



WORDLY WISE  
AN ALLIANCE WITH A POWERFUL  
PERSON IS NEVER SAFE.  
— PHAEDRUS

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

View from the Valley

The aftermath of the Pulwama attack marks the retreat of political engagement with Kashmir



NAEEM AKHTAR

No HYPHENATION

India-Saudi Arabia relations cannot be seen through the prism of Pakistan. That's the message from Saudi Crown Prince's visit

THE VISIT BY the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman was extraordinary on many counts. Planned more than a month ago, it was meant to be a message from MbS to the Western world that despite the Jamal Khashoggi episode, there are still some countries that need Saudi Arabia, including the biggest democracy, and are ready to welcome him. As it turned out, his swing through South Asia, coinciding with the aftermath of the deadly Jaish e Mohammad attack in Pulwama, thrust him and his country front and centre into the heightened tensions between India and Pakistan. But Saudi Arabia is no spring chicken to the geopolitics of the region. That is why the prince, who has more or less assumed charge of the Islamic kingdom from his ailing father, managed to pull off a successful balancing act between the two neighbours, giving each the sense that it had trumped the other, at least in the joint statements.

Nowhere was the balancing act more evident than in the joint statements issued in Islamabad and New Delhi. Reading the two statements together, especially the paragraphs on the issues of maximum contention that have resurfaced after the Kashmir attack, the feeling is hard to escape that the two cancel each other out. In Pakistan, the statement asked for avoiding the "politicisation" of the UNSC 1267 designation regime; in India, it "underlined the importance of comprehensive sanctioning of terrorists and their organisations by the UN". In Pakistan, the statement made no mention of the attack in Kashmir; in India, it said that the Crown Prince condemned the attack in the "strongest possible words". In Pakistan, MbS praised Prime Minister Imran Khan for his efforts at dialogue, and in India, he praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "personal initiatives to have friendly ties with Pakistan". The statement mentioned "the need for creation of conditions necessary for the resumption of comprehensive dialogue between India and Pakistan". Ultimately, tightrope walking is what nations do. India too does this between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two sworn enemies, as does China, MbS's next destination.

Relations between India and Saudi Arabia have more depth and breadth than a Pakistan prism provides, and this was evident in the range of other matters that find mention in the joint statement, chiefly investment and energy co-operation. The two sides appear to have put on hold the \$44-billion refinery complex in Maharashtra after BJP agreed to the Shiv Sena demand for its relocation. But there is no getting away from the reality that Saudi money has fuelled militancy in the region. And Saudi games in the region, including in Afghanistan, are contributing to making it unsafe.

BATTLELINES IN TN

Seat pacts in Tamil Nadu mirror the national discourse, reflect the weakening of the main Dravidian parties

BOTH THE BJP and Congress have clinched seat pacts with the dominant regional forces in Tamil Nadu for the upcoming general election. The BJP announced a tie-up with the AIADMK, the party in office in the state, and the PMK on Tuesday whereas the DMK and Congress formally declared a seat deal on Wednesday. Some smaller outfits and the communist parties are also a part of these alliances, making the parliamentary elections a direct contest between two fronts. The AIADMK, which will contest the bulk of 39 seats in Tamil Nadu, has said it will seek votes in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi whereas DMK chief M K Stalin had endorsed Congress President Rahul Gandhi for prime minister some time ago at a public event in Chennai. Simply put, the battle in Tamil Nadu will mirror the national narrative this time unlike in 2014, when the state saw multi-cornered contests with the two Dravidian majors, the AIADMK and DMK, seeking a mandate in the name of their chiefs.

The two alliances also reveal the churn in Tamil Nadu politics, which seems to be diminishing the strength of the Dravidian titans. With the passing away of J Jayalalithaa and M Karunanidhi, the AIADMK and DMK are short of charismatic, pan-state leaders who can sway voters. Stalin is an experienced campaigner, but the DMK is yet to win an assembly or a general election since 2009. The AIADMK is a much weakened force after the splits in the party, evident in the party's decision to contest upto 25 seats in the state and leave the rest to allies. This is in sharp contrast to 2014 when the party refused to part with any seat to potential allies, projected Jayalalithaa as the party's PM face and won an unprecedented 37 seats. Its present leadership of chief minister Edappadi Palaniswamy and deputy CM O Panneerselvam have opted for an alliance that has the potential to be a formidable socio-political coalition, particularly in western Tamil Nadu. The DMK, facing its first electoral test after the death of Karunanidhi, too has opted to consolidate the sentiment against the governments in New Delhi and Chennai by making concessions to the Congress, which was isolated and targeted during the 2014 election for refusing to intervene in the ethnic war in Sri Lanka in favour of the LTTE.

It is anybody's guess if the alliances will stay beyond the general election. But the results will have a bearing on almost every party and influence the political dynamic in the state.

DIVERSITY BY DIKTAT

South Korean government's attempts to curb the influence of K-pop are likely to be counterproductive

THE KOREAN PENINSULA is no stranger to the scourge of sartorial uniformity. North Korea, of course, is well known for having an approved list of hairstyles for both men and women, which for some odd reason are best suited for portly men stuck in a time-warp. Capitalist Korea to the south, though, is facing a more complicated problem. Its Ministry for Gender Equality and Family is fighting a new source of uniformity, usually outside the pale of democratic governments — popstars. Are Korean pop (K-pop) stars, the ministry asked earlier this month, "all twins"? There is already a backlash to the perceived attempts at censorship with the government's attempt to impose "guidelines" to limit the exposure of K-pop celebrities on television and make viewing more diverse.

Slim, slick and dressed almost to a template, K-pop icons wield immense influence in South Korean society. In fact, K-pop music and fashion is a much-desired cultural commodity in many parts of Asia and beyond. But the effects of the stars' popularity are not all positive. A very particular aesthetic is held up as a standard and according to a Gallup survey, one in three women between the age of 19 and 29 in the country have had plastic surgery to conform. Plastic surgery is even glorified through reality shows featuring K-pop celebrities, as though it were nothing more than a passing fad, a pair of shoes that can be discarded next season.

The government of South Korea, though, may not be taking the best approach by trying to wiggle its way into what ought to constitute popular culture. Even its far more totalitarian neighbour to the north would likely think twice before enforcing variety, a far more onerous task than ensuring uniformity. The best approach is likely to let the era of K-pop run its course. The shallowness of customer loyalty is likely a better bet than diversity by diktat.

QUITE UNDERSTANDABLY, THE Valentine's Day atrocity in Pulwama, which caused the biggest ever loss of lives of security forces to violence in the three-decade-old strife in Kashmir, sent shockwaves across the world. The outrage and anger were unprecedented, given the fact that the fallen bravehearts came almost from every state. The very sight of body bags triggered calls for revenge.

While the country is trying to come to terms with the loss and is looking to the political and military leadership to come true on its pledge to root out terrorism, there has not been an adequate focus on its impact on ground zero — Kashmir. Nor has there been any attempt to look into the recent developments leading up to a tragedy of such a scale. A Kashmir perspective is absent in the current narrative, except for the attempts by political leaders and social media activists to try and save the harried students who became targets of revenge mobs in some places.

For a state that has gone through three decades of the worst violence and has actually never been stable post-Independence, how is February 14, 2019, different? A quarter-century back, 43 civilians were killed only a few miles away at Bijbehara on the same highway. But the killing of CRPF soldiers is different both for its context and fall out.

The difference is reflected in many ways. First, Kashmiri youth are retaliating through methods that have been passed on to them, like a contagion moving through the air. From street demonstrations, funeral congregations, stone-throwing, teenagers with just a few days of experience with Kalashnikovs, mostly on social media, they have now been converted into dynamite. Pakistan is an essential part of this transformation, helping it along, but the problem remains exclusively ours. That they maintain assets in Kashmir is a fact of life that should need no proof. But does that affirmation help?

Second, and more important, is the response from the country, its leadership and

the nation that Kashmir adopted after exercising a choice. When dozens of civilian mourners were killed in the aftermath of Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq's murder, the country's then prime minister apologised. And that was a time when thousands of Kashmiri youth had picked up the gun against the country. Pandits had to leave Kashmir and as did many Muslims. It was a rebellion but the country welcomed everyone who could escape. While the security forces and militants did what they did, the country seemed to own everyone from Kashmir. The semantics and expressions were warm, which could ultimately result in some rebuilding of bridges. Today, an incident is enough to disown, discredit and disrespect every Kashmiri.

Third, the role of politicians and defence forces seems to have interchanged. The operation in village Pinglen, following the blowing up of the CRPF bus in which Pakistani mastermind Kamran was killed, is a case in point. Though tempers obviously ran high following the bus massacre, the forces never allowed that to influence their judgement or the commitment to save civilians. In the process, they suffered major losses. Compare that with the politicians and the country as a whole and the inference is clear.

In addition, with respect to the perspective on what would constitute a resolution, the political class and the army appear to differ sharply. While the prime minister has given a carte blanche to the defence forces, the Army remains the only voice in the country that calls a spade a spade. Even the Opposition has lapped the government's political abandonment of Kashmir as a safe passage out of the election minefield.

Almost all top army commanders who have served in Kashmir in the recent past have maintained that the military aspect of Kashmir has been addressed and now it is a political issue, to be addressed through reaching out to people.

quoted as saying so. Before him, the highly-respected General D S Hooda, the Northern Army commander who led the surgical strike, has consistently recommended a political approach. But politicians are tossing the responsibility back to the security forces. If anything, they are only adding to the poison against Kashmiri Muslims, as has the Meghalaya governor who recommended a boycott of Kashmiris and Kashmiri goods.

Post the removal of the Mehbooba Mufti government, the BJP is ruling Jammu and Kashmir through its politician-governor who recently claimed that he was the chief minister of the state as well. Unfortunately, he made the country believe that the problem in Kashmir was to do with mainstream politics and that he has fixed it by holding panchayat and urban local body elections. There has not been a greater farce in the name of elections than these polls, even by Kashmir's standards.

The governor's effort to marginalise Kashmir is also writ large in recent decisions, notably the carving out of the Ladakh division. The narrative being constructed is that the minority Hindu of Jammu and the Buddhist in Leh are to be granted "azadi" from Muslim Kashmir. But RSS thinkers don't seem to consider that such a discourse cuts both ways. Given this narrative, how can you convince the Muslims of the state to remain a part of India? Away from the strategic oversight of the country, the governor has handed out a fresh argument to the restive youth for whom everything connecting with the two-nation theory is a way to heaven.

And lastly, out of the 13 police districts in Kashmir we now have 10 with SPs who do not know the Kashmiri language. Four out of the five south Kashmir districts are among the 10 police stations. No wonder no one had an inkling of the suicide bomber.

The writer is a former minister, Jammu and Kashmir and member of the People's Democratic Party. Views are personal



TRISHA RAY

LETHAL AND AUTONOMOUS

Machine-driven weapons need an international system of accountability

IN MARCH 2014, hundreds of mysterious gunmen in camouflage appeared on the streets of Crimea and began taking over local government buildings. While Russia initially denied the existence of the "little green men", as they came to be known, President Vladimir Putin admitted that they were Russian military at the one-year anniversary of the Crimean occupation. Ethical issues and the complete violation of the Geneva Conventions notwithstanding, the logic behind this tactic was quite straightforward and compelling: Aid pro-Russian forces while creating enough uncertainty about Russian involvement so as to prevent NATO retaliation and global backlash.

The tactic itself has been deployed by rogue states before, but usually through proxies. Pakistan, for instance, has a history of supporting terrorist and insurgent groups in Jammu and Kashmir. Yet with fewer remaining strategic partners and important resources connecting it to more powerful states, Pakistan no longer possesses the leverage needed to shield itself from international backlash as Russia did. In such an environment, states like Pakistan may be tempted to turn toward new methods to achieve their goals.

Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) — which can detect, select and attack targets without human intervention — are one such avenue. International rules around LAWS are relatively underdeveloped, and in the absence of clear norms on human accountability and attribution for autonomous weapons, we could see states like Pakistan deploy LAWS for operations outside their borders.

LAWS present several benefits for "middle powers": They increase the reach and effec-

tiveness of forces, reduce casualties and enable persistent presence in vast, inaccessible terrains. Countries like India or South Korea, which operate in a complicated geostrategic context, can therefore use LAWS to effectively police and protect their territory. On the flipside, LAWS can be used by state and non-state actors to engage in asymmetric tactics. This could take three forms: A state could directly deploy LAWS against an adversary state; a state could equip proxies such as insurgent or terrorist groups with autonomous weapons units; a non-state actor steals or otherwise illegally acquires autonomous systems or units.

With this destabilising potential in mind, external state actors that actively aid insurgencies and terrorist organisations will be tempted to deploy autonomous systems and claim they are stolen or rogue units.

While LAWS are still in the development stage and are fairly inaccessible for most states — let alone non-state groups — due to high costs, and lack of skilled AI talent and operators, it is not a complete stretch of imagination to envision a future where autonomous weapons are within the reach of any state or non-state actor that wants them.

