

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Lessons from a crisis

We must face up to intelligence failures, lack of civil-military coordination, poor statecraft of the past



ARUN PRAKASH

A NEW CONVERSATION

Diplomatic opening in Abu Dhabi has cleared ground for more intensive and sustained political engagement with Islamic world

BACK IN 1969, India had to endure the diplomatic humiliation of being "disinvited" from the founding session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, thanks to intense Pakistani lobbying. Fifty years later, India had the privilege of addressing the opening session of the OIC foreign ministers' gathering in the UAE, and it was Pakistan's turn to sulk. The foreign minister of Pakistan, Shah Mohammed Qureshi, who objected to the UAE invitation to India, chose to stay out of the room when the external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, was speaking. The inability of Pakistan to prevent India from joining the meeting underlines the big change in India's standing in the Muslim world. It also points to the relative decline of Pakistan's influence in the Middle East. While religion remains the organising principle of the OIC, all member states pursue their own national interests with little regard to faith. The growing importance of economic partnership with India and the shared interests in combating the destabilising forces of religious extremism have generated new warmth for Delhi. Pakistan is no longer in a position to veto India's possibilities in the Islamic world.

Swaraj chose not to directly criticise Pakistan by name, but underlined the need to press Islamabad to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism on its soil. She acknowledged that the challenge of terrorism can't be fought through military means alone and "must be won through the strengths of our values, and the real message of religions" in favour of peace and harmony. She reminded the OIC of India's traditional good relations with most member states. She specially referred to the dramatic transformation in India's relations with the Gulf region during the last few years. "It is an indispensable strategic and security partnership, and a natural economic partnership, of immense value, to our nations, and for our shared region." She specially thanked the United Arab Emirates, the host of the ministerial, for inviting India to address the gathering and Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh for lending support.

India's first ever participation in an OIC gathering does not mean the Islamic countries have decided to discard Pakistan in favour of India. As in other international forums, it's not a zero-sum-game between India and Pakistan. A furious Pakistan appears to have got the OIC to endorse its criticism of India's Kashmir policies. Delhi should not be detained by these routine resolutions that different member states bring to the OIC. What really matters is the political decision by the UAE and Saudi Arabia to press Pakistan to release the Indian Air Force pilot, Abhinandan Varthaman, who was downed in the aerial combat with the Pakistani Air Force last week. Even more important is the fact that the diplomatic opening in Abu Dhabi has cleared the ground for a more intensive and sustained political engagement with the global Islamic collective. The next step for India is to begin a quiet campaign for observer status at the OIC.

TOWARDS DIGNITY

Other states should take a leaf out of Delhi's use of technology to end manual scavenging, instead of living in denial

THE INTRODUCTION OF a fleet of 200 machine-equipped trucks is unlikely to bring the scourge of manual scavenging in Delhi to an immediate end. Even then, Delhi's AAP government deserves to be applauded for deploying technology in an effort to curb this dehumanising practice that has survived three changes in the law in the past 25 years. The sewer-cleaning machines that were launched last week have been designed to meet the demands of the small lanes in the capital's slums and urban villages. Each unit has a tank to spray water and a sludge compartment to collect the silt cleaned up by the machine — this sludge was usually left along the sewer during manual cleaning. The machines will be given to manual scavengers, who will be trained to operate them.

The sanitation workers, who will be given the new machines, were identified by a Delhi government survey last year. But like most parts of the country, Delhi lacks an accurate count of the people engaged in manual scavenging. The Delhi government has acknowledged that its enumeration does not depict the extent of the problem in the capital. Other states, however, have not been that sensitive. For example, during a survey last year by the Centre, the governments of Haryana, Bihar and Telangana did not report even a single manual scavenger. But the task force conducting the survey — it comprised members from the ministries of social justice, rural development, drinking water and sanitation, and housing and urban affairs and the National Safai Karamchari Finance and Development Corporation — found that there were 1,221 manual scavengers in Bihar, Haryana had 846 such workers and 288 people in Telangana were engaged in this dehumanising practice.

The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, allows the use of manual labour to clean sewage if the employer provides safety gear. But, in practice, this provision is more flouted than followed. According to the social justice ministry's records, one person dies every five days while cleaning sewers — unofficial reports indicate that the figure could be much higher. Municipal corporations and local bodies very often outsource the sewer cleaning tasks to private contractors, who do not maintain proper rolls of workers. In case after case of sanitation workers being asphyxiated to death while working toxic sludge pools in different parts of the country, these contractors have denied any association with the deceased. The Delhi government's move to use machines is a first step towards according dignity and respect to sewer workers. It should be emulated in other parts of the country. However, technology's emancipatory powers will be realised at their fullest only when the states stop living in denial about manual scavenging.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



THE UNTHINKABLE HAS happened. For the first time ever, the air forces of two nuclear-armed neighbours, India and Pakistan, have crossed national boundaries and carried out kinetic attacks on each other's soil. Aerial combat has also resulted in casualties and losses on both sides.

