



TILAK DEVASHER

THERE ARE three dimensions to the suicide attack by Masood Azhar's Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in Pulwama on February 14 that led to the tragic deaths of at least 40 CRPF jawans.

The first dimension is Kashmir related. The Pulwama tragedy signals a significant escalation in terrorism in the Kashmir Valley. Given the type (Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device-VBIED), target and the scale of the attack, it seems obvious that this was done at the behest of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). The motivation would have been to refocus attention on the Valley after a spate of successes by the Indian security forces in neutralising terrorists, to provide a higher degree of visibility to the JeM, and to show the attack as being carried out by a local Kashmiri. However, it is obvious that while a local Kashmiri youth was the trigger, he was merely cannon fodder. The sourcing of material, training and planning was the handiwork of Pakistanis. The moot point, however, is whether this attack is a reversion to the 1990s pattern of terrorism involving the Pakistanis in pole positions and Kashmiris in sacrificial roles. While time will tell, the security forces in Kashmir will have to factor in this modus operandi and devise counter-measures.

The second dimension is Pakistan related and has two sub-dimensions. First, it announces the arrival of Lt General Asim Munir, the new DG ISI, on the Pak-sponsored terror front. Munir was promoted to being a three-star general in September 2018 and given charge of the ISI in October 2018. Among his previous appointments were Director General Military Intelligence (DG MI) and Force Commander Northern Areas (FCNA). The latter, especially, would have given him familiarity with J&K and the infiltration of terrorists into India facilitated by the troops under his command. The Pulwama attack is possibly Munir cutting his teeth in terrorist operations and showing his boss, the army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, that despite his lack of seniority, he is indeed one of the "boys" when it comes to India.

Second, it is now emerging that Bajwa, who completes his three-year tenure as army chief in November, is interested in an extension. Signals of this are apparent in the sycophantic articles that have started appearing in the Pakistan media. Below, for example, are just three excerpts from one such article published in *The Daily Times* on February 4:

"A leader of a different kind, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa is instrumental in strengthening the national power in the domain of security, economy and foreign policy

presiding over a paradigm shift from a national security state to a development oriented, confident nation and society."

"Starting with foreign policy, Bajwa has become the most relevant military leader ever produced in this part of the world."

"General Bajwa's leadership has put Pakistan on the international stage, at times when Euro-Asia is rising in clout. His continued role is going to be an integral part of Pakistan's success trajectory in the time to come."

Reports, however, indicate that Imran Khan is not inclined to give Bajwa an extension. Why should he? Having inherited Bajwa, Imran Khan is beholden to him for facilitating his being elected prime minister. Khan would rather appoint his own army chief, not realising that once appointed, a Pakistan army chief is no one's man. Perhaps aware of PM Khan's disinclination, it would suit Bajwa to create a crisis in Indo-Pak relations that would ensure Imran Khan's continued dependence on him.

The third dimension is regional. As is its wont, Pakistan has declared victory prematurely in Afghanistan. Buoyed by the US's desperation to exit Afghanistan and hence its renewed dependence on Rawalpindi, Pakistan has concluded that relations with the US are back on an even keel. Combined with its "all-weather" friend China, and the recent cosying up to Russia, Pakistan feels that it has covered all its bases. This is all the more so because its failing economy has got a shot in the arm through bail-out packages from Saudi Arabia and UAE.

Hence, even before any agreement has been reached between the US and the Taliban, to say nothing of an intra-Afghan agreement, Pakistan has concluded that it can now shift its focus to its primary target — Kashmir and India. For Pakistan, therefore, the situation is akin to 1988-89 when the Soviets had withdrawn from Afghanistan and the Mujahideen were poised to take over in Kabul allowing it to shift attention to Kashmir where the insurgency had just about begun.

Two other aspects of the regional dynamic need to be noted. On February 13, one day before the Pulwama attack, a bus carrying Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) of Iran was targeted by a similar kind of attack in the Chanali area of Khash-Zahedan road in the Sistan-Balochistan province. Twenty-seven were killed and another 20 injured in the attack. The Sunni separatist group Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for the attack.

Interestingly, Jaish al-Adl has its hideouts in Pakistan. While details of the nature of the attack are awaited, it would be useful to compare the modus operandi and the explosives used in this attack with the ulwama attack given that Pakistan is the common element in both.

Devasher is author of Pakistan: Courting the Abyss and Pakistan: At the Helm. He is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat and currently Member, National Security Advisory Board and Consultant, Vivekananda International Foundation

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DIGNITY DEFICIT

THIS REFERS TO the article "Crossing the laxman rekha" (IE, February 15). The decline in the quality of political discourse is not confined to the prime minister. Leaders like Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati and Sanjay Raut (Shiv Sena) too show little restraint in their utterances. One reason for this is that the tradition of dignified dialogue initiated soon after independence lost its way by the 1970s, with Raj Narayan taking the lead. Now the leadership baton has been passed on to younger individuals who suffer from political illiteracy and limited vocabulary. Engaging with opponents in a dignified manner is a trait which seems lacking in the current crop.