Four of the Permanent-5 powers in the United Nations — the US, France, Russia and UK — have explicitly rejected moving toward a new international law on autonomous weapons. The US and Russia are actively pursuing AI-driven military systems, the UK Ministry of Defence was recently revealed to be funding a no-longer-secret programme, and while China has called for a ban, its military has continued to research and develop LAWS. It therefore seems likely that these

powers would support a regime on LAWS, if at all, only after they have developed and perfected the technology themselves.

However, even in the absence of comprehensive international framework agreements on LAWS, stakeholders in the emerging LAWS ecosystem need to promote the creation of export controls and rules. Relevant private technology companies — some of which (like Google) have already taken the lead in developing internal ethical guidelines for AI technologies — with buy-in from state actors should establish an export control group to create guidelines for LAWS and component technology sales. This must include basic stipulations on accountability in cases of theft or hacking. Suppliers must be able to prove that they have in place the necessary physical and non-physical safeguards to protect their LAWS technologies. In this vein, the AI and weapons industry must craft specific standards for such safeguards. Autonomous systems themselves could help in export controls through persistent surveillance of LAWS manufacturing facilities, although it may be difficult to get actors to agree to such measures.

To ensure we shape the future of LAWS to tilt toward a positive overall outcome, we need to start building up a flexible, evolvable framework of rules that accounts for the myriad ways in which the technology can be misused, not just in traditional state-to-state conflicts, but in the context of the many non-traditional modes of conflict.

The writer is a junior fellow with the Cyber Initiative, ORF

FEBRUARY 22, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



ATAL'S CHINA TRIP

THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, said his talks with Chinese leaders had "unfrozen" the border issue which has bedevilled relations between India and China for 19 years. Reporting to Parliament on the outcome of his China visit and his meeting in Peking with the Chinese premier, Hua Guofeng, vice-premier Deng Xiaoping and the foreign minister, Huang Hua, he said it was "not insignificant" that both governments had agreed on "the need to reflect further on the possible ways to resolve this crucial border question". In an eight-page statement, Vajpayee said he had made it clear "the unresolved boundary question must be

satisfactorily settled if relations of mutual confidence are to be established". These exploratory contacts had "at least unfrozen the issue," he added.

IRAN REFERENDUM

IRAN'S NEW GOVERNMENT announced it will hold a national referendum in 15 days on the issue of formally changing the nation from monarchy to an Islamic republic. The government statement said the single question on the ballot would be "do you favour an Islamic republic?" A "yes" vote in the referendum would provide legitimacy for Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolution against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

INDO-CHINA ON BOIL

VIETNAM RUSHED REINFORCEMENTS to the border city of Lang Son while China deployed three divisions and tank units 80 km east of the city, intelligence sources in Bangkok said. Several thousand heavily armed Vietnamese regular and regional troops were advancing toward Chinese positions at Lang Son, near the China-Vietnam border, a Bangkok dated report in the Tokyo newspaper Asahi said. The Chinese has captured Lao Cai, northwest Vietnam's major communications and railway centre on the Red River. The invaders were said to be 16-20 kilometres inside Vietnamese territory, and each side claimed inflicting thousands of casualties.



WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As Pakistan continues with efforts to defuse tensions with India after the Pulwama incident, the Indian government seems to be finding new ways to harden its stance."  
—THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE

# When figures are suspect

Cloud over economic data invites questions about government's sincerity on issues ranging from job creation to addressing agrarian crisis



R NAGARAJ

ECONOMIC STATISTICS HAVE a public good character — their use is non-rival and non-excludable. Such information is necessary for evidence-based policymaking and informed discussion in democracies where citizens seek accountability from their government. The use of scientific methods for collection and estimation and their timely dissemination are, therefore, public services. Universally, publicly-funded institutions with professional independence and external oversight perform these functions to insulate them from political interference. India was a pioneer in nurturing such a statistical system. As Angus Deaton, the Noble laureate, and Valerie Kozel said, "Where Mahalanobis and India led, the rest of the world followed".

Lately, Indian statistics have come under a cloud. In early 2015, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) issued a new GDP series (with the revised base year 2011-12), which showed a significantly faster growth rate for 2011-12 to 2013-14 compared the earlier series (with base-year 2004-05). Manufacturing sector growth rate for 2013-14, for instance, simply ballooned — swinging from (-) 1.4 per cent in the old series to (+) 5.5 per cent in the revised one. Data users sought the CSO's explanation as the revised estimates did not square with related macro-aggregated data such as bank credit growth or industrial capacity utilisation. Dismissing such criticisms, the CSO asserted that the revision was in line with the global best practices — following the UN System of National Accounts, 2008 — and used the Ministry of Corporate Affairs's (MCA) much larger corporate database.

Since then, with almost every GDP revision, more worms tumbled out of the can. For instance, in the January 31 release, the GDP growth rate for 2016-17 — the year of demonetisation — was revised upwards by 1.1 percentage points to 8.2 per cent, the highest in a decade. This flies in the face of most evidence economists — most recently, Gita Gopinath, the IMF chief economist — have produced. How could such large counter-intuitive upward revisions happen? It is impossible to independently investigate the mystery, as the CSO has refused to reveal specific methodological details.

As mandated since 1950-51, with every base-year revision, the CSO has always published the back series within a few months of the publication of the new series. This time it took over three years, as the officials informally admitted their inability as MCA data for years prior to 2006 did not exist. Yet, last year, two competing back series of varying time lengths were prepared — separately by the National Statistical Commission and CSO — showing diametrically opposite growth rates. They seem coloured by political considerations, discrediting not only professional work but also damaging institutional integrity. The seeds of doubts about the GDP revision sown four years ago have grown into a

banyan tree of distrust.

In another instance recently, the Department of Industrial Policy and Planning (DIPP) has stopped updating FDI inflow data. Its official web page was last updated a year ago, with figures available up to December 2017. Surprisingly, the government that has often invoked rising FDI inflow as evidence of its industrial policy success has turned silent. Why, one wonders.

Make in India's success is claimed by showing the improved ranking in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business (EDB) index — from 142 in 2014 to 78 in 2018. But as the improved ranking is shown to be an artifact of changed methodology, did it really accomplish a policy goal without an improved industrial performance?

Russia offers a telling example of the futility of improved EDB ranking, which went up from 120 in 2012 to 20 in six years, without any effect on foreign capital inflows. Who will fall for such gimmicks, least of all foreign investors?

Since 1995, the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, has published data on suicides, which is used to flag the gravity of farmers' suicides. In 2016, the MHA ceased to publish this information, fueling speculation about the government's motives, when agrarian unrest is believed to be rising, and has become a political issue.

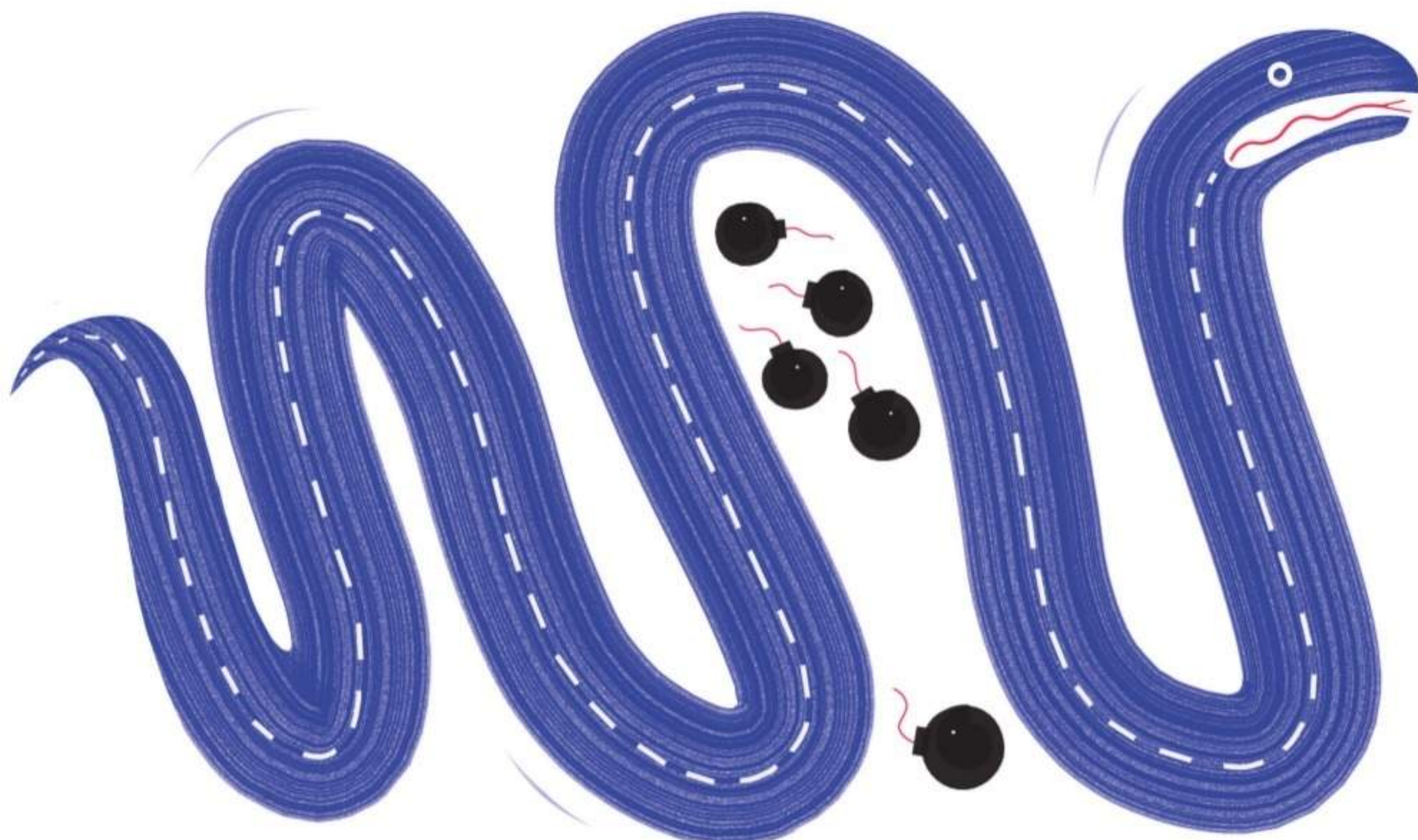
Most recently, skipping of the scheduled release of the results of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in December 2018 has raised more questions about the government's intentions. The survey results are a report of the government's economic policies, as it was the first economy-wide employment survey held after 2011-12. The leaked data confirmed the worst fears of an unprecedented rise in unemployment rates, confirming the government's motivations in the suppression of the data.

Contesting the leaked PLFS estimates, the NITI Aayog CEO asserted an employment boom, invoking the rising EPFO membership — a database widely known to account for just about 15-16 per cent of the formal sector workforce. In fact, the chief statistician, in his maiden interview after assuming the office, categorically stated that EPFO data does represent the employment situation of the country. The CEO also claims 22 million jobs were created in 2014-16, citing a McKinsey report. The report, however, does not provide any statistically and economically valid explanation for its estimates.

There seems to be a systematic pattern in distorting and/or withholding public information that could throw a harsh light on the government's performance. It is increasingly relying on anecdotes fed by private and international consultants for policy making, discarding nationally representative, professionally estimated data, vetted by independent experts.

This is the time for all democratically-minded people — regardless of their political and ideological leanings — to raise their voice against the tendency, and impress upon the government to restore access and integrity to public statistics, and re-establish institutional independence of the statistical organisations.

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CR Sasikumar

# Looking beyond Pulwama

The security apparatus should be radically restructured in the light of the terror strike. CCTVs, quick patrol teams, drones and sniffer and tracker dogs on convoy routes could prevent similar attacks in the future



M P NATHANAEL

THE DEATH OF 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in a suicide bomb attack in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, has shocked the nation, as it was unprecedented in recent times. An explosion of this magnitude was not ever presaged. The CRPF has already ordered a court of inquiry into the lapses that may have led to the disaster, and to rectify the shortcomings.

At the very outset, there can be no denying the fact that there has been an intelligence failure though the agencies claim to have sounded the security forces of a possible improvised explosive device attack. Such information without any specifics could not have been acted upon with the seriousness it deserved. Even an inkling of the possibility of an attack on the convoy could have put the road opening patrols and the officials manning the convoy on very high alert. Intensive checking could then have been carried out of all vehicles so as to intercept and avert any mishap. But for want of any specifics, it seems, the intelligence feed was not given the attention and seriousness it warranted.

Although the road opening patrols had sanitised the route of the convoy, they could not have prevented the civil vehicles from moving on either side of the roads. In this attack, the lone suicide bomber is believed to have come on to the highway from a village road and carried out his cowardly mission.

That a car with reportedly over 30 kg of explosives, possibly RDX, could move in the area undetected calls for some serious thought. He must have carried the explosive

in the car for sometime before hitting the highway. This is where the intelligence failure comes into sharp focus. Where was such huge quantity of explosives stored before being loaded into the car? Southern Kashmir has been the hotbed of terrorism with many young boys joining the militant ranks in recent months. Intensive checking of vehicles and possible hideouts could have put breaks on their dirty mission.

That a long convoy of 78 vehicles with over 2,547 men had to move in the wee hours from Jammu is being questioned. Though the convoy was split for better command and control and to avoid bunching, they are reported to have got close to each other on nearing Lethpora. No doubt, the huge concentration of CRPF personnel in the transit camp due to a road blockade for quite a few days before the day of the incident may have dictated the decision. The government could have ferried them to Srinagar by Air Force aircraft and thus avoided a long convoy, which is more prone to attacks apart from the failure of command of the convoy commander. By no stretch of imagination could any convoy commander have exercised proper command and control over the fleet and personnel extending over quite a few kilometres considering the mandatory distance that needs to be maintained between each vehicle as per the Standard Operating Procedure.

In order to inflict heavy casualties, terrorists usually select a place for attack where the vehicles have to slow down due to a sharp bend or gradient. Such spots call for special attention by way of sanitisation. The suicide bomber chose such a spot where the vehicles slowed down and managed to inflict heavy casualties. Laden with what is suspected to be RDX, the terrorist is reported to have driven alongside the convoy for a minute or two before ramming into the CRPF bus and triggering the explosives.

Though the inquiry will reveal the lapses that will need to be rectified, immediate steps need to be taken to avert a recurrence of such

an incident. At the cost of causing inconvenience to the general populace, all civil vehicles need to be banned from plying on the highway when military/paramilitary convoys are on the move. Ambulances and emergency service vehicles could be the sole exception to this rule.

In recent months, the CRPF along with the Army and the Special Operations Group of Jammu and Kashmir Police have carried out a series of successful operations against the militants and have wiped out a large part of the top leadership of terrorist groups. As many as 256 militants were killed in various operations in J&K last year, which has unnerved their bosses across the borders. That they have played a pivotal role in training the suicide bomber, procuring RDX and planning the attack is certain.

While intelligence agencies need to beef up their sources, the security apparatus calls for a thorough review. The Jammu and Kashmir Police is already planning to install CCTVs all along the 400 km-stretch of the highway, right from the entry point to the state in Lakhampur in Punjab to Sonmarg beyond Srinagar.

As a force multiplier, drones could also be pressed into service to hover along the highway and detect any suspicious movement of men or vehicles along the route. Quick reaction teams deployed at vantage points along the highway could be rushed to spots where suspicious movements are noticed through real time pictures and take remedial measures.

Similarly, the extensive use of sniffer and tracker dogs could lead to recovery of explosives and even terrorists. The Belgian Malinois dogs presently being used by the CRPF in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha have proved their mettle by way of being instrumental in the recovery of huge quantities of explosives in various operations.

The writer retired as inspector general of police, CRPF

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## THE Urdu PRESS

### PULWAMA HORROR

THE TERROR ATTACK in Pulwama received extensive coverage in Urdu papers. On February 16, almost all papers carried editorials on various aspects of the incident.

Munsif's editorial is titled 'Jawanon ka khoon kiski gurdan par?' It notes that "instead of examining where we went wrong, it is easy to deflect the blame on a neighbour. Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju has been boasting that there has been no big terror attack during Narendra Modi's tenure as prime minister. But the situation in Jammu and Kashmir has gone from bad to worse. A record number of jawans and civilians have been killed." The editorial asks the Modi government to "take moral responsibility for inability to check this attack."

Roznama Rashtriya Sahara also calls Pulwama a terrible tragedy and talks about the need to introspect. It refers to the killing of an army major even after the 14th. "India has taken back the Most Favoured Nation from Pakistan, it must now work to isolate Pakistan. But first it must do what it can to prevent attacks such as these, which hurt our soldiers." "Minister of State and former Army chief, V K Singh's statement, 'After Pulwama, we must look at our shortcomings that allowed this incident to take place,' does fill us with hope," the newspaper notes.

Hamara Samaj's editorial on February 20, titled, 'Pulwama ka dard' describes the day of the attack as a "Black Day". The editorial says this is so not only because of the terrible tragedy — something that we have been bearing — but also because there have been calls for *inteqaam* (revenge). But the revenge against Pakistan must be meaningful, so that it is forced to never allow its territory for attacks on India again, the editorial asserts.

### MUCK IN KARNATAKA

THE URDU PAPERS have commented on the recent tape, which shows the BJP attempts to break the ranks of the Congress and JD(S) and topple the state government captured.

Siasat on February 11, says in Karnataka, "Yeddyurappa is keen to take charge. It was said of former Congress President Sitaram Kesri, when he was in hectic parleys in Delhi in the 1990s, that he is in a hurry because he is so old." For similar reasons, "Yeddyurappa is willing to go to any extent". "Disclosures are coming thick and fast about crores of rupees being offered," the paper notes

Munsif's editorial on February 14 is titled 'Aakhir etraaf, kama hi pada' (after all, an admission had to be made). The paper writes that: "BJP leaders never tire of repeating that they are disciplined and not corrupt. But the conduct of the BJP's unit in Karnataka is

enough to blow their cover." The editorial speaks of immense "uthal-puthal (things going topsy-turvy) in the state. Operation Kamla was re-enacted on some Congress and JD(S) MLAs but it did not succeed and the state government was saved. Yeddyurappa had denied this outright but in just a few days, Karnataka Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy released audio tapes which make it clear that an offer of crores of rupees was made. After it became public, Yeddyurappa denied it was his voice."

### BILLS DIE SINE DIE

URDU TIMES, ON February 14 has an editorial titled, 'Nakaami ki ibteda' (the beginning of failures) on Parliament being adjourned. It contends that the gravest failure of the BJP government has been its inability to push through the triple talaq bill. "It may be said that more than the government's failure, it is the Opposition's triumph that the Bill could not have passed. The Opposition said, send it to the Select Committee. If the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is brought back, discussions will have to restart," the editorial asserts. Protests in the Northeast proved to be the bill's death knell.

Etemaad on February 11 talks about the 'Syaah isteqbaal' or the black welcome, while referring to the reception the PM received in

Assam, where he was greeted with black flags and black balloons. The paper, which is the AIMIM's mouthpiece, concludes that "the environment is not conducive for the BJP, as protests in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu demonstrate." The editorial writes of "student groups and other civil society groups making their serious problems with the Citizenship Bill evident and launching a state-wide bandh".

Sahafat, on February 14, writes how a Bill designed to exclude Muslims has landed the BJP in trouble and points to the irony of the situation.

Inqilab on February 10, makes a prediction: "All plans to push this Bill through will be destroyed. There are strong indications that this Bill, passed by the Lok Sabha on January 10, will lapse as the Upper House will not clear it. Of the 245 MPs, BJP has just 73, and even if the entire NDA supports it, the figure will not be enough", it said, presciently.

Urdu Times on February 20 in an editorial titled 'Yeh To hona hi thaa' (this was inevitable) has creatively interpreted the opposition to this Bill by the Shiv Sena. It says that "the Sena's alliance with the BJP proves its opposition to the Bill was merely to increase its bargaining power."

Compiled by Seema Chishti

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SHADES OF SAFFRON

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Disgrace' (IE, February 21). We seem to have learnt no lesson from the anti-Sikh riots. We are again taking the law into our own hands by punishing a community for the wrongdoing of a few. The Raisina Hill gentry are unaware of the way the society is being polarised for their vested interests.

Tarsem Singh, Mahipur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Disgrace' (IE, February 21). Meghalaya Governor Thaghata Roy has once again accorded short shrift to constitutional requirements by stirring communal sensitivities when the need of the hour is to build political consensus on the way forward to address the alienation of our people in Kashmir. The governor has spoken like a right-wing ideologue.

SS Paul, Nadia

### BIGOTRY AGAIN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Shaming ourselves' (IE, February 21). It's unfortunate that young Kashmiris have become targets of toxic majoritarianism and communal bigotry. Such insecurity could be a breeding ground for radicals. A mindset free from caste, class and religious ideology is the need of the hour.

Sangeeta Kampani, New Delhi

### 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](mailto: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

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Shaming ourselves' (IE, February 21). It's unfortunate that young Kashmiris have become targets of toxic majoritarianism and communal bigotry. Such insecurity could be a breeding ground for radicals. A mindset free from caste, class and religious ideology is the need of the hour.

Divya Singla, Patiala





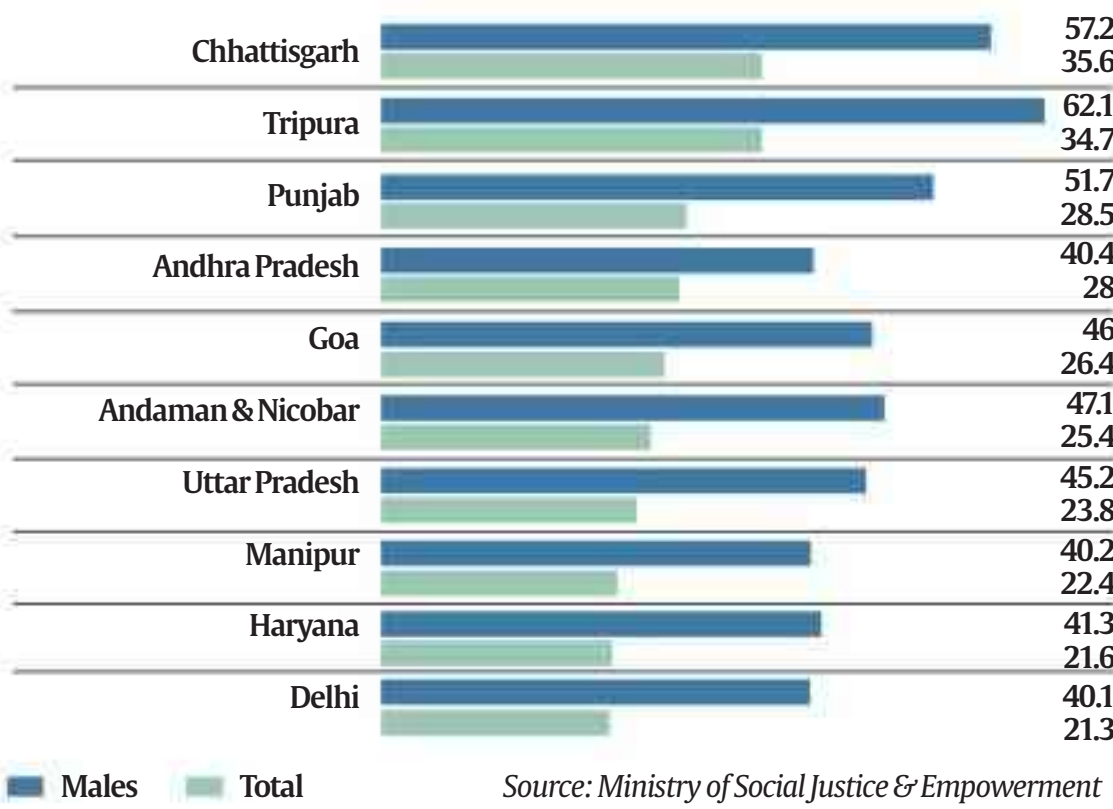
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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@expressindia.com](mailto:explained@expressindia.com)

## TELLING NUMBERS

### 1 in 7 Indians is an alcohol user, prevalence high in Chhattisgarh

PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL USE (10-75 YEARS), IN %

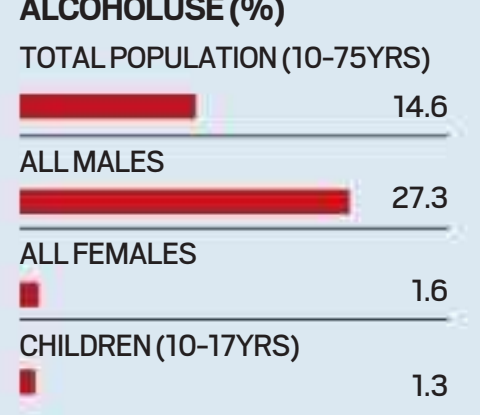


ONE IN seven Indians is an alcohol user, according to a report released by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, and other findings of which were reported in *The Indian Express* on February 19. 'Magnitude of Substance Use in India, 2019', a report prepared by National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, AIIMS-New Delhi, cited the prevalence of current alcohol use as 14.6% among the total population in the age group 10-75.

An overwhelming majority of alcohol users are males and fall in the age bracket 18-49 years (74%). As such, the prevalence was several times higher among men (27.3%) than among women (1.6%). Also, 1.3% of children (ages 10-17) are alcohol users, as opposed to 17.1% in the 18-plus age group.

The report notes that there is considerable heterogeneity in prevalence of alcohol use in the country. States with high prevalence are Chhattisgarh

#### ALL-INDIA PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL USE (%)



(35.6%), Tripura (34.7%), Punjab (28.5%), Arunachal Pradesh (28%) and Goa (28%). More than half the male population of Chhattisgarh, Tripura and Punjab use alcohol. Among women, states with the largest prevalence of alcohol use are Arunachal Pradesh (15.6%) and Chhattisgarh (13.7%). Among children, a high prevalence was found in Punjab (6%), West Bengal (3.9%) and Maharashtra (3.8%).

## TIP FOR READING LIST

### WHY DO ZEBRAS HAVE STRIPES?

THE EVOLUTION of the zebra's black & white coat has intrigued scientists for years. Now, researchers have added evidence to a theory that the primary purpose of the stripes is for avoiding blood-sucking parasites — horse flies. Their study shows that stripes don't deter horse flies from a distance, with both zebras and domestic horses experiencing the same rate of circling from the flies. However, video analysis revealed differences in approach speed. When approaching zebras, horse flies fail to slow down, which is essential for a successful landing.



ing the visual system of the horse flies during their final moments of approach."

Researchers also made the same horses wear different coloured cloth coats: black, white or zebra-striped livery. Just as before, when horses wore coats with striped patterns, they experienced fewer horse fly landings.

Source: University of Bristol  
Research paper in PLOS One:  
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0210831>

**DECISION 2019**  
THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

**LALMANI VERMA**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

AHEAD OF the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is facing a challenge retaining alliances with two regional parties in Uttar Pradesh — Apna Dal (Sonelal) and Suheldeo Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP). While the Apna Dal (S) has said "it is free to take a decision", the SBSP has given an ultimatum that it will quit the NDA if its concerns are not addressed.

#### Apna Dal & Apna Dal (S)

The parent party is Apna Dal, formed in 1995 by late Sonelal Patel, a popular leader among Kurmis, a backward caste with a presence in eastern UP and Bundelkhand. The breakaway Apna Dal (Sonelal) is headed by patron Anupriya Patel, Sonelal's daughter and now Union minister. It claims to enjoy the support of Kurmis as well as non-Yadav OBC groups such as Kushwaha, Maurya,

### Why are alliances with Apna Dal (S) and SBSP important for BJP in Uttar Pradesh?

## One UP region and two allies BJP cannot afford to offend

Anupriya Patel's Apna Dal (Sonelal) and O P Rajbhar's SBSP have been flexing their muscle in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. They draw their support from the same region and identify with several communities whose votes could be crucial to BJP.

Nishad, Pal and Saini in these areas. The parent party failed to win any seat in the 2007 Assembly polls when it contested 39 seats, or in the 2009 Lok Sabha polls when it contested 29. In 2012, it contested 76 Assembly seats and won its first, Rohania in Varanasi, with Anupriya elected.

The Apna Dal tied up with the BJP in 2014 and won both Lok Sabha seats it contested. Anupriya, who won Mirzapur by 2.19 lakh votes, vacated her Assembly seat; her mother Krishna lost the bypoll. After Anupriya broke away, her Apna Dal (S), continued the alliance with the BJP. In the 2017 Assembly elections, it contested 11 seats and won 9; one of these winners is now a minister. These 9 seats are segments of a clutch of Lok Sabha constituencies with significant numbers of Kurmi voters.

#### Suheldeo Bharatiya Samaj Party

The SBSP is headed by president Om Prakash Rajbhar, now a minister in UP. He

ELECTION	APNA DAL/APNA DAL (S)*		SBSP	
	CONTESTED	WON	CONTESTED	WON
Assembly 2007	39	0	97	0
Lok Sabha 2009	29	0	16	0
Assembly 2012	76	1	52	0
Lok Sabha 2014	2	2	12	0
Assembly 2017	11	9	8	4

\*Apna Dal (S) in 2017 Assembly polls

used to be state president of the Apna Dal's youth wing. Like Apna Dal (S), the SBSP identifies with non-Yadav, backward-classes voters. It estimates that one-third of UP's voters are non-Yadav OBCs and claims it has the support from many of these groups including Prajapati, Pal, Rajbhar, Chauhan, Dhangar, Bind, Kevat, Mallah and Kurmitoo.

Rajbhar left the Apna Dal when Sonelal

Patel denied him an election ticket. The SBSP lost a series of elections — an Assembly bypoll in 2003, 12 Lok Sabha seats in 2004, 97 Assembly seats in 2007, 16 Lok Sabha seats in 2009 (with the Apna Dal as ally), 52 Assembly seats in 2012 and 12 Lok Sabha seats in 2014. In 2016, at a programme organised by Rajbhar in Mau, BJP president Amit Shah announced the alliance between the two parties.

## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

# Why Saudi Arabia matters

India has deep ties with the kingdom, which is the only country apart from China that can put pressure on Pak. But these relations are part of a complex Middle East story in which Iran, Israel and US too, are players

**NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN**  
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 21

**Given that Saudi Arabia is one of Pakistan's main patrons, is it odd that India's Prime Minister should be warmly receiving Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in New Delhi only days after the Pulwama terrorist attack?**

It may indeed, seem odd that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should hug the Crown Prince on the red carpet when he had just committed to massive investments in Pakistan, and Riyadh and Islamabad had issued a joint statement that not only praised each other "for the achievements and sacrifices made... in the war against terrorism" but also "underlined the need for avoiding politicisation of UN listing regime" — a thinly veiled swipe at India's attempts to get the Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist Masood Azhar sanctioned under UN Security Council Resolution 1267.

However, no wise country plays zero sum games in foreign policy, especially where powerful players are involved. India has always kept its relationship with Saudi Arabia separate from that country's relations with Pakistan, and it is, in the long term, much bigger than individual terrorist attacks.

The visit by Crown Prince Mohammed, or MBS as he is known, was part of his long-scheduled three-nation tour — on Thursday, he arrived in Beijing, and was expected to meet with President Xi Jinping during his two-day visit. The tour has been seen as an effort by MBS to repair his image that has been dented badly by the gruesome October 2018 murder of the dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's consulate in Ankara. The Prince, who has been directly linked to the murder, is currently not welcome in any western country. MBS has projected his Pakistan-India-China trip as part of his Vision 2030, which includes a "strategic partnership council" of Saudi Arabia and eight other countries, including India.

Given the elaborate planning and scheduling that goes into such official visits, India could not have cancelled it without hurting its own interests. His brief return to Saudi after the Pakistan visit for a day before flying to India is being put out as a successful outcome of efforts by the Indian side to de-hyphenate his two visits in South Asia. Ministry of External Affairs managers also projected the absence of a Kashmir mention in the India-Pakistan joint statement.



PM Modi receives Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Wednesday. Tashi Tobgyal

#### What then is the precise nature of the India-Saudi Arabia relationship currently?

There has been a steady progress in the bilateral relationship since 2006, when King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud visited India. The two sides signed the landmark Delhi Declaration during that visit, which laid the framework for upgrading ties to the level of "strategic partnership" in 2010, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Saudi Arabia. The kingdom is India's fourth largest trading partner, and India is the fourth largest market for Saudi exports. Bilateral trade is in the region of \$28 billion, most of it crude oil exports to India, which imports around 19% of its oil requirements from Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian oil major Aramco and a partner UAE company had decided to invest half in a planned \$44 bn in a refinery-cum-petrochemical project in Maharashtra billed as the world's biggest, but that project is on hold for now as the Shiv Sena has objected to its proposed location in Ratnagiri. The two countries have defence, security and counter-terror cooperation.

India has the world's third largest Muslim population (after Indonesia and Pakistan), and there is inevitably a religious-cultural aspect to the ties with the custodian of Islam's holiest sites. Plus, there are more than 2.7 million Indians working in Saudi. The Ministry of External Affairs described Prime Minister Modi's visit to the kingdom in 2016 as a "turning point" that took the strategic engagement "upward". Saudi Arabia hon-

oured Modi with its highest civilian honour, the King Abdulaziz Sash. During the MBS visit, the two sides signed MoUs with a potential investment of \$ 100 bn, five times more than what he signed up for in Pakistan.

#### Saudi and Pakistan are aligned, Saudi and Iran are rivals, Pakistan sponsors terrorism in India. The security forces of Iran and India were targeted on consecutive days by two Sunni jihadist groups, each of which has Jaish (Jaish ul-Adl and Jaish-e-Mohammad) in its name. Is there a connection?

The connection, in fact, is Saudi Arabia.

It is well documented that Saudi bankrolled Sunni extremist groups through Pakistan to recruit jihadist fighters for the first Afghan war. The groups fighting India in Kashmir have their origins in this. Jaish-e-Mohammad was set up by Masood Azhar with funds from Taliban and al-Qaeda. And Lashkar-e-Taiba, originated from a group called Markaz Daawa wal Irshad (Centre for Preaching and Guidance), which was formed to fight the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

Despite the Saudi connections to al-Qaeda and other terror groups, its relations with the US have remained solid. Shia Iran views the US-Saudi-Israel alliance as an existential threat.

The MBS visit to South Asia came in a week in which three significant events took place. First, representatives of 60 nations met at Warsaw for a US-led "Middle-East conference", which was in reality an "anti-Iran"

conference. Germany, France and the EU, which were in the Iran nuclear deal and opposed US President Donald Trump's decision to break away from it, did not attend. Others sent junior representatives. But there were strong speeches against Iran by both Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Israel Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Second, 27 of Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps were blown up in Sistan-Balochistan by a "suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device" (SV-BIED). Third, an identical bombing a day later, claimed by Jaish-e-Mohammad, killed 40 CRPF personnel in Kashmir.

After the attack on the IRGC, Iran lashed out at the US and its "allies in the region". The attack was claimed by a group active on the Pakistan-Iran border called Jaish ul-Adl. The attack marks a new low in relations between Iran and Pakistan. Tehran sees the attack as confirmation that Pakistan has ganged up with Saudi in the regional coalition against it. Iran accuses Saudi Arabia of funding the group and Pakistan of sheltering it. While there is nothing apparent to link Jaish-e-Mohammad and Jaish ul-Adl, both are Sunni extremist groups operating out of Pakistan.

Iran, like India, does not like the emerging US-Taliban "peace agreement" that could leave the Taliban in the driving seat in Afghanistan by the middle of 2019. The Saudis, who back the talks, fear Iran may undermine it. Saudi, along with Pakistan and UAE, participated in one round of talks in Abu Dhabi in December 2018. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and UAE were the only countries that recognised the Taliban government in Afghanistan that lasted from 1996 to 2001.

#### Why can't India leverage its excellent individual relations with Iran, Saudi, Israel, and the US to tackle some of its longstanding national security problems, including Pakistan?

Pakistan has complex and difficult relationships with the US and Iran and no relations at all with Israel. Since 2001, the bottom line of US-Pakistan ties is Pakistan's centrality to the US-led war in Afghanistan. With a huge Shia population of its own, Pakistan is mindful of Iran's importance, but has provided the battlefield for the Saudi-driven Sunni vs Shia geopolitics of the region. The only country that has more influence over Pakistan than China is Saudi Arabia, but its own irons in regional fires would prevent it from helping India on this front. This is why the MBS visit had to be a balancing act between India and Pakistan.

## THIS WORD MEANS: MELDONIUM

# Drug at centre of India's new dope scandal

suffering from heart and circulatory conditions more "physical capacity and mental function". Though not approved by the US FDA, the drug has been easily available over the counter in Eastern Europe and Russia.

#### The problem

Because meldonium aids oxygen uptake and endurance, several athletes have been caught using it. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) put it on the list of banned substances in September 2015, and the ban went into effect on January 1, 2016. A study published in *Drug Testing and Analysis* in 2015 concluded that the drug "demonstrates an increase in endurance performance of athletes, improved rehabilitation after exercise, protection against stress, and enhanced activations of central nervous system (CNS) functions".

Grindeks has said meldonium can provide an "improvement of work capacity of healthy people at physical and mental overloads and during rehabilitation period", and that it believed the substance would not enhance athletes' performance in competition, and might even do the opposite.

#### Other users

Former European figure skating champion and a member of Russia's gold-winning team at the 2014 Winter Olympics, Ekaterina Bobrova, has tested positive, as has Russian cyclist Eduard Vorganov. In 2013, Swedish media reported that the 2013 1,500 m world champion Abeba Aregawi had tested positive.

A number of athletes were using it before it was banned. (Sharapova claimed that she was unaware that the ban had come into ef-

fect.) In 2015, anti-doping group Partnership for Clean Competition said meldonium was found in 182 of 8,300 urine samples it tested as part of a study. WADA confirmed at the time of the Sharapova scandal that since the ban, meldonium had been found in 55 samples.

Jagtar dropped out of the Asian Athletics Championships in Bhubaneswar in July 2017 after he failed an in-competition dope test given by NADA during the Federation Cup in Patiala the previous month. Last month, his ban was reduced from four years to two, after he provided "substantial evidence" that helped bust a ring of illegal performance-enhancing drug suppliers. NADA, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, is "responsible for promoting, coordinating, and monitoring the doping control programme in sports in all its forms in the country".

#### NEXT

#21 How significant are smaller allies to the two major coalitions in Maharashtra?