Although an inevitable sequel to the February 14 Pulwama car-bomb attack by the Pakistan-based Jaish-e Mohammad (JeM), India's air-strike inside Pakistan did carry the risk of tit-for-tat hostilities spiralling into a full-scale war with nuclear connotations. This is not an alarmist view because the current environment, on both sides of the India-Pakistan border, remains fraught for two reasons.

Pakistan has been turned into a neurotic theological state by the military and its cohort of jihadi proxies. Pakistan's shadowy "deep state" comprising the army and its Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) directorate, has also kept alive the myth of an ever-present "existential threat" from "Hindu India". This mythology is vital for the survival of the "deep state" and its jihadi allies. The Pakistan Prime Minister, beholden to the army for his survival, has been blowing hot and cold in the past few days and his "peace overtures" must be treated with caution.

On our side, the Pulwama attack was the last straw for the long-suffering Indian public. The loss of 40 CRPF jawans served to focus the deep anguish and humiliation that Indians have endured over the decades from Pakistan-inspired insurgencies and Pakistan-initiated terror strikes. There was unanimity across India that a strong message needed to be sent to the Pakistani instigators and abettors of jihadi terror.

The Pulwama car-bombing, occurring in the run-up to India's 17th general election, has added a bitter edge of xenophobia and religious bigotry to an already acrimonious election campaign. Extreme caution is called for to ensure that India's vital national interests are not subsumed by politically-motivated and competitive machismo masquerading as patriotism. Hyper-nationalism at the hustings and war-mongering in TV studios could not only damage India's delicate social fabric but also drive the nation into an unwanted

conflict.

Here it must be pointed out that phrases such as "revenge", "retribution" and "martyrdom" are not part of our military's lexicon and must not be foisted on the armed forces. At the same time, there is a dire need for India's national security establishment to learn how to employ India's military as an instrument of state policy by acquiring an understanding of concepts like "deterrence", "compellence" and "coercion" for attaining political aims.

In this context, we must face up to the intelligence failures, lack of civil-military coordination and poor state-craft on India's part that have allowed the ISI to torment this nation for many decades. The litany of assaults on India's sovereignty and citizenry is long but in every case, we have been caught unprepared and wanting in terms of a consistent policy and coherent response. Three instances in our recent past demand introspection because they point to a lack of resolve and even pusillanimity on the part of the Indian state.

In December 1999, Indian Airlines flight IC-814 was hijacked to Kandahar where the hijackers demanded the release of JeM terrorists. Most democracies have a declared policy of "no negotiations with terrorists" for the simple reason that negotiations give legitimacy to terrorists and are perceived as condoning violence. In the absence of such a policy, this hijacking saw the government caving in to public pressure and capitulating abjectly to the hijackers' demands. India has paid a dear price in lives for the release of Masood Azhar in Kandahar.

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terror assault on Mumbai, the nation was uplifted when a cabinet minister signalled the government's intentions: "All options are open to us." A day later, morale plummeted when after a cabinet meeting, the minister announced, "War is not an option." India had, once again, exercised "strategic restraint" gaining universal applause but allowing the instigators of the 26/11 outrage to go unpunished.

Against this backdrop, we must consider if India's timorous past postures and conduct have served to embolden its adversaries. From our unilateral undertaking of "no first use" of nuclear weapons (post-Pokhran II) to declarations that "war is not an option", have we conveyed an unintentional guarantee of immunity to those contemplating inimical actions against us? However, two resolute actions — the launching of cross-border commando raids in September 2016 and Wednesday's airstrikes on Pakistan-based terror hubs — have, at long last, demolished such delusions. Simultaneously, they have also shattered the myth of a "nuclear overhang", crafted by Pakistan, to deter a robust Indian response to cross-border terrorism.

No sane South Asian wants war and if Kashmir continues to remain a casus belli, we must undertake an agonising policy re-appraisal. While the army continues to guard J&K against external intrusions, India needs to evolve a long-term strategy, "civilian" in nature, to restore peace.

There are also other measures available to discourage neighbours from interfering. At the strategic level, we need to urgently revise and introduce a degree of ambiguity in India's nuclear doctrine. At the operational level, India must convey clarity and resolve by openly declaring: One, a "no negotiations" policy vis-a-vis terrorists and hijackers; two, its right to respond suitably to cross-border terrorist attacks at their source and three, that while the response may not be instant it will be certain.

In order to implement this policy, military units with suitable capabilities should be earmarked and kept in the requisite state of readiness at all times.

The writer is a former chief of the Indian navy



MUZAMIL YAQOOB AND BASIT ABUBAKR

SHADOWS IN THE VALLEY

Kashmir needs a robust education system, an honest conversation

AFTER THE gruesome attack on Indian forces on February 14 in Pulwama, everyone came forward to condemn the attack. However, there has been complete denial in influential quarters of another sort: The media and academia seem to gloss over the deeper conflicts and crises that played a role in bringing two nuclear armed neighbours to the brink — and could again.

The media's engagement with Pakistan touched new lows, post-Pulwama. At the same time, civil society exhibited disinterest in condemning the violence against Kashmiris in different parts of India.

The violence is another grim reminder of the othering of the people of Kashmir. The continuous war-mongering and the hate propaganda on TV has created an environment with serious implications for Kashmiris: The advisories for Kashmiri students at different varsities to not venture outside their hostels seem to confirm the climate of fear we are living in. Students were forced to cancel academic tours and conferences, affecting their careers, while traders were forced to shut their business and leave.

The Kashmir conflict has a direct bearing on the education sector in the state as the perilous condition compels thousands of students to leave their homes and study outside the state. The recent episode showcased the precariousness that pervades the life of a Kashmiri scholar, and it should now be enough to make a concerned civil soci-

ety focus on rebuilding the education sector in Kashmir, so that students aren't forced to cut short their careers if situations like the one we face today arise. All this while the central government failed to provide any measures to ensure safety against the violence that was inflicted on the students, in educational institutions in Dehradun for example. This has not only jeopardised the conditions of those who were evicted but also left the remaining Kashmiris vulnerable.

The ruling dispensation, known for its anti-minority rhetoric, began facing increasing discontent and stiff opposition in the recent past. A need was perhaps felt to divert attention from multiple controversies and disastrous policies of the government, as the general elections are around the corner, by targeting Kashmiris in the wake of Pulwama. A malevolent narrative around Kashmir and Kashmiris being the biggest threat to India's national security, is being promoted.

It is also a fact that in present-day India, bigotry is as rampant as racism is in America: It is a game of "us" versus "them", wherein the bodies of the other are treated as lesser bodies, just as blacks were in America. One can see how prejudices are deepened and disseminated every night on several news channels — the way the media referred to the black male as a "brute" and "thug" in the US, here, the other is re-

ferred to as a "terrorist" and "fundamentalist".

And it is over these lesser bodies that the muscular and jingoist nationalists want to reap electoral dividend while the Indian left-liberal keeps getting pushed on to the backfoot. Even experts on Kashmir can be seen today caving in to the climate of war mongering, as they advocate an armed war against another country, regardless of the terrible consequences.

The Indian government should take note of the fact that this targeting of Kashmiris furthers the alienation of an already disgruntled population, which will take a long time to reverse. It has undone whatever gains had been made in the years when violence had declined in the Valley. Not everything can be blamed on Pakistan and the Indian government should take appropriate steps to resolve the conflict as soon as possible.

The scrapping of Article 370 of the Constitution cannot be an answer to the escalating situation in Kashmir. It will only sharpen the anxieties of an insecure people. Nor can the "de-hyphenation of Ladakh and Jammu from Kashmir Valley" yield any fruitful results. Kashmir deserves a dialogical solution by taking on board all the stakeholders.

Yaqoob, 22, and Abubakr, 27, are students at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

MARCH 4, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

CEASEFIRE IN VIETNAM CHINA IS REPORTED to have decided on a ceasefire in its two-week-old border war with Vietnam after capturing Lang Son and other Vietnamese frontier cities. Thousands of casualties were claimed on both sides. Hanoi Radio said in its latest battle report, however, that Chinese troops reinforced with six infantry divisions and hundreds of tanks and artillery pieces were intercepted by the Vietnamese north of Lang Son and suffered heavy losses. Japan's Kyodo News service said the ceasefire decision was reported by a Chinese government official in Peking. The report said the official did not say when the ceasefire was to take place or when the

Chinese were to pull back their troops to the Chinese side of the 720 km-long border.

UP CABINET EXPANDS UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF minister, Banarsi Das, announced in Lucknow that he would appoint 14 more cabinet ministers. Talking to newsmen on his return from New Delhi where he had consultations with the central leaders, he said he would allocate portfolios to the new ministers soon. Das said the expansion of his ministry would be a "continued process". Asked if the former chief minister, Ram Naresh Yadav and the dissident leader, Raj Mangal Pandey would find berths in the state cabinet, the chief min-

ister replied, "maybe or maybe not. None will be excluded". The chief minister said that those whose primary loyalty to the Janata party was in doubt would be excluded: "Those who attend RSS shakhas would not be included in the team of ministers."

BHUTTO'S PETITION THE HEARING OF Z A Bhutto's review petition was resumed before the Pakistan Supreme Court after a gap of two days, according to Radio Pakistan. Yahya Bakhtiar, counsel for Bhutto, made further submissions seeking a review of the verdict of the court, rejecting Bhutto's appeal against the death sentence in the Kasuri murder case.





# 15 THE IDEAS PAGE

## No achhe din for the farmer

When it comes to agriculture growth, the NDA government compares poorly with its immediate predecessor. The next government must initiate structural reforms, set realistic targets



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH  
BY ASHOK GULATI AND RANJANA ROY

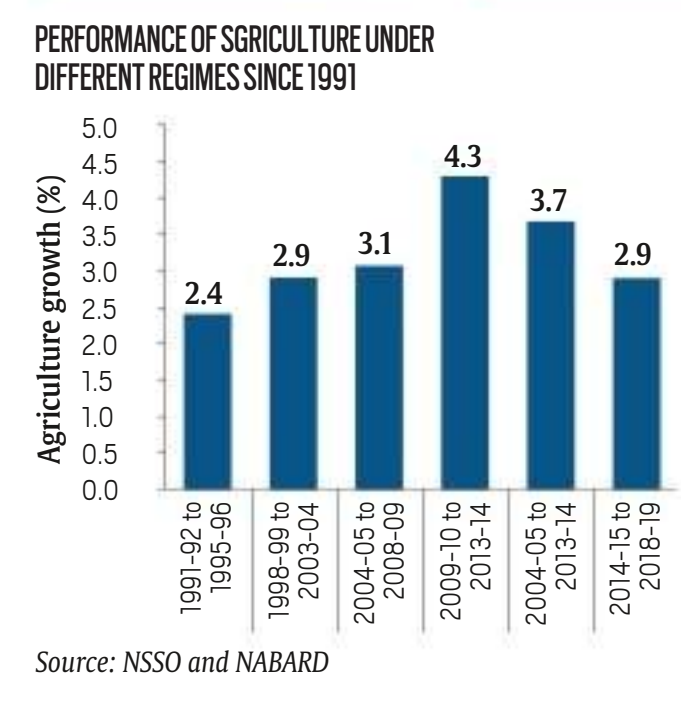
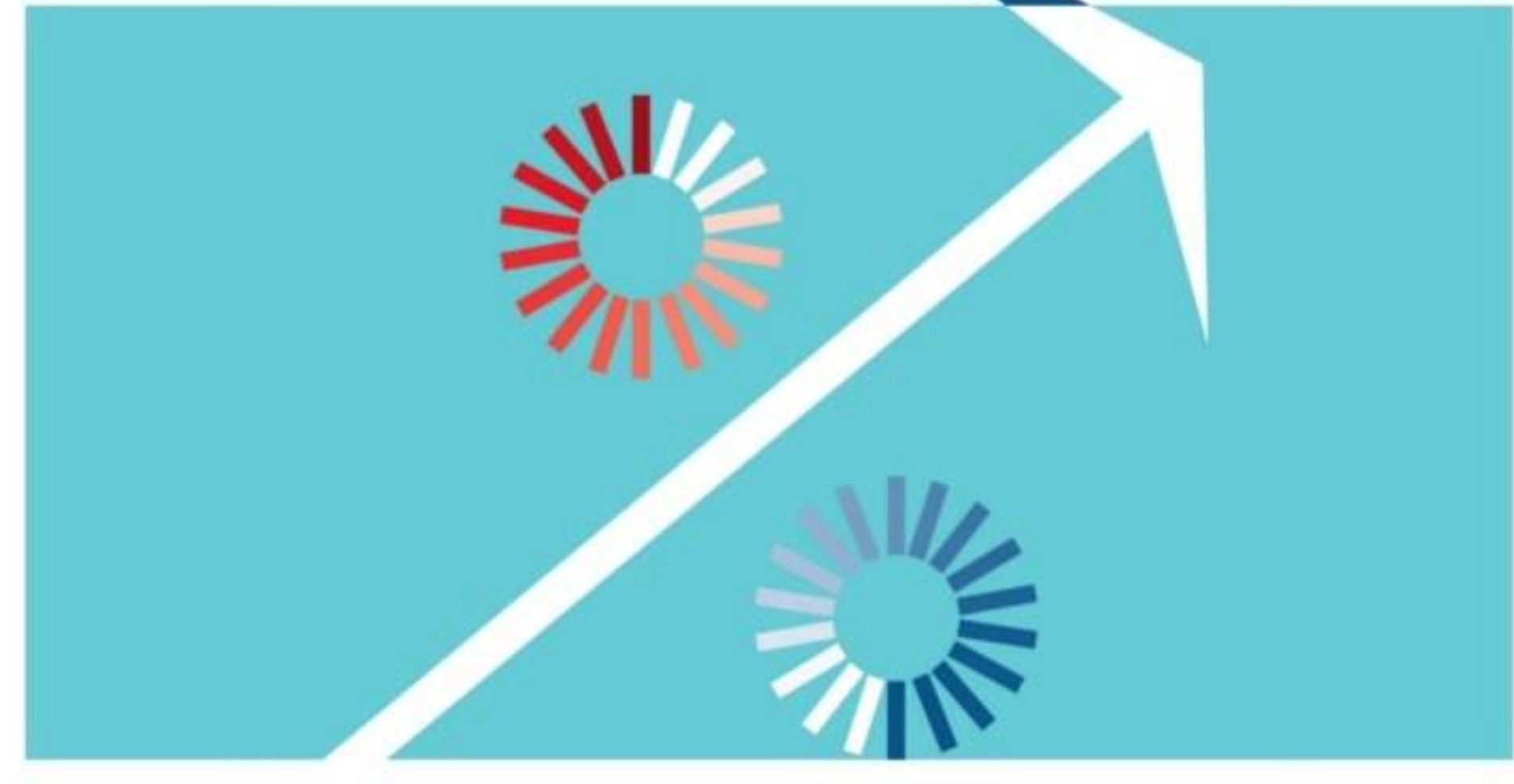
THE CENTRAL STATISTICS Office (CSO) has released the second advanced estimates of national income for 2018-19, along with the quarterly GDP estimates for Quarter 3 (Q3). The overall GDP for Q3 is down to 6.6 per cent and for 2018-19 as a whole, the GDP is expected to grow at 7 per cent, a notch lower than 7.2 per cent achieved in 2017-18.

Our concern, however, is with the performance in agriculture, which engages almost 47 per cent of the country's workforce. Its growth, therefore, has significant influence on poverty. The growth of Gross Value Added (GVA) at basic prices from the "agriculture, forestry and fishing" sector is expected to be 2.7 per cent in 2018-19 — as against 5 per cent in 2017-18. This is a massive drop of 46 per cent. The CSO clearly states that the GVA for this sector has been compiled using the Second Advanced Estimates of Production of Crops for 2018-19. However, in case of the livestock sector, the estimates are taken from production targets for milk, eggs, meat and wool. Generally, targets are most optimistic than what turns out to be the reality.

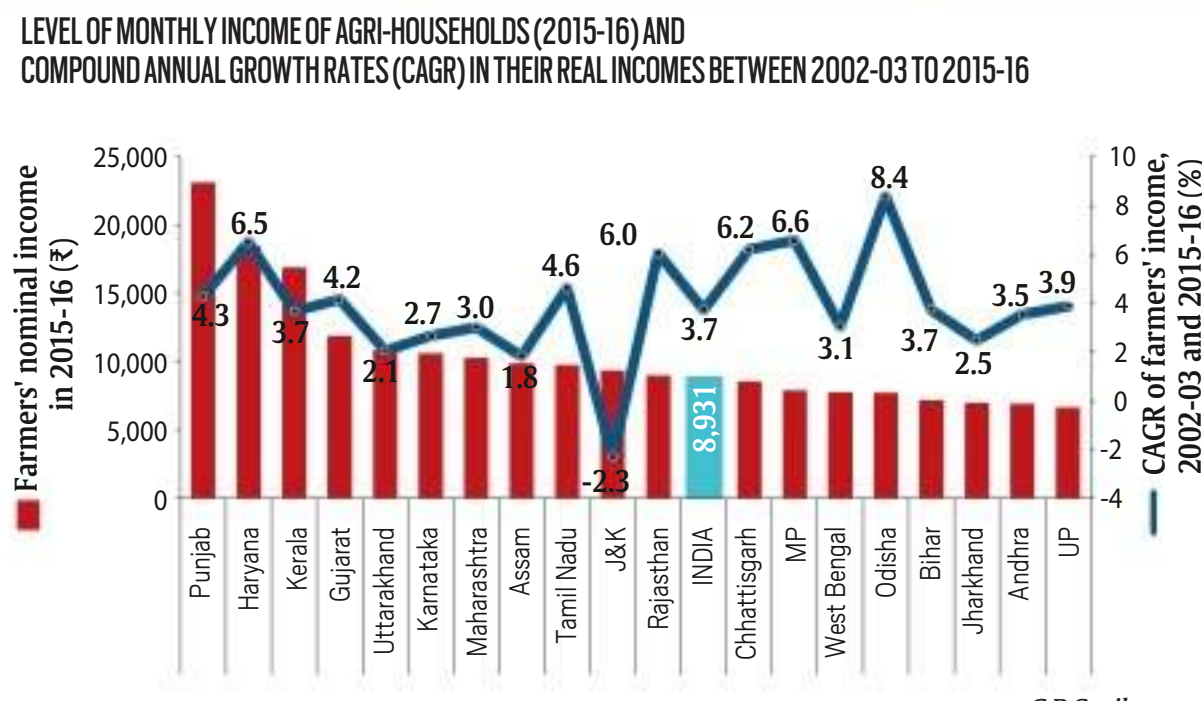
It is normally agreed that the year-on-year growth rates of agriculture fluctuate much more than the overall GDP growth rates, as almost 52 per cent of the country's cropped area is still dependent on the monsoon. A year-on-year comparison can be misleading. So, we look at the five-yearly performance in agriculture under the Narendra Modi government and compare it with earlier regimes — beginning with the Narasimha Rao government which ushered in economic reforms in 1991. We avoid the period between 1996 and 1998, when three prime ministers held office — Atal Bihari Vajpayee (first time), H D Deve Gowda and I K Gujral. But we take 1998-2003-04 (the NDA government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee), 2004-05 to 2008-09 (UPA-1), 2009-10 to 2013-14 (UPA-2) and 2014-15 to 2018-19 (the Modi government). Graph-1 shows the average annual growth rates of agriculture GDP (GVA at basic prices for later years), as given by the CSO.

The graph shows that the Modi government's record in agriculture is mediocre: At 2.9 per cent, it is better than the 2.4 per cent achieved by the Narasimha Rao government, equals the performance of the Vajpayee government, is a notch below the 3.1 per cent achieved by UPA-1 but significantly lower than the 4.3 per cent growth rate achieved by UPA-2. Evaluating these growth rates over a longer period is important because the real incomes of agri-households move in tandem with the overall agri-GDP growth. It is also important to take note of these figures in light of the Modi government's much talked-about target of doubling farmers' incomes by 2022-23.

Graph-2 presents the monthly incomes of agri-households in major states of India, and for all India, as estimated in the NABARD's latest survey on Financial



Source: NSSO and NABARD



C.R. Sasikumar

Inclusion, often called NAFIS, for the agricultural year, 2015-16. Agri-households in Punjab had the highest monthly income of Rs 23,133 while Uttar Pradesh with Rs 6,668 occupied the lowest position. At the all-India level, the average income of an agri-household in 2015-16 turned out to be just Rs 8,931 per month.

The compound annual growth rates (CAGR) of real incomes between 2002-03 (NSSO survey) and 2015-16 (NABARD survey) (the RHS axis) comes to 3.7 per cent at the all India level, with a high of 8.4 per cent for Odisha (though with a low base) and minus (-) 2.3 per cent for agri-households in Jammu and Kashmir. It may be noted that the CAGR are impacted by the performance in agriculture in the base or terminal year. It is interesting to see that the CAGR of agri-GDP for the period 2002-03 to 2015-16 is 3.8 per cent while the CAGR of agri-household incomes is 3.7 per cent.

The Expert Committee on Doubling Farmers' Incomes by 2022-23, headed by Ashok Dalwai, estimated that the growth rate required to achieve this target would have to be 10.4 per cent per annum from a base period of 2015-16. Nearly three years after this base period, there is no sign of acceleration in agri-GDP growth rates. In fact, it has decelerated to 2.9 per cent from 4.3 per cent during the UPA-2 period.

This implies that in the remaining four years, the rate of growth in agri-household incomes and agri-GDP growth would have to be about 15 per cent per annum in order to attain the target of doubling farmers' in-

comes. This is almost impossible given the policy instruments used by the government so far, including the latest PM Kisan Scheme that gives Rs 6,000 per annum to small and marginal farmers. This does not augur well for the Modi government.

Dreaming big is good provided one is able to mobilise resources and frame policies to unleash the "animal spirits" in agriculture. So far, one has not seen that. Instead, one sees rising anger and restlessness amongst farmers, which is forcing several states to loosen their purse strings. Many states have announced loan-waivers and/or direct income support. Of course, there is a lot of politics in these freebies but they are also an acknowledgment that the discontent amongst farmers must be addressed.

The time has run out for the Modi government. However, the party or alliance that assumes office after the general election must embark on structural reforms in agriculture at the earliest — from agri-marketing to opening up land lease markets, to rationalisation of food and input subsidies (fertilisers, power, irrigation, insurance, interest subvention) and investing in innovations that can ensure not only higher productivity in agriculture but also its sustainability and profitability.

Finally, it may be advisable to shift the target date for doubling farmers' incomes from 2022-23 to 2029-30. That will be more realistic.

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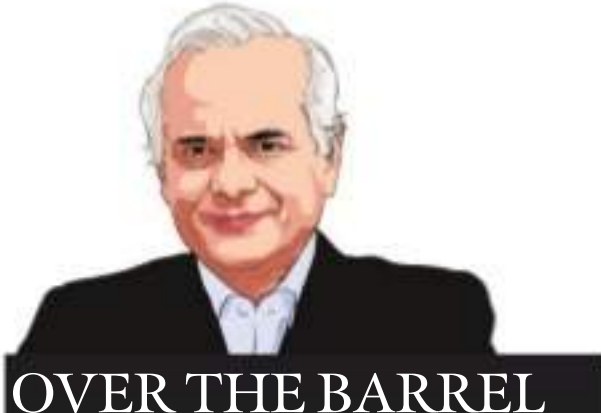
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## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Throughout the present crisis, the national leadership has emphasised that while Pakistan reserves the right to defend itself against external aggression, Pakistan does not want and is not seeking war with India." — DAWN

## The right climate

Indian leaders can learn from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, locate the opportune moment to push climate change policies



OVER THE BARREL  
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ, a 29-year-old US Congresswoman representing the New York boroughs of Bronx and Queens, has shot into public prominence in the US for a non-binding resolution that she and her Democrat colleague, Senator Ed Markey from Massachusetts, have tabled in the US Congress.

What is surprising is that there is nothing remarkable about the resolution. It contains a package of oft-discussed ideas on how to decarbonise the US economy. Even the caption — "the Green New Deal" — has been mentioned before. *New York Times* columnist, Thomas Friedman, used this phrase in 2007 while writing about clean energy. Yet, Cortez is today the cynosure of her seniors in the US Congress. Her resolution has won the support of several presidential hopefuls and the "old new ideas" on global warming have acquired traction.

What is the reason for her success? Why has this resolution struck a chord? What lessons, if any, does the Cortez phenomenon offer Indian politicians who wish to embed climate change more deeply into our policy fabric?

Victor Hugo said "nothing can hold back an idea whose time has come". His insight focused on two elements: The idea and the timing. A "good" idea would be no more than just that if introduced at an inopportune time. It could be transformational if supported by context and circumstance. The response to Cortez's resolution suggests the importance of a third factor: Language and message.

The road to decarbonisation has been well-marked over the years and the milestones are known: Electricity must be decarbonised by basing it on solar and wind; industry furnaces should be powered by solar and heat; the internal combustion engine should be replaced by electric vehicles; residential homes and buildings should be redesigned to make them carbon neutral; clean energy technology should be generously funded etc.

The distance covered so far down this road has not, however, been much. The IPCC "special report on global temperature of 1.5°C", published in October 2018, made clear that the world has a long way to go in achieving its objective of containing temperatures to below 1.5°C. This objective will only be achieved if it accelerates the implementation of ideas that secure "rapid and far reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure and industrial systems" and thereby "deep emission reductions".

The reasons for this slow pace are many and country specific. The US, for instance, has stumbled because of the ambivalence of political leaders towards global warming, the varying interpretations of scientific data and the counterfactual physical experience. President Donald Trump is openly derisive when he says it "wouldn't be bad to have that good old fashioned global warming right now" in his tweet from the

US Mid-West where temperatures had fallen to Arctic levels.

One reason common to all countries for the disconnect between the idea of decarbonisation and its implementation has been the absence of broad-based public and, therefore, political support. The green agenda has all too often been introduced at an inopportune time or through an ineffective medium.

The Cortez phenomena offers a sense of what is possible if both timing and medium juxtapose to leverage and complement each other. Her resolution was, for instance, well-timed. It was introduced at a time the US public was still unsettled by the spate of natural disasters that had hit the country. The fires in California last year were the worst ever, leading to considerable loss of life and livelihood. Moreover, it was no longer possible to ignore the mounting scientific evidence of global warming and the forewarning of scientists that the window of opportunity for managing the consequences was fast closing. Cortez also leveraged the power of language. Instead of complicating public understanding by discussing arcane and the still somewhat controversial issues of carbon pricing, sequestration technology, nuclear energy and financing structures, it called for a "10 year national mobilisation" plan for reducing carbon emissions. The medium was a simple war cry.

The Cortez resolution may eventually end up in the archives like so many other resolutions on the same subject but, today at least, it has to be credited for bringing global warming into the US national conversation.

What is the takeaway, if anything, for India from the Cortez resolution? I ask this question only because I believe our public has still not fully appreciated the implications of global warming for India: We will be amongst the worst-affected countries in the world if sea levels rise, glaciers melt and temperatures fluctuate between extremes. There is therefore an urgency in raising public awareness about this issue.

All governments for the past two decades have made an effort to tackle the challenge of climate change. The UPA government set up the National Action plan on climate change in 2008 and established a number of climate change missions. The present government made a comparable, if not greater, effort. They set ambitious targets for solar and wind power; they provided incentives for electric vehicles; set a timeline for the cutting of emissions by utilities and also benchmarks for energy efficiency; and, they replenished the "clean energy fund" for financing clean energy through an increase in the coal cess. But no government has been able to elevate this issue to a national priority and bring it into the public, and, therefore, political discourse.

The Cortez resolution offers a clue on how this could be done. The subject must be brought onto the legislative agenda. The new governments should introduce a bill — call it "the climate change and clean energy Bill" — that sets out a time-bound objective for decarbonisation. The language of the bill must be exhortatory and its purpose should be to educate and mobilise. It should be able to bring climate change into the national conversation and create the opportune time for implementation of the ideas already on the agenda.

The writer is chairman and senior fellow, Brookings India

## VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

## TIME TO TALK

THE MARCH 1 editorial in *Dawn*, written after Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that his country would release Indian Air Force Wing Commander Abhinandan, backs what it calls "a step in the right direction". The newspaper seems clear that diplomacy and peace is the only way forward for India and Pakistan and welcomes the words and announcements of the PM Khan in that direction. It adds that "it will almost certainly take more urgent diplomacy by the international community and a significant change in Indian rhetoric and actions before the risk of conflict, or worse, can be deemed to have receded at this stage."

The editorial seems to imply that the Pakistan government has acted maturely through the current crisis: "Throughout the present crisis, the national leadership has emphasised that while Pakistan reserves the right to defend itself against external aggression, Pakistan does not want and is not seeking war with India. The prime minister has termed the pilot's release a "peace gesture", and New Delhi should use it as an opportunity to recast the discourse inside India, which has drifted dangerously towards jingoism and pro-war sentiment in recent days. With so much of the war discourse focused

on abstract and, arguably, removed-from-reality notions of pride and definitions of success, the captured Indian pilot has provided a human face to the potential costs of war."

It also takes to task the irresponsible role the media has played in both countries: "The Indian media immediately and overwhelmingly cheered on the Indian state's claim of having targeted an alleged militant training camp in Pakistan, while sections of the Pakistani media celebrated the downing of an Indian warplane and the capture of the pilot. In the main, the media in neither country has attempted to factually contribute to the national discourse; it has focused, instead, on promoting unchecked and unverified state narratives."

## GLOBAL DISREPUTE

FARRUKH KHAN PITAFI, an Islamabad-based TV journalist in an article titled 'Mutually assured disreputation' in *The Express Tribune*, points to a fact that is sometimes forgotten or glossed over in the talk of war, deterrence and conflict in South Asia: "We, South Asians, live in a nuclear tinderbox."

He adds: "India and Pakistan have huge stockpiles and means to effectively deliver the nukes. Without going into extrapolations suffice it to say a full-fledged nuclear war between the two nations means millions

would die on both sides. And yet in the past fortnight, India has endured a psychotic break with reality. Indian pundits often say that this talk of nuclear mutually assured destruction is Pakistan's nuclear blackmail. How blasé? Use your imagination, man. War has a momentum of its own."

Like the editorial in *Dawn*, Pitafi too holds the media to account. But he lays the blame more at the door of Indian journalists. Though, according to him, their Pakistani counterparts are not without blame either. The implications of this are negative for both countries: "Why does this matter? It matters for two reasons. People and the profession. People because in these racist times you forget that the world is watching. No matter how much we try to distinguish ourselves, to the outsiders we look and sound the same. The same colour of the skin, more or less the same language. Since our hate exchanges are often in the English language now, they proliferate. What India says about Pakistan and what Pakistan says about India all stays in people's mind. To a European, an American or a citizen of any other country, this is not an indictment of India or Pakistan but of South Asians as a whole. I call it mutually-assured disreputation. In coming days this will compound the difficulties faced by the South Asian diaspora. If you want your people to be treated compassionately

abroad, you will have to show you are capable of compassion yourself."

## STANