



## Healing touch

Kashmiri students elsewhere must be reassured of their personal safety

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a petition seeking directions to educational institutions to protect Kashmiris in the face of harassment and intimidation in various parts of the country after the ghastly terror attack in Pulwama on February 14. Hundreds of Kashmiri students, primarily from Dehradun in Uttarakhand, have already returned home or moved to Delhi or Jammu seeking safety. Amid these reports, the Union Home Ministry had on Saturday issued an advisory to all States and Union Territories to ensure the safety of Kashmiris. The Jammu and Kashmir police too have set up helplines. It is to be hoped that these measures will be strengthened, especially with the Supreme Court now hearing the issue. It needs to be made clear by the State and Central governments that there will be no compromise on the State's responsibility to ensure the well-being of citizens. Equally, there needs to be stern action against the mobs that harassed and tried to frighten Kashmiris. The Uttarakhand police arrested 22 students on Tuesday for trying to have Kashmiri students expelled from their college, but there have been other similar instances. It will be a cause for lasting shame if young people studying in different parts of the country were sought to be isolated, and their ethnic identity headlined to make them targets of majoritarian mobs looking to avenge a terrorist attack. Law and order must prevail, and the students must be given enough confidence that they can return to their educational institutions and studies without fear.

However, occurrences such as these, of communally charged attacks, cannot be forgotten with the mere return to a semblance of normalcy. No group of Indians should be allowed to be isolated by blame-calling mobs, and the situation demands a strong, politically-led initiative to end the intimidation and reassure the victims. Given this, it is regrettable that members of the Narendra Modi Cabinet have either been in denial or have infused ambiguity into their statements of reassurance. Union Human Resource Development Minister Prakash Javadekar, for instance, on Wednesday said outright that there had been no such harassment. Equally disturbing, he prefaced his remarks with a reference to "a tremendous reaction of anger in the country about the Pulwama incident". The fact is that many Kashmiris have already fled Dehradun, and some of them have shared their stories. Mr. Javadekar, as HRD Minister, should address their feeling of insecurity, instead of being dismissive about it, and in the process allowing the mobs a free pass. Moreover, the fact that anti-Pakistan sloganeering can so easily slip into anti-Kashmiri rhetoric must bother civil society and politicians of all hues. Even if the attacks are isolated, the counter-argument must come from across the political spectrum, and in one voice: that all Kashmiris enjoy all protections and rights available to them as Indian citizens.

## Half-measures

It is good the 'angel tax' has been moderated, but its arbitrary nature remains intact

After the uproar among start-up investors in the last few weeks, the Centre on Tuesday decided to ease the conditions under which investments in start-ups will be taxed by the government. According to the new rules, investments up to ₹25 crore in companies that are less than 10 years old and with a total turnover of less than ₹100 crore will be exempted from the new angel tax. Further, investments made by listed companies with a net worth of at least ₹100 crore or a total turnover of at least ₹250 crore will be fully exempt from the tax, so will investments made by non-resident Indians. When it was first proposed by the Centre in 2012, the angel tax was justified as an emergency measure to prevent the laundering of illegal wealth by means of investments in the shares of unlisted private companies at extraordinary valuations. But the adverse effect that it has had on investor confidence has forced the government to ease the stringent rules. The easing of the outdated angel tax rules will definitely make life easier for start-ups, which are in desperate need for capital to fund their growth and other business requirements. Further, since the new rules are set to be applied retrospectively, many young companies that have received notices from the Income Tax Department in the last few years will be relieved by the latest tweak in the rules.

There are, however, a few other issues with the new rules that could still cause unnecessary headaches to young start-ups. Companies wishing to make use of the latest exemption, for instance, will first need to be registered with the government as start-ups. To be classified as one, a company needs to attest to conditions such as that it has not invested in any land unrelated to the business, vehicles worth over ₹10 lakh, or jewellery. These requirements, while probably aimed to prevent money-laundering, can lead to considerable bureaucratic delays and rent-seeking. Also, the new rules for the angel tax, though less stringent than before, can cause the same old problem of arbitrary tax demands for companies that do not fall under the defined category of start-ups. The taxes to be paid are still supposed to be calculated by the authorities based on how much the sale price of a company's unlisted share exceeds its fair market value. It is impossible to know the market value, let alone the fair market value, of shares that are not openly traded in the marketplace. So tax authorities with ulterior motives will still possess enough leeway to harass start-ups with unreasonable tax demands. Unless the government can address the arbitrary nature of the angel tax, the damage to investor confidence may remain.

# The great Indian political shift

The Ambedkarite, Lohiaite and Dravidian parties are visibly moving to a politics without 'othering'



SAJJAN KUMAR

The 2019 general election is being seen as a test of the parties opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance in forging workable pre-election fronts, and of the BJP in deepening its electoral coalitions. But it is interesting to scan the changing political landscape before the campaign for the Lok Sabha gets truly underway for changes in the 'politics of othering' that has so far defined most Indian parties. Or in other words, are non-BJP, non-Congress parties adopting Congressism?

### Episodic othering

The enumeration exercise by the colonial ethnographic state since the late 19th century brought to the fore the politics of 'numbers', thereby reshaping society into the binary of 'minority-majority' along caste, religion and ethnic lines. By the 1920s, the political discourse in India, barring that of the Indian National Congress, inhaled the politics of 'numbers', which seamlessly metamorphosed into the politics of 'othering'. This took various forms under parties such as the All-India Muslim League, the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, the Justice Party, etc. By the 1950s, against the backdrop of the domineering discourse of Congressism, which was a politics without 'othering', India witnessed the emergence of four dominant political threads: Lohiaite, Ambedkarite, Hindutva and Dravidian, championing the fault-lines of caste, religion and ethnicity, thereby practising the politics of 'numbers and othering'. The constitution of the 'other'

happened at three levels. First, at the symbolic level, wherein the founding fathers were pitted against each other. Second, at the societal level, wherein the socio-economic interest of one section was shown as being unaligned with that of sections signifying the 'other'.

Third, at the political level, wherein idiom, metaphor, popular slogan and appeal were deliberately sectarian, exhibiting a 'friend-enemy' simile. It was argued that popular politics was about speaking for different shades of subalterns, who constituted the majority, thereby projecting the politics of 'numbers and othering' as necessary to serve the ideals of equality and freedom. However, this mode of politics infused a great deal of bitterness in the societal realm by treating the ideals of 'fraternity' as subservient to 'equality and freedom'.

The manifestation of this three-fold othering was seen in the political culture across India since the 1990s in an entrenched way. The popularity of slogans in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, emanating from Ambedkarite and Lohiaite discourse, while championing an egalitarian quest took recourse to caste-based 'othering' that competed with the religious 'othering' of Hindutva.

This entrenchment of 'othering' could be seen most clearly in post-2000 Uttar Pradesh when the acidic political rivalry between the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) manifested itself in their governments' policies as they pitted two social justice icons, R.M. Lohia and B.R. Ambedkar, against each other. For instance, the BSP government by 2012 had brought almost 19,000 most backward villages under the Ambedkar Village Scheme. The official signboard designated them as 'Ambedkar villages' qualified for special developmental funds.



However, when the SP government came to power in 2012, it selected another set of villages under a new village development scheme, Ram Manohar Lohia Samagra Gram Vikas Yojana, and officially labelled them as 'Lohia villages'. The replacing of Ambedkar by Lohia had another dimension. While the Ambedkar villages were inhabited by significantly large numbers of Dalits, the Lohia villages had a majority of non-Dalits, particularly the Other Backward Classes.

This three-fold othering has its parallel in the southern and North-eastern States, which was reflected in the BJP's slogan 'Jati-Mati-Veti' (identity, land and resource) in 2016 during the Assembly election in Assam, privileging ethnic identity, and in the controversy over the separate flag during the Karnataka election in 2018.

Besides, going against the ideals of fraternity, the fact that any politics of 'othering' becomes a politics of exclusion by default underlines the need for a politics without 'othering'. Therefore, the question is, can India witness a 'politics of numbers' (pragmatic electoral compulsions) that doesn't necessarily metamorphose into a 'politics of othering'?

Something may be changing. The frequency of 'othering' in the political discourses of Lohiaite, Ambedkarite and Dravidian politics is declining, and is now at the

most episodic. In fact, the tone and tenor of the Mahagathbandhan in Uttar Pradesh, particularly regarding the SP (Lohiaite) and the BSP (Ambedkarite), signify the beginning of a phase of 'politics without othering' at the normative level. In their formal press conference announcing the grand alliance, both Mayawati of the BSP and Akhilesh Yadav of the SP referred overwhelmingly to class and occupational identities, and only a passing reference was made to Other Backward Classes and Dalit identities. In marked contrast to their position during the Mandal phase of the early 1990s, they welcomed the 10% reservation announced for economically weaker sections.

Whether these shifts indicate the return of Congressism — a mode of politics without any 'othering' — is yet to be seen, but certainly it indicates a process wherein the Congress does not seem to be the only claimant of the discourse of Congressism. Rather, more and more parties which rose on the plank of anti-Congressism are adopting the discourse of 'non-othering'.

### The BJP exception

However, there is one radical contrast to this emerging trend. While Lohiaite, Ambedkarite and Dravidian politics are embracing the framework of non-othering, the Hindutva discourse led by the BJP is still caught in the old-mode of 'othering' even though its electoral slogan appears to be all-inclusive.

In fact, it is BJP that has taken the politics of 'othering' from the old episodic level to the incessant level. By dint of a disproportionate investment in an army of dedicated team pollsters indulging in hair-splitting profiling of the electorate contingent to pre-existing prejudice, anxiety and aspirations, the party has seamlessly employed multiple modes of 'othering' simultaneously to trounce its politi-

cal rivals. The BJP has single-handedly taken the politics of 'othering' from the episodic to incessant level wherein the everyday life of the people is systematically fused with the constitution of the 'other' and its perpetuation. This has taken the form of communalisation of everyday lives, as reflected in the instances of cow-vigilantism and mob-lynching. Besides, the demonisation of Nehru by pitting him against other founding fathers has reached a hysterical level.

At a time when the emerging centrality of agrarian issues has led to the shrinking cultural space for privileging religious identity in southern, western, central and some parts of northern India, the BJP as a compensatory move is shifting its politics of othering eastward, in West Bengal and the Northeastern States. In essence, this is an attempt to shift the core space for communal othering to east and Northeast India, as seen, for instance, with the politics over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. This explains why a party that championed the ethnic sentiment of 'Jati-Mati-Veti' in Assam was desperate to pass the Citizenship Bill that privileges the religious identity.

### A litmus test

Barring Hindutva, the emerging trend of parties that emerged from the Dravidian, Ambedkarite and Lohiaite discourse moving to the politics of 'non-othering' is a moment of celebration. A liberal democracy needs competing and contested politics along differentiated socio-economic interests without letting it slip into the 'politics of othering'. The 2019 election will be a litmus test of how far Indian democracy has come in this regard.

Sajjan Kumar is a political analyst. He is associated with Peoples Pulse, a research organisation that specialises in fieldwork-based political study

## Picking sides in West Asia

India could find it difficult to maintain a 'balancing' approach between different West Asian powers



HARSH V. PANT & HASAN ALHASAN

Over the past few years, the course of India's relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) suggests that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India finally appears to be moving away from its traditional "balancing" approach to West Asia. The Modi government has in practice demonstrated a preference for working with the three regional powers rather than Iran, a trend likely to be reinforced after the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and the proposed trip by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to New Delhi.

### Regional realities

Since the 1990-91 Gulf War, India has officially adopted a "balancing" approach to West Asia, which some view as a legacy of non-alignment. Although this approach has allowed India to eschew involvement in regional disputes and de-phenate relations with regional rivals including Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia, the policy has also constrained India's ability to press

its geopolitical interests in the region.

Geopolitically, MBS and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) have over the past few years escalated their battle against political Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Most notably, this materialised in their support for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's takeover of power in Egypt from the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, and in their dispute with Qatar, a key regional backer of the group. Naturally, this brings them closer to Israel, which faces a growing threat from Islamist militant groups, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iranian-backed forces in Syria.

The campaign by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to curtail the influence of political Islamist groups also draws them closer to India. During his visit to New Delhi, the Saudi Crown Prince hinted at the attack by vowing to "cooperate in every way, including intelligence sharing". In recent months, the UAE has also ramped up its security cooperation with India, extraditing at least three suspects wanted in relation to the AgustaWestland case.

### Defence and energy needs

Meanwhile, India's defence and security partnership with Israel has already proven useful to its security and military modernisation drive. In 1998, Israel provided In-



dia with valuable intelligence on Pakistani positions during the Kargil war. More recently, India and Israel have collaborated on a \$777 million project to develop a maritime version of the Barak-8, a surface-to-air missile that India successfully tested in January. India has also reportedly agreed to purchase 54 HAROP attack drones for the Indian Air Force and two air-borne warning and control systems (AWACS) worth over \$800 million from Israel. Due to its technological sophistication and warm relations, Israel has become one of India's top suppliers of military technology.

Economically, the ability of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to mobilise investments despite low oil prices is a huge asset in their relations with India. Investments have included a \$44 billion oil refinery in India by Saudi Aramco and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company in partnership with an Indian consortium. During his visit to New Delhi, MBS said he foresaw up to \$100 billion worth of Saudi invest-

ments in India over the next few years, including a plan by the Saudi Basic Industries Corp. to acquire two LNG plants.

### Iran's stake

In contrast, Iran's support for Islamist militancy, not least by transferring advanced missile technology to Islamist groups and militias in Lebanon and Syria, has led to an increase in tensions with Israel, which responded by conducting air strikes against Iranian targets on Syrian soil in January. Although the simultaneous attacks that claimed the lives of 27 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and 40 members of India's Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) are likely to bring India and Iran closer together against Pakistan, it is doubtful that the occasion would generate much momentum in bilateral relations.

From an economic perspective, U.S. sanctions have turned Iran into an unreliable economic partner. Despite obtaining a six-month waiver from the U.S. in November on energy imports from Iran, India is shoring up plans to find alternative sources as the waiver reaches its term. Meanwhile, Indian investments in Iran, including the Shahid Beheshti complex at Chabahar and the Farzad B gas field, have languished for years, reflecting the severe constraints on doing business with Iran.

However, India's tilt towards Is-

rael, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE is not a risk-free move. Iran continues to exercise much influence in West Asia and can help shape events in Afghanistan by shoring up the Taliban against the U.S. Moreover, Iran's Chabahar port represents a strategic investment for India which hopes to use the facility to connect with the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC) that extends to Central Asia and to bypass Pakistan en route to Afghanistan.

Yet, as tensions rise in West Asia, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have coalesced more closely against Iran under the U.S.-sponsored Middle East Security Alliance (MESA). Concurrently, recent escalation between Iran and Israel on the Syrian front suggests that tensions are unlikely to drop soon. Amid competing demands from West Asian powers for India to take sides, India might find it difficult to maintain a "balancing" approach even if it wanted to.

For now, the Modi government seems to have taken its pick. Having practically abandoned a "balancing" approach, the Modi government has, in effect, placed its bets on Israel and the Gulf monarchies, relegating relations with Iran to the side.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Employment test

The data on employment, or their lack, are there for all to see (Editorial page, "The employment test", February 22). Regular employment opportunities appear to be a thing of the past, with employment on a contractual basis and daily wages becoming common. The now infamous promise of the government, of the creation of two crore jobs every year, was an important reason why it came to power in 2014. Lakhs of jobs have been lost, mostly in the informal sector, and because of demonetisation.

Thousands of youth from faraway parts of the north and Northeast are now working in the south as there are fewer opportunities in their

States. In the public sector, the pronounced tilt towards privatisation is cutting off opportunities for educated youth.

G.B. SIVANANDAM,  
Coimbatore

The employed category in several sectors, both government and private, is over-burdened, evident in the banking and information technology sectors. Mental health issues are also on the rise. It is time the government enacted suitable statutes to regulate the workload and targets. It may be possible to find more job opportunities for the unemployed if available jobs are evenly distributed. As welfare is not money alone, this is an area for focus.

P.G. MATHEW,  
Kochi

Going by the growth trajectory in the past few decades, it is illusory to expect any government to "vacate the stage" if it has failed to generate employment. There has been little difference in the economic policies of the Congress and the BJP, which have remained pro-big business. The alleged fudging of official data may indicate that we have not lagged behind in graduating to a post-truth society.

MANOHAR ALEMBATH,  
Kannur, Kerala

It is amusing that the writer has tried to link it to the Narendra Modi government. One wonders what the writer's line would be in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, or 4IR, where technology use is

growing exponentially. A major aspect of the 4IR will be to change the way we work, as there will be the increased automation. Experts claim that automation will sound like a recipe for a worldwide disaster, as it will put people out of jobs, have labour unions, or what is left of them, striking and cause political upheaval. Is India prepared for this?

R. SUBRAMANIAM,  
Bengaluru

### On teaching

It is pathetic to note that those who take up teaching do so to escape unemployment, resulting in mediocrity in the educational system (OpEd page, February 21). That apart, the modern Ekalavya does not need to depend on

a teacher or the 'chalk-and-talk' method; Google is the guru and Skype has started replacing 'dreary' classroom learning. In this digital mayhem, passion towards teaching is rare. It is ironic that educational institutions are run by the rich who have political backing. 'Teaching is a service and not a transaction', is what the writer feels, but are there such teachers today?

E.S. CHANDRASEKARAN,  
Chennai

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the story on resident certificate issue in Arunachal Pradesh (Feb. 21, 2019, some editions), there was a reference to a rally addressed by Deputy Prime Minister Chowna Mein. He is actually the Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh.

A report headlined "Vishnu Prasad ridicules Ramadoss" (Feb. 21, 2019, some editions) talked about the *incarnation* of former PMK MLA Kaduvetti J. Guru in jail. It should have been *incarceration*.

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YES, NO, IT'S COMPLICATED

# After the terrorist strike in Pulwama, is war even an option?

YES



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Our conventional deterrence has failed. It is necessary to initiate strong military measures

The terrorist attacks in Pulwama, Pathankot, Uri and Nagrota, among others, are part of Pakistan's low-intensity limited war on the Line of Control (LoC) since 1947-48 and its 30-year-old proxy war to bleed India through a thousand cuts.

**Proportionate reaction**  
India should resist a knee-jerk emotional reaction to this grave provocation, which unquestionably crossed its threshold of tolerance, to satisfy an enraged public. Instead, the response should be part of a comprehensive long-term, national-level strategy to counter Pa-

kistan's proxy war. The aim should be to raise the cost for Pakistan's deep state – the army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) – for waging its proxy war, with a view to eventually making the cost prohibitive. The response should be proportionate and multidisciplinary in approach, comprising diplomatic, economic and military measures. It should include overt and covert actions.

What if miscalculation on either side leads to war? Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz theorised that war is an instrument of state policy. Today, some analysts believe that,

because of the destructive power of modern weapons, war is no longer a viable option unless the most vital interests of a state are threatened.

The object of defence preparedness of an appropriate level is to deter war and, if deterrence breaks down, to fight and win. Since the victory over Pakistan in 1971, the Indian armed forces have succeeded in deterring a major war, with the exception of the localised Kargil conflict of 1999.

However, India's conventional deterrence has failed to deter Pakistan's proxy war and state-sponsored terrorism and it is now necessary to initiate strong military



measures to prevent future terrorist strikes being launched from Pakistani soil. These measures should be carefully calculated to minimise the risk of escalation and must avoid collateral damage to the extent possible.

The military's aim should be to inflict punishment on the Pakistan army deployed on the LoC and terrorist training camps and related infrastructure in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). For each new act of state-sponsored terrorism, the scale and the intensity of the punishment inflicted should be increased by an order of magnitude.

Military operations should include artillery strikes with guns fir-

ing in the 'pistol gun' mode to destroy bunkers on Pakistani army posts on the LoC with minimum collateral damage; and Smerch and Pinaka rocket and missile strikes with precision-guided munitions (PGMs) on brigade and battalion HQ communications centres, logistics infrastructure, ammunition dumps and key bridges on major rivers.

Trans-LoC attacks by troops should be limited to raids by special forces and border action teams like the surgical strikes launched after the Uri military camp was hit in September 2016. Brigade-level attacks or larger infantry attacks must be avoided at least to begin with. The employment of fighter aircraft, particularly those armed

with PGMs, launched from a stand-off range on the Indian side of the LoC is also a viable military option. As long as the international boundary in Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat is not crossed by Indian Air Force aircraft, escalation by Pakistan is unlikely.

**Covert operations**

Counter-proxy war operations should be supplemented by covert operations. Since the remaining roots of militancy are now in Pakistan and PoK, and Pakistan is not inclined to bring to justice the leaders of terrorist organisations like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed, terrorists they call 'strategic assets', they must be neutralised through covert operations.

NO



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New Delhi

We have been spending next to nothing on strengthening our defence forces

The point is not the message which is to be sent, but whether we are capable of an effective and sustained campaign. You cannot wake up one fine morning and decide to go to war. You have to prepare for war.

**State of preparedness**  
Last year, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence noted that 68% of our equipment in the defence forces was in the 'vintage category'. It also pointed out that we do not have sufficient ammuni-

tion to support 10 days of war with Pakistan. We are supposed to have 42 squadrons in the Air Force, but have 33 which are operational, of which there are nine that should already have been phased out, which means they are being pressed into service well beyond their shelf life. So, we have roughly 24 squadrons when we should have had 42. There are comparable deficits across the board in all the armed forces. That is the state of our preparedness. If we continually invested in the defence forces, the option of war

would have been real. But we have been spending next to nothing on strengthening our defence forces. We are in deficit in every aspect. Wars are not fought by men alone in the modern age. Of course, we have men out there who are willing to fight and are willing to take all the risks they are told to take. But that doesn't mean they will prevail.

Let's suppose we declare war. China is clearly with Pakistan and even if they just start massing troops on our eastern borders, what will we do? We have a two-front war doctrine on paper, but it



is not backed by anything. Despite boastful claims to the contrary, we do not have the material capacity to fight a two-front war. Not only must we be prepared to fight a two-front war, we

must have the capacity to prevail in such a war. Only then does war become an option. You can't decide after a terrorist strike that you will go to war. You have to prepare for war. Then, if a situation like this arises, without boasting about it, you declare war.

Of course, there is this whole argument that Pakistan has a nuclear umbrella. But I don't think that is a

deterrent to war from our side. We also have a nuclear umbrella. I don't see China trembling and saying India is a nuclear country, we must not do anything to provoke it. The nuclear issue is not an issue.

**The decision is political**

The capacity to prevail in a confrontation is an issue. If that is absent, talking of going to war is a waste of breath. Political leaders are running an electoral campaign, and by striking manly postures, they think they will win votes. But they are only going to be exposed. Nowhere in the world does the army decide to go to war. Political leaders do not say, we give the army

a free hand. War is an act of political intent. The army fights wars. It does not decide whether or not to go to war. That decision is a political one, and this has already been made for us. It is made every year when we announce our Budget and make miserly defence allocations.

Today, even where we talk about specific acquisitions, these would only partially meet our requirements of 15 or 20 years ago, not our requirements today. So, how is war even an option? Of course, if we are forced, the armed forces will fight, but they would have to do so with both hands tied.

As told to Anuradha Raman

IT'S COMPLICATED



**MANMOHAN BAHADUR**  
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If we consider war, we must think rationally about its impact and the desired end result

Is the terrorist act in Pulwama an act of war? Is it akin to the 2001 attack on Parliament, which, being an attack on India's symbol of democracy, was considered as one and Operation Parakram was launched? In one sense, the attack in Pulwama may not be an act of war because, though the number of brave Indians lost was far too many (and even one life lost is one too many), Parliament carries an indelible significance of India's nationhood. However, the attack, if seen as a dare to India's military power and to the Indian government's

writ, could be termed an act of war because its sheer audacity makes it a strike on India's pride as a sovereign independent nation.

Nations cannot be reformed but managed. Germany and Japan are exceptions, but it took World War II, tens of thousands of lives, and trillions of dollars to make them democratic entities. The shrill cries for emasculating Pakistan so that it stops aiding terrorism from its soil are not grounded in reality. This also does not mean accepting the status quo of the past decades, with Pakistan-aided terrorists killing In-

dians on and off.

**Issues to consider**

Four basic issues have to be taken into account for taking a decision. First and foremost, what is the desired end state:

destruction of the Pakistan army, which wields real power, or an action that buys a greater duration of peace? Second, if war is the solution, what would be the economic and social impact on India? Third, India has international support now, but would that be the case in a long-drawn-out affair? China will never dump Pakistan due to its large economic and geopolitical stakes in Islamabad. The U.S.,



though it has professed its strategic partnership with India, has made its exit from Afghanistan its first priority. It needs Pakistan in its talks with the Taliban and hence there are limits to its support.

Russia, too, has its own interests in Kabul, especially after the American exit, and hence requires Pakistan as an intermediary. Thus, geopolitically, Pakistan has the upper hand in pulling the power strings. Finally, should cold, calculated logic decide the future course of action or should public pressure and electoral calculations be the catalysts?

The answer to the last question is simple, though vital: national inter-

ests override every other argument. The answers to the other questions are governed by the following facts. If escalation occurs through kinetic action, there would obviously be a loss of human lives – and India needs to be prepared for that. Here, the red herring of the nuclear factor needs to be removed. In terms of economic costs, the 1999 Kargil conflict made India poorer by many tens of thousands of crores (no official data are available and estimates vary greatly). More importantly, we lost 527 brave Indians trying to re-take those hills. Diversion of monies (and they would be substantial and long-drawn-out) towards fighting efforts would denude finance required for

addressing the economic and social realities of India.

**Some years of peace**

So, is war an option? Of course it is, with the above points rationally thought through. Once the government decides to go down the kinetic path, the armed forces are ready. The 'reformation' of Pakistan vis-à-vis India is not possible but this may get us some years of peace. The peace dividend can be elongated by managing our diplomacy with other countries so that subsequently their acceptance of India's just position serves as a deterrent to Pakistan's inimical stance towards India.

Views are personal

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## Holding a mirror to war

The technology of warfare has evolved, but grief and loss remain

ANJALI THOMAS



In the aftermath of the suicide bombing in Pulwama district on February 14, which killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel, war seems to be on the collective mind of the nation with some baying for blood and others cautioning restraint.

Few words in the English language evoke such powerful emotions: patriotism and glory, love and hate, fear and anger, hope and despair. For centuries, poets have borne witness to the strife that humans have inflicted upon themselves since the birth of civilisation. Just as the technology of warfare has evolved from spears to drones, the tenor of war poems has changed too.

*The Iliad*, one of the oldest war poems, glorifies heroes. It begins, not with the abduction of Helen that sparked the battle of Troy, but with the wrath of Achilles. It ends, not with the rape of Troy, but the death of another hero, Hector. In 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,' Alfred Tennyson flogs the motif of heroism in the 1854 Battle of Balaclava: as the cavalry rides into the valley of Death knowing that someone had blundered, theirs was not to reason why, "theirs but to do and die".

World War I poetry began on a patriotic note too, but soldier-poets – half buried in the trenches and witness to the slaughter that their generals had sent them to – began to revolt. Wilfred Owen upended the Roman poet Horace's view of patriotism: "My friend, you would not tell with such high zest/To children ardent for some desperate glory,/The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori* [It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country]".

Even for the triumphant, the battlefield is a place that births nightmares. In the poem, "The King Speaks to the Scribe," by Keki N. Daruwalla, Emperor Ashoka contemplates the cost of his victory at Kalinga: "The battlefield stank so that heaven/had to hold a cloth to its nose. I trod/this plain, dark and glutinous with gore,/my chariot-wheels squelching in the bloody mire."

By World War II, the instruments used in battle had changed. Planes and submarines provided distance from the violence, drowning out the agony of the dying. Today, drones have dehumanised war into video games. The heroism and horror in war poetry has given way to cynicism, satire, and alienation.

One emotion, however, remains unchanged: loss. Achilles mourned the death of his best friend. The World War I poets mourned the loss of innocence. Sarojini Naidu, in her 1915 poem, "The Gift of India," gives voice to the motherland who grieves for the soldiers that have been torn from her breast to the "drum-beats of duty sabres." Hatred may fuel a war, but what remains is loss and grief. Our failure to acknowledge this by allowing the narrative to be taken over by an army of trolls is a disservice to the nation. As Mr. Daruwalla writes in 'At War': "...haven't we enough on our plate/without having to think of war/and blood-stained jihad?"

The writer is with The Hindu's Bengaluru bureau



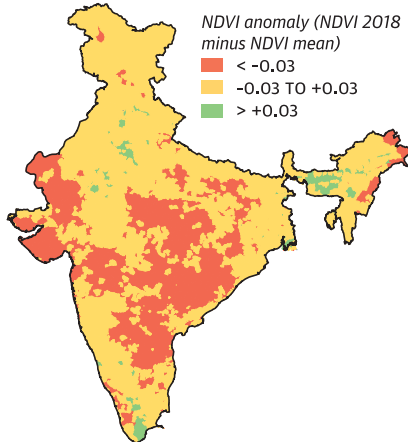
DATA POINT

### Good crop, bad crop

Severe shortage of rainfall in 2018 reduced soil moisture across several States. This has led to weaker or sparser vegetation. By Vignesh R

**No green shoots**

The map depicts the change in vegetation in 2018 compared to the mean vegetation between 2010 and 2017, in 4,449 blocks across all districts in the country. This change is called **NDVI\* anomaly**. Blocks in red had sparser or weaker vegetation in 2018 than the mean. Blocks in green had thicker or healthier vegetation in 2018 than the mean. Blocks in yellow had negligible change in 2018 from the mean. Sparser vegetation means that the quantity of crops is affected. Weaker vegetation means that the quality of crops is affected



The blocks with NDVI anomaly in red mostly match with those which had inferior soil moisture (see earlier data point on February 6)

**Quantifying the difference**

The higher the share of blocks with sparser or weaker vegetation in a State, the higher the possibility of farm distress. The table shows the percentage of blocks in each State which had sparser or weaker vegetation in 2018 compared to the 2010-2017 mean. For example, in Gujarat, 70% of blocks had sparser or weaker vegetation in 2018 than the mean. This shows that the crops in those blocks in 2018 either lacked the quality achieved or were lower in quantity compared to the mean period

State	%	State	%
Gujarat	70.2	Jharkhand	25.8
A.P.	66.8	U.P.	22.7
Chhattisgarh	64.6	Bihar	21.2
Maharashtra	56.2	Arunachal	18.8
Kerala	52.4	Rajasthan	15.1
M.P.	49.6	Tamil Nadu	9.7
Odisha	47.7	J&K	7.1
Manipur	40.0	Himachal	5.3
India avg.	38.2	Uttarakhand	5.0
Nagaland	36.4	West Bengal	4.0
Karnataka	26.0	Assam	1.2

**Pinch of salt**

While the lack of soil moisture is an accurate indicator of drought, NDVI anomaly is not. For example, 52% of the blocks in Kerala had sparser or weaker vegetation in 2018 than the mean despite heavy rains. This is because floods too affect vegetation as they reduce crop area

Maps, data sourced from MODIS (NASA EOSDIS LP DAAC) and processed by Raj Bhagat Palanichamy

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 22, 1969

### President Ayub not to seek re-election

President Ayub Khan of Pakistan to-day [February 21, Rawalpindi] announced that he would not seek re-election as President when his present term expires this year-end. In an unscheduled broadcast from Radio Pakistan, he said his decision was final and irrevocable. President Ayub told his 100-million people that they would be free to elect a person of their choice as his successor. If his current efforts to resolve the political crisis through which the country was passing with the help of all Opposition leaders and independents failed, he would soon introduce constitutional changes before the National Assembly so that elections were not delayed. President Ayub denied that through the political order he had introduced in the country 10 years ago he was seeking to perpetuate his rule.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 22, 1919

### Bangalore Shooting Incident.

The following is published in the 'Daily Post' in connection with the shooting incident on Neelasundra Lines [in Bangalore] on Wednesday [February 19] during musketry training. A number of recruits of the 280th Infantry had to undergo instruction on the Musketry parade ground and there were twelve squads of men thirty yards apart aiming at targets with dummy cartridges. One recruit named Achtya is stated to have applied to the Naick in charge of arms for cartridges before this parade and was told to take one or two clips of ten cartridges which were lying on a box and he presumably took away a clip of loaded ones. The difference between loaded and dummy cartridges is very slight but the dummies have a few holes bored in them. The instructor on such a parade is supposed to examine the ammunition before the men commence to practise, but this man states that the recruit Achtya was not in the ranks when he went round.

CONCEPTUAL

### Commitment device

SOCIOLOGY

This refers to any choice made by individuals in the present in order to prevent themselves from making impulsive mistakes in the future. It is believed that commitment devices can force people to stick to their original hard decisions without wavering from such decisions under distress in the future. An individual wishing to lose weight, for instance, may choose to buy a year-long membership at the gym instead of a weekly or monthly membership as a way to force himself to go to the gym regularly. Making one's commitments or goals public to a large group of people is another common example of an effective commitment device that can help people achieve their goals.

MORE ON THE WEB

These Red Sea coral reefs may just survive climate change

http://bit.ly/RedSeaCoralReefs