YG Chouksey, Pune

INSECTS MATTER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "No small matter" (IE, February 13). Insects comprise 75 per cent of fauna of our world. They play a vital role in keeping the ecological balance. Pollination ensures that we subsequently get our food. Zoologists urged invertebrate conservation long ago and this study now reveals the need for such conservation again.

Tapomoy Ghosh, Bardhaman

PARALLEL SCHOOLS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial "Exam and

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

peace" (IE, February 14). The coaching centre industry thrives on the insecurity of students and parents to succeed in a national-level exam. It runs parallel to mainstream schooling, and is unregulated by the state. It creates inequality, as access to coaching depends on the economic viability of households.

Nitin Pathak, Navi Mumbai

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

PULWAMA & PAKISTAN

WHILE THE PAKISTAN press has given a significant amount of attention to the attack in Pulwama on February 14, the opinion pages in major newspapers have not been as reactive. In fact, conspiracy theories have found space as news rather than opinion. But, to be fair, many editorials and opinion articles have lamented the acrimony that the aftermath of the attack has brought with it.

The February 16 editorial in *Dawn*, for example, notes that "after each such incident, the already strained ties between the two countries take a further hit, this time with Delhi vowing to work for 'the complete isolation ... of Pakistan' from the international community, while withdrawing the MFN status for Pakistan. Both countries have summoned each other's envoys — India, to protest against what it sees as Pakistan's 'role' in the attack, and Pakistan to refute India's unproven allegations."

The thrust of the editorial, however, is that given that the suicide attacker was a local Kashmiri youth, it is for New Delhi to admit to the failures of its policy in the Valley: "Importantly, the young suicide bomber in the Pulwama attack was a native... For many years now, India's increasingly strong-arm, brutal tactics [in Kashmir] have alienated the

local population who have had no need of outside help to vent their anger and frustration. Young Kashmiris are taking up the gun and attacking symbols of the Indian establishment. They have been met with a hail of bullets but have not been deterred... The fact remains that until Delhi backs down from its militarised approach to the Kashmir issue, the violence will continue. It is only through the path of negotiations involving Pakistan, India and the Kashmiris that the stand-off can be resolved."

The ideas dealt with with some subtlety by the *Dawn* editorial are expanded in a rather ham-fisted manner by Muhammad Ali Ehsan in an article in *The Express Tribune* on February 17. Ehsan, an Islamabad-based political scientist writes that "Hours into the Pulwama attack it was pointing fingers at Pakistan. Not something new that we are not aware of but the Indian impulsiveness to blame Pakistan every time a terrorist incident occurs mocks the very concept of examination, exploration and investigation which must be carried out before reaching a final verdict."

He lays the "blame" for the heinous attack squarely at India's door, glorifying "A freedom fight that has stood up against state terrorism for 70 long years will not end by

state oppression."

According to Ehsan, "The Pulwama incident is not a Pakistan-sponsored act of terrorism as India claims but an incident which is a consequence of the unending violence and brutality that the Indian forces have unleashed on the people of... Kashmir." Towards the end of the article, Ehsan accuses Delhi of making unsubstantiated accusations against Pakistan.

The political scientist also uses a combination of exaggeration, implication and poor rhetoric to belabour his point. "Indian military effort alone will not end the Kashmir uprising. Neither will the attempts by India to balance against Pakistan by supporting and arming our rivals and by patronising separatism and anti-Pakistan movements like the PTM (Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement)," he contends.

Ehsan further argues, "The tendency of the Indian government to lay down 'red lines' and threaten Pakistan with dire consequences and befitting replies is a political bluff to charm its domestic audience. All Indian political threats of isolating Pakistan internationally should be responded with strong diplomacy and the military threats of executing any surgical strikes should be fittingly responded in a similar fashion."

JAMMAT'S CONSCIENCE

THE FEBRUARY 17 editorial in *The Dhaka Tribune* upholds the moral red line of Bangladesh politics. A leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami — Abdur Razzaq — resigned his party positions due to the organisation's failure to apologise adequately for its anti-liberation stand in 1971.

"The resigning Jamaat leader's call for an apology seems driven more by tactical considerations than by genuine contrition, the editorial notes. Nevertheless, it says that "it cannot be denied that the point made by Razzaq is correct". "Unless and until Jamaat apologises for its crimes in 1971, not just in terms of opposing Bangladesh's independence but also committing unspeakable atrocities on the population, there can be no legitimate seat at the table for Jamaat in Bangladesh politics," it remarks.

It also criticises the BNP: "We must also stress the moral poverty of the BNP as the party which rehabilitated the Jamaat in Bangladeshi politics, including sitting alongside them in government. This has long been a serious failing of the BNP and the sooner it recognizes this and severs all ties to Jamaat, the better. Otherwise, it too can credibly be accused of condoning Jamaat's crimes against Bangladesh."

