



The Indian EXPRESS

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Who's winning/losing?

The anger in India after Pulwama is self-destructively turning inward



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

AGAINST THE MOB

SC order to state governments to protect Kashmiris exposes a failure of the political class to speak up in the face of the mob

IT IS GENERALLY understood that public safety is the first duty of a government, but it has taken a petition in the Supreme Court to secure the safety of Kashmiris in 11 states across the country. The Court has directed the Delhi police commissioner and the chief secretaries and DGPs of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra to ensure the security of Kashmiri citizens and other minorities. A bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi required these officials to "take prompt and necessary action to prevent incidents of threat, assault, social boycott etc against Kashmiris and other minorities". It is their duty that he did not agree with it. The cumulative result is that the citizens of one state, already alienated, are now certain that they are unwanted.

This amounts to a sharp response to a government living in denial of the feeling whipped up against the community following the Pulwama attack. This is not the first time that an entire community has been demonised for the actions for a tiny handful of its members, and the government should have acted swiftly to reassure them. On the contrary, human resource development minister, Prakash Javadekar, announced that the community was at no risk, at a time when reports of the targeted harassment of students and migrant labour were appearing in the media. Institutions were publicly denying admission to Kashmiris, and workers were living in fear. Imminent violence in Delhi was prevented by police action. At the same time, Meghalaya governor Tathagata Ray tweeted in support of a nationwide boycott of Kashmiris, and Kashmiri products and businesses. It was a sentiment that recalled a dark time in Europe, caused an uproar in society, but was met by the government with a disconcerting silence. It took far too long for Union law minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad, to speak against the motion, and he limited himself to saying that he did not agree with it. The cumulative result is that the citizens of one state, already alienated, are now certain that they are unwanted.

Historically, the Supreme Court has served as the custodian of the public weal, intervening to secure a range of assurances, from the protection of undertrials to that of the environment. However, it should not have been necessary for citizens to approach the highest court to secure the safety of a community. In addition, the Opposition has also been surprisingly reluctant to contest problematic statements on the issue. It, too, has failed in its duty, which is to call out the government when it falters. It is a lasting shame that the political class, across parties and ideologies, chose to be silent when mobs threatened to turn the anger over the killing of security personnel inward and against a particular community.

ONUS ON CPM

The party must take the lead in ending political murders that threaten to destroy democracy in Kerala

POLITICAL MURDERS HAVE returned to haunt Kerala. Last Sunday, two Youth Congress workers were hacked to death in a village in Kasaragod. The first information report mentions that the victims had been threatened by CPM activists. Two days later, police arrested a local committee member of the CPM. The CPM has denied any role in the murders and expelled the arrested person from the party. CPM Kerala secretary, Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, cited a resolution against political murders to buttress the innocence of the party in the killings. With elections round the corner, these murders will haunt the CPM, which has been trying to shrug off the public perception that the party is intolerant of opposition and does not mind the physical elimination of its opponents.

If the CPM state leadership is to be believed, a local unit of the party may have ordered an action without consulting the top leadership. It is, of course, possible that the accused acted as a lone wolf, independent of the party. But that scenario is remote considering the structural and operational dynamic of a cadre party like the CPM, which works on Leninist organisational principles and where orders flow down from the top. In the wake of the widespread criticism following the murder of T P Chandrasekharan, a rebel leader, by party workers, the CPM passed a resolution at its last state conference against political killings. But the public pronouncements of many leaders give the impression that the message has not gone down the ranks, who see the sentiment against political murders more as a tactic than a clear moral stance. This is least surprising considering the messaging from the party, which extends legal aid and other protection to activists and even henchmen who have been jailed on murder charges.

At least 20 political murders have been reported since the CPM-led Left Front came to office in 2016, most of them involving CPM and RSS workers. Almost all of these have been meticulously planned and some of them conducted by criminal gangs to whom the murders had been outsourced. The political class ought to recognise that this criminalisation of politics is eating away the gains Kerala society has achieved over decades through public action centred on a rights discourse. Politics in Kerala has historically been a battle of ideas, not a war fought with sticks and swords. It should remain as such. The CPM, being the most influential political force in the state, ought to take the lead and start the cleansing from its own ranks.

BREAK(DANCE) THROUGH

Break dancing is set to become an Olympic sport. The honour, though, may be a veiled insult

PARIS, ONE IMAGINED, would have been more puritan about one of the biggest events to be held in the city. After all, the raw drama of the traditional sports on offer at the 2024 Olympics promises to be scintillating enough. But the city's Olympics organising committee wants to move with the times by turning a global cultural phenomenon from decades ago into an Olympic event. In 2024, if the International Olympics Committee approves the city's recommendations, get ready for "breaking battles".

To be fair, break dancing may be old but it isn't dated. Like Bruce Lee did with Kung Fu in the 1970s, Michael Jackson gliding, popping and moonwalking through the 1980s and beyond made the art a global phenomenon, all the way to small-town India and Prabhudeva, who couldn't croon like the king of pop but would certainly move like him. There is also an undeniable athleticism to "breaking", the best practitioners can make it seem part capoeira, part kung-fu and display a gymnast's flexibility. Yet, the question remains: Why has the Paris organising committee for the Olympics chosen to include a fluid, street art form in a rigid scoring structure that sport demands?

Breaking was, and continues to be, largely a sport (or art) of the marginalised — of immigrants and minorities that populate the poorer suburbs of wealthy cities. The cited reason for its proposed inclusion in the Olympics that it is among "sports that can be shared on social media, sports that are a means of getting around, forms of expression, lifestyles in their own right, sports that are practiced every day, in the street and elsewhere". Perhaps this is France trying to say to its youth, "we see you". But why, pray, must breaking become a sport to find expression? Ballet too requires almost superhuman flexibility and training. We are unlikely to have that art scored as a sport.

AFTER PULWAMA, A suffocation has gripped India. Not to put too fine a point on this, political opinion now operates under the disconcerting thought that Pakistan is in some significant sense, winning. The anger against Pakistan is justified. But what we are witnessing in India is more a paroxysm of self-loathing rather than righteous anger; a self-loathing that is looking not for solutions, but for someone to blame. The tragedy of Pulwama is not just that soldiers died; it is the sense that we are acting as if Pakistan has won.

Pakistan has won because it can help carry out such acts of violence with impunity. No international pressure, no diplomatic response, no surgical strikes seem adequate to the task of deterring this behaviour. It is no small consolation to remember that even the mightiest of powers flounder on the desolate shoals of terrorism; just look at the Americans in Afghanistan. There is no quick fix to the problem.

Pakistan has won because while we have the right, and arguably the duty, to retaliate, we have not built the capabilities. We can carry out visible operations to satiate public will. But the blunt truth is we have not built the kind of intelligence, covert operations, and technological capabilities for a genuine response to sub-conventional warfare. These capabilities are not conjured up at will. They require years of patient state building. These don't come easily to countries that cannot even get a basic defence contract right. It is nonsense to say that India or Indian liberals did not have a national security strategy. The thinking on this is quite sophisticated. It is truer to say that as always we did not put our money where our mouth is.

Pakistan has won because the radicalisation in Kashmir is real and the alienation pervasive. We can console ourselves with the fact that cowardly Pakistani generals who use proxies can never win an actual war. But it is also becoming clear that our chest thumping politicians can seldom win an actual peace. It is easy to vent out anger at Kashmiris; it is far more difficult to accept the truth that in the last five years we made

Pakistan has won because our public culture has become corrosive. The Pakistani state's silence in the face of violent proxies is being mirrored in our state's silence in the face of vigilantism. Pakistani has long been a state whose public culture has been tethered to an unreality about its future. It has so often cut off its nose to spite the face. In our phantasmagorical projections of power, in thoughtless diagnosis, in the rush to find someone to blame, India's public discourse is devolving into the same unreality.

the situation in Kashmir far worse. The fragile and uncertain gains in Kashmir of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh years have been squandered away in an illusory bravado.

Pakistan has won because our responses make India look more like Pakistan. There is a long-standing strain in Indian politics that has gained more currency recently. Structuring citizenship or political standing around religious identity was Pakistan's parlour game. But there are more politicians in India now who want to play the same game, who are besotted by the same vocabulary of blasphemy, religion-based identification, and parochialism. There are sections of the Indian Left, whose response to nationalism is to say that the poisons of smaller identities can be an antidote to the larger poison of vicious nationalism. We are creating a culture where each life is reduced to, and completely foretold in, its identity. Now, apparently, even soldiers are reduced entirely to their caste. No wonder it is so easy to stereotype, attribute collective guilt and seek collective retribution and conjure up divisions. Pakistan was born in and is scarred by an identity fetish. Instead of embracing freedom, we also want to measure up to that fetish.

Pakistan has won because in the war we are alone. Of course, we have to artfully use any country that will listen to us. It is even more important to keep Pakistan's friends nearer to us than its enemies. But the blunt truth is that we look in vain for geopolitics to help us. The world has its own interests in propping up the India-Pakistan divide. And which external power can even understand, let alone heal, the psychological complexes that fuel this irrational war?

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someone to blame, India's public discourse is devolving into the same unreality. It may be true that a vast majority of people still carry their heads with a sense of balance and proportion. But there is no denying the fact that those are not the people who are empowered: Amit Shah and Tathagata Roy are the empowered faces of India.

So the self-loathing in the aftermath of Pulwama is not just about righteous anger against Pakistan. It is about the deep suffocation at the realisation that we have let Pakistan win. Sure, there will be some retaliatory action. But even if successful, we know that is not a victory. In 1971, we won the war but lost the peace. Sure, there will international support for India. But it will at best redirect Pakistan's efforts, not finish them off. Sure, India has more moral capital than Pakistan. But we have too many politicians willing to dissipate that capital. Sure, India has been far too patient with Pakistan. But India's grievous sin is more that it has not been impatient about building its own capabilities.

The net result is an anger that is self-destructively turning inward. The Right has turned on Kashmiris, Muslims, journalists and other assorted "anti-nationals", because it cannot accept the self-defeating nature of its own ideology and interventions. It has been caught in the lie that a chest-thumping Modi can do better than a vacillating Nehru. The Left has always laboured under the anxiety of whether its positions were principled or simply a rationalisation of weakness. Either way India feels trapped.

But the truth is defeating Pakistan is not about defeating the Pakistani state. They will inflict losses on us. But the Pakistani state can equally be trusted to harm Pakistan. The truth is that defeating Pakistan is about defeating a state of mind called Pakistan. The disconcerting truth after Pulwama is the state of mind called Pakistan seems to have made inroads into us than the state of Pakistan itself. Pakistan has won.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Ashoka University. Views are personal

SUO MOTU SABOTAGE

How judicial activism has aggravated the backlog of cases in Pakistan's courts



KHALED AHMED

THE CHIEF JUSTICE of the Supreme Court of Pakistan Justice Saqib Nisar, who retired on January 17, must go down as the most "activist" judge in the country's history. He leaned on Article 184(3) of the Constitution on "fundamental rights" to barge into any image-enhancing case, raiding hospitals while neglecting his own domain where 1.9 million cases languished "in pendency".

Justice Nisar was so aggressive — he got the Punjab chief minister to apologise in court for incorrectly transferring a police officer — people thought he was "put on the job" by the most powerful institution of the country, the army. Earlier, Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry had covered himself with *suo motu* glory and was mentioned in the *Guinness Book* for initiating 6,000 such cases while backlogs accumulated — Rasheed Rizvi, a retired judge of the Sindh High Court, said on television that Justice Nisar actually beat Justice Chaudhry's *Guinness Book* record.

After Justice Nisar started interfering in the executive and addressing "the people" directly on TV and launching fund-raising campaigns, he started looking funny. Some judges reacted, one went to his hometown Peshawar after retirement and told the lawyers there that what was happening in Pakistan was not normal judicial process. Another judge, who was retiring, refused to attend the farewell dinner arranged by the

court but no one read the message. Then the bombshell came from the Islamabad High Court.

On July 21, 2018, Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui told the Islamabad bar that the army was dictating terms to the judiciary and that the current activism was nothing but a kind of "indirect" conduct of justice. He told the lawyers: "The ISI had approached Islamabad Chief Justice Muhammad Anwar Khan Kasi and said: We don't want Nawaz Sharif and his daughter to be allowed to come out of the prison until the July 25 elections. Do not include Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui on the bench hearing Sharif's appeals." Siddiqui stated in public that both the high and supreme courts were taking orders from the army. Needless to say, he was quickly dismissed from service through the Supreme Judicial Council.

The highly-regarded Justice Faez Isa, sitting on a Supreme Court bench with his boss, objected to the overly "activist" nature of the case they were hearing. Chief Justice Nisar lost his cool, walked out of the bench, and announced its "re-composition" by removing Justice Isa from it. Silent while this was happening, the other judge on the bench, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, declared in writing that the chief justice was wrong in breaking the bench in mid-hearing.

A "populist" judge often becomes popular. People loved Justice Nisar for breaking

the red tape and reaching down to them like the Caliphs of Baghdad in the heyday of Islam. *Herald* magazine chose him as Person of the Year in 2018. "Justice Nisar frequently raided hospitals, not just to check the quality of the medical care they provide but also to see how some under-trial politicians were being kept there. He was enraged to find them living in luxury. He also hauled mineral water companies to court, telling them to pay for the water they were extracting from the ground. His single most significant initiative, however, has been his untiring championing of the construction of at least two large dams in the country. He has appeared on television, addressed public seminars and travelled as far as England to collect funds for them." He needed Rs 1,450 billion for the dams but collected only Rs 9.1 billion. In October 2018, the conduct of the chief justice became so annoying that The Women's Action Forum filed a petition against him at the Supreme Judicial Council.

Justice Saqib Nisar has retired. Let's hope he was the last of the *suo motu* tribe. His successor, Justice Asif Saeed Khosa has already announced during the farewell session for the outgoing chief justice that he would abstain from his *suo motu* precedent.

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FEBRUARY 23, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



KASHMIR UNREST
THE HOME Minister, H M Patel, ruled out Central intervention in Jammu and Kashmir, and called upon the All Party Action Committee, agitating for rectification of regional imbalances in the State, to call off its agitation to pave the way for a peaceful settlement. The only way the Centre would intervene, Patel told Karan Singh (Cong), who had demanded Central action to bring peace to strife-torn Jammu was to use its good offices to see that the problem was sorted out. For this, however, both the Action Committee and the Government would have to exercise restraint, he said. Patel was replying to a short duration discussion in the Lok Sabha on the

"serious situation that has developed in Jammu and Kashmir as a result of continued regional imbalances and repression".

INDIA WITH VIETNAM
LABELLING CHINA AN aggressor, the External Affairs Minister, A B Vajpayee, today called upon the super powers to pressurise China into withdrawing its forces from Vietnam. "The aggressor cannot be allowed to enjoy the fruits of aggression," he declared in a ringing indictment of the Chinese attack on Vietnam, at the end of a three-and-a-half-hour debate in the Lok Sabha. Coming as it did on the last day of his China visit, the attack, Vajpayee said, has caused a "setback" to

the process of normalising relations with Peking. "Gone are the days of punitive expeditions and gunboat diplomacy," he said.

SOVIETS KNEW IT
THE SOVIET UNION had informed India that the Chinese would attack Vietnam nearly two weeks before A B Vajpayee went to Peking. But New Delhi did not take this information seriously. Even though Vajpayee denied it in the Rajya Sabha that he had any such information, it was apparent that India had some inkling of it when Vajpayee said he had discussed with Morarji Desai before going to China what he should do in case China attacked Vietnam.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“China won't be a geopolitical player in the Middle East. It has no enemies and can cooperate with all countries in the region. China's increasing influence in the Middle East comes from pure friendly cooperation.” —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

2019 alliance math — road to nowhere

Mahagathbandhan may not work in 2019 due to internal contradictions. The alliance's problem is that the Congress is a natural enemy of important regional parties



C R Sasikumar

THEY SAY THAT a week is a long time in politics, so what might a month be? In January, opinion polls were sanguine, and unanimous, about a hung Parliament. The range of seats, regardless of the polling organisation, was 80-120 seats for the Congress and 180-220 for the BJP. If one took the central tendency, then the Congress with 100 seats was a better bet as the lead party in the next government. A month or so later, while no new opinion polls have appeared, the mood has gradually shifted towards the BJP/NDA. Pulwama has happened, and the government response might affect the final outcome. We don't know. What we do know, post the budget presentation, is that the odds have shifted ever so marginally in the BJP's favour. The shifting odds have to do with a historical contradiction — the Congress party is a natural enemy of several important regional parties.”

Analysis suggests that a large part of the shift in the BJP's fortunes are due to cracks within the Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance). It appears that the fight is not between the alliance and the BJP — but between the alliance members themselves. For the Mahagathbandhan, it might very well be the case “we have seen the enemy and it is us”. This article is not a forecast of what will happen — it is just a documentation of what history suggests might happen. Forecasting elections in the best of times is a minefield where even angels fear to tread; three months before, a forecast without an opinion poll is suicidal for a mere mortal. I am not ready to commit forecast hara-kiri just yet.

There are four important facts surrounding this election, facts suggesting that the grand alliance may have a tougher fight than envisioned by the opinion polls in January.

Fact 1: There are only two national parties — the BJP and Congress. The choice for any political party is to either go alone, or go with an alliance. The option of “home alone” is no longer present for most regional parties. The last hold-out, Tamil Nadu, will, for the first time, have two alliances fighting each other — AIADMK-BJP and DMK-INC.

Fact 2: The BJP, in only its second electoral foray in 1989 obtained a national voteshare of 11.5 per cent and 86 seats in Parliament, a number nearly twice as much as the 44 seats obtained by the Congress in 2014. The rise of BJP and the fall of the Congress is best exemplified by this simple statistic — the BJP in its second election gained twice as many seats as the Congress did in its 16th election and 130 years of existence. Result: The BJP a rising party; Congress a declining national party, and the decline is on a slippery slope. More than an alliance — a large swing in its favour — maybe needed to bolster its (and the alliance's) fortunes.

Fact 3: The Congress voteshare has declined by 20 percentage points (ppt) and the BJP's has increased by nearly exactly the same amount since 1989 — the year which first signalled the impending decline of the grand old party. The Congress vote share in 1989 and

2014 — 39.5 per cent and 19.1 per cent, respectively; The BJP vote share 11.4 and 31 per cent.

Fact 4: The BJP has very few allies as partners, and in three states — Bihar, Maharashtra, and Punjab — the alliance is not a matter of convenience, but rather a matter of history. To be sure, Bihar's popular chief minister, Nitish Kumar, broke from the BJP in 2013, (after being part of the NDA for over a decade) fought and won the 2015 state battle against Modi, and in a stunning about face, re-joined the Modi-led NDA alliance in June 2018. This makes the task for the anti-BJP alliance that much more difficult.

We present several examples of electoral math, and alliance failures, below. The key point to note is that the alliance arithmetic is heavily dependent on the existing voteshares being 5-10 ppt higher than the existing NDA/BJP share. A large swing in the favour of the alliance will help — for the moment the analysis is presented without any swing in favour of the NDA or UPA.

UP: In 2014, the BJP vote share was 42.3 per cent. The BSP and SP together obtained 41.8 per cent and the Congress, 7.5 per cent. A simple three-party alliance would mean a no-contest — 49.3 per cent for the Mahagathbandhan: An average margin of 7 per cent in a two-party contest is a landslide, that is, with the Congress, alliance wins.

Why did Mayawati-Akhiresh ruin Congress's dream by announcing that they would allot only two out of the 80 seats to the Congress? Without the Congress, the alliance starts with a 0.5 per cent disadvantage (41.8 per cent vs 42.3 per cent). A likely explanation is that more of the Congress vote is considered floating, and likely to gravitate to the BJP. The BSP has the highest glue; the SP somewhat less glue (stickiness of voters).

The 2014 election shows the Congress voteshare and rank was low. Number one and number two positions in UP constituencies was as follows: INC (2,6), SP (5, 31) and BSP (0,34). An objective calculation would allow the Congress to only contest eight seats in UP (adding up one and two). The SP-BSP combine knew that just eight seats would not be agreeable to the once-almighty Congress.

West Bengal: Mamata Banerjee, on her own, obtained 39 per cent of the vote in 2014 and 44.9 per cent in the 2016 assembly election. She does not benefit from an alliance with either the CPM or INC — it is them who

she vanquished in both state and parliamentary elections. The gap between her and INC+ votes is about 10 percentage points. This is the alliance (read Congress's) dilemma — if it really wanted Modi to lose, then Congress had to be a very junior partner in West Bengal. That the Congress party was (is) not willing to do.

Bihar: The one outstanding success of an alliance was in the 2015 Bihar assembly election — and it is this memory that likely provoked the Mahagathbandhan dream. It is important to understand why the Bihar alliance worked. It was because the joint opposition voteshare was a very large 16 percentage points higher than that of the BJP. Hence, even if some of the glue wore off, the alliance would still win. In 2014, BJP won 22 seats and the three-party opposition of JDU, RJD, and INC fighting separately won eight seats. The vote shares: BJP 29.4 per cent, and the other three 44.3 per cent. One year later, in the assembly election, BJP vote share declined by 5 per cent, and the alliance share declined by 2.5 per cent. Voteshare comparison: BJP 24.4 per cent, alliance 41.8 per cent. It was a no contest. The alliance worked because of the big gap in voteshares — BJP obtained 53 seats and the combined alliance 178 seats.

The fact is that the Mahagathbandhan is not quite the idea euphorically envisioned in January — a simple reality check suggests inherent contradictions. The Modi opposition is united because of political expediency — and politics requires that they fight each other, not the BJP.

How can there be an effective alliance with those one is in competition with? When that happens in the marketplace, one actor emerges supreme. The Mahagathbandhan constituents see that as a real danger with the Congress. When the national partner is big, and you are small, it is a positive sum game — both parties gain seats. But if the national partner is small and you are big (at a state level) it is a zero-sum game — the smaller party will lose.

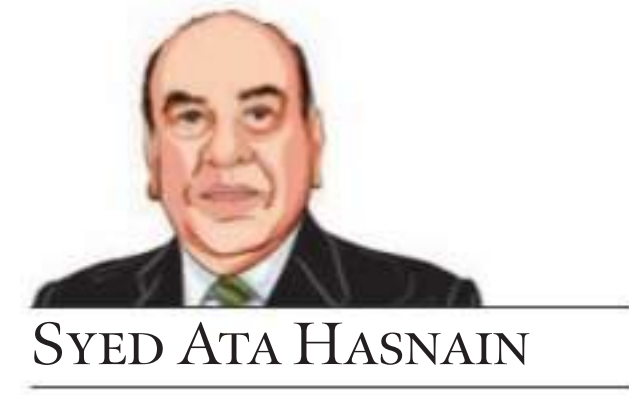
**The analysis presented is based on my book on the electoral economy of India, *Citizen Raj: Indian Elections 1952-2019*. Westland-Amazon, forthcoming April 2019

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The Mahagathbandhan is not quite the idea euphorically envisioned in January. A simple reality check suggests inherent contradictions. The Modi opposition is united because of political expediency — and politics requires that they fight each other, not the BJP. How can there be an effective alliance with those one is in competition with? When that happens in the marketplace, one actor emerges supreme. The Mahagathbandhan constituents see that as a real danger with the Congress.

Best served cold

By announcing and discussing retribution for Pulwama, the element of surprise is lost. It is patient and planned operations that will hobble Pakistan



THE PULWAMA INCIDENT has created a national outrage even greater than Mumbai 26/11. That is because in the last 10 years, social media has developed to such an extent that information earlier heard on the radio, read in newspapers or watched on television by choice is now absorbed almost by compulsion when smartphones buzz. Besides, the casualties of 26/11, although four times greater than Pulwama, were centred on Mumbai while the 40 CRPF bravehearts came from every nook and corner of India. Their last rites were conducted in an environment of passion, promising retribution. Earlier, every citizen had an opinion but he kept it to himself or discussed it in evening gatherings with friends and associates. There was little scope for rumour-mongering. Today, every stranger on social media is called “friend” and discussions go out of control with hundreds of different perceptions being exchanged between strangers. This is mostly considered the national mood and it changes by the minute based upon fresh bouts of fake news or flawed and ill-informed perceptions.

The national mood demands retribution, and rightly so. In 1977, Zia-ul-Haq came to power in Pakistan, overthrowing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Almost immediately, he was quietly planning retribution against India for the disaster that had struck Pakistan in 1971 and humiliated it with 93,000 prisoners falling into India's hands. However, Zia was smart — his perceived retribution was all about bleeding India, knowing fully well that on the conventional battlefield he could never better it. He aimed at exploiting India's faultlines, which he perceived as its major weakness.

Strangers who make up public opinion on social media today are also self-perceived strategic experts forcing the government's hand and limiting its options. Emerging from this segment is the voice that there is no purpose served by maintaining an army of 1.3 million if it cannot go to all-out war when the nation is hit below the belt by its adversary. Strategic options from the spectrum of hybrid war, the war of today with multiple tools, rarely appeal to this segment because the optics are absent.

So when the media, the array of pseudo-analysts, strangers on social media and many other self-styled strategic experts speak and exchange messages, the projection to the adversary is clear — we are coming to get you and we will come by the frontal approach, the attritional approach so to say. The power to manoeuvre, to placing yourself in a position of advantage and securing your rear and flanks isn't a part of the strategy this segment speaks of. That is why when I was questioned on India's military options on television discussion, and I explained the necessity of first securing a “firm base”, I was urged to get on with the “actual” military options —

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the supposed romantic ones involving missiles and strikes. The power of being smart and conducting something which will pay dividends out of proportion to the effort and potential response rarely occurs to people.

When a nation virtually announces that it is going to do something in reprisal it compromises one of the basic principles of war — surprise. Either it must have the focus and prior contingency planning in place to respond within the shortest possible window to square the match or it should work quietly with no time compulsions but with a memory that does not allow time to dilute the commitment towards retribution. In the current case, Pakistan probably appreciated the time window and continues to believe that the passage of time will blunt India's public anger and lead to a climb-down. For a nation that is surviving on financial borrowing and has just enough forex reserves to pay for a month's imports, it is diffused, long-term military engagement which will force it to its knees. Covert and invisible operations such as launched by Russia in Ukraine have left the US and the West hopping mad — that is the strategy to study and adapt. However, none of that will pay electoral dividends or give high-level optics, only a smart victory.

A major tactical necessity for success in offensive operations is taught at every military school: It's called “firm base”. Operations are always conducted firm base to firm base. Upgrade that to the national strategic level and the firm base will give us three immediate connotations. First, that a peripheral political consensus will fetch no dividends — it will crack in the next few days. There has to be wholehearted political cooperation as between then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the early Nineties. Second, if the social cohesion within Indian society is fractured, any victory at the border or anywhere else in the military realm is going to be meaningless. Third, leave the national social cohesion aside, if the Kashmiris without any labels attached to them are harmed, publicly vilified and not allowed the benefits of India's many facilities then the army is going to be fighting at the border while looking over its shoulder. In 1965 and 1971, the army was never uncomfortable about rear-area security. Today, it will need to consider deployment of equal resources for rear area security as for the frontline. When political consensus, national social cohesion and rear areas of J&K are all stable, a strategic firm base will be established, a sure way of ensuring victory.

There is no need to discuss India's potential air-strike options, missile targets or Pakistani bases for fresh surgical strikes. The leadership has given the armed forces the freedom to decide, plan and operate — that is precisely the need. However, with the media assisting in telling the adversary that we are coming tomorrow or the day after, and at which locations, it isn't helping the national cause. All it needs to do is to give the armed forces a “firm base”.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TIGHTROPE POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘No hyphenation’ (IE, February 22). During Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's (MbS) visit to New Delhi, there was some disappointment. In the joint statement released by India and Saudi Arabia, there was no mention of Pakistan-based Jaish e Mohammad's role in the Pulwama terror attack. In Islamabad, MbS had endorsed Pakistan's efforts at dialogue with India, while in India he counselled against the politicisation of the UN regime for designating terrorists. In the latter statement there is an implicit criticism of India's efforts to get Jaish chief Masood Azhar sanctioned as a global terrorist. For Saudi Arabia, it was a business trip, and the Saudi Crown Prince made that very clear by desisting from commenting on the strained relations between India and Pakistan.

Lal Singh, Amritsar

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘No hyphenation’ (IE, February 22). It is indeed wrong to hyphenate Saudi Arabia's independent relations with two bitter enemies — Pakistan and India. In the international scenario, all countries act according to their self-interest. For example, America is friendly with both Israel and the Arab countries. Similarly, Pakistan, too, never hyphenates its relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran, which are bitter rivals. New Delhi must also learn to be mature enough to act in pursuit of our own interests. We must not act as we did in the past, when we ignored Israel to express solidarity with the Arabs and the US to remain friendly

The writer is a New Delhi-based defence and security analyst

LETTER OF THE WEEK

YOUTH IS KEY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Punishing Jaish’ (IE, February 16). While the nation mourns and while we take every diplomatic recourse to demonstrate our anger, we must not be blind to the core issue in Kashmir. Why are the educated, well-off youth of Kashmir getting drawn to terror? Kashmir needs to be nursed back to health with a multi pronged strategy.

Sangeeta Kampani, Delhi

with the communist powers.
RC Goyal, Ambala Cantt

PATH POST-PULWAMA

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Looking beyond Pulwama’ (IE, February 22). Now, when despite intelligence reports we failed to protect our soldiers, we need to be more prepared than ever going forward. Providing the option of air travel to the forces is a good initiative, but it is by no means enough. Tools suggested by the writer — CCTVs, drones, sniffer dogs, patrolling along with stringent SOPs and sanitisation of the route with no deviation at all — should go a long way in ensuring the safety of our soldiers.

Bal Govind, Noida

Emergency chronicles

Multiple narratives exist for why Indira Gandhi lifted the Emergency



IN HIS ARTICLE titled ‘Why did Indira Gandhi call off the Emergency?’ (IE, February 08), Fali S Nariman speculated that the then US president, Jimmy Carter, had put pressure on Indira Gandhi to call off the Emergency and hold elections in March 1977. However, Nariman went on to say that he could not find any documents to substantiate his “recollections”.

Carter was sworn in as US president on January 20, 1977. And, it was two days earlier, on January 18, that Indira Gandhi addressed the nation on All India Radio, calling for elections. As president-elect, Carter would not have written on such a sensitive topic to a world leader, before he was sworn in.

As far back as early November, in 1976, Indira Gandhi had told her principal secretary, PND Dhar, and my late father H Y Sharada Prasad, who was her information advisor, in strict confidence: “I am going to call off the Emergency and hold elections. I know that I will lose, but this is something which I absolutely have to do. The intelligence agencies will tell me what they think I want to hear. But I know that I am going to lose, even though the IB is saying that I will win 330 seats.” Neither of them ever got to know the reasons behind her decision. Although, N K Seshan, Dhar, and my father got the impres-

sion that, from about September 1976 onwards, Indira Gandhi was beginning to get disillusioned with the Emergency, and was implementing measures to re-take power away from her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi. She was particularly perturbed by a rash interview which Sanjay Gandhi gave to a newspaper, in which he had harshly criticised the Soviet Union and the Indian communist parties. She had also received inputs from intelligence agencies that the CIA had penetrated Sanjay's inner circle.

In the March 2006 issue of the magazine *Realpolitik*, my father wrote: “The Emergency can be described as Indira Gandhi's coup against her own prime ministership. Her Secretariat, the Home Ministry, the Cabinet, and indeed her government as a whole, were deprived of their effective power, and the prime minister herself was made a prisoner of the Palace Guards...”

Indira Gandhi did not let Sanjay Gandhi get even the slightest inkling of her intention to hold elections. In fact, Sanjay Gandhi first got to know about the elections from her radio broadcast on January 18, 1977, and he had an angry showdown with her. On February 2, 1977, when Jagjivan Ram and Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna defected, she told my fa-

ther, “I am sure to lose the elections. Now that Bahuguna has abandoned me, I will be wiped out in Uttar Pradesh.” But in a cryptic remark, she also said that, “It will be a relief if I lose, an absolute relief”.

In recent years, the RSS has been trying to portray that it was its strong grass roots opposition which led to the defeat of Indira Gandhi. But the truth is quite different. Its then sarsangchalak, Balasaheb Deoras, had issued numerous statements supporting Sanjay Gandhi's Five-Point Programme. In November 1976, over 30 leaders of the RSS, led by Madhavrao Muley, Dattopant Thengadi and Moropant Pingle, wrote to Indira Gandhi, promising support to the Emergency if all the RSS workers were released from prison. The RSS's abjectly cringe-inducing letter of surrender was processed by my father.

This surrender by the RSS has been confirmed by Subramanian Swamy too. He wrote in *The Hindu* in 2000, on the 25th anniversary of the Emergency: “...A tearful Muley told me in early November 1976 that I had better escape abroad again since the RSS had finalised the document of surrender to be signed in end January of 1977, and that on Mr. Vajpayee's insistence I would be sacrificed to appease an irate Indira and a fulminating

Sanjay whose names I had successfully blackened abroad by my campaign. I asked him about the struggle, and he said that in the country everyone had become reconciled to the 42nd Amendment, and democracy as we had known it was over. Democracy was over for the RSS but not for all others. A few weeks later general elections to the Lok Sabha were declared. No one quite understood then what had made Indira Gandhi do that. But as a consequence, the RSS, luckily, did not need to sign the document of surrender.”

It could be that Indira Gandhi lifted the Emergency because she was more the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru than the mother of Sanjay Gandhi. However, Jayaprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai had miscalculated badly when they relied on her being Nehru's daughter. After JP's speech at Ramliila Maidan in June 1975, when he had called on the army and police to not obey orders, Biju Patnaik had warned JP: “Now that you have pushed her into a corner, she will retaliate harshly.” But both JP and Desai replied saying: “No, Nehru's daughter will never ever impose a police state.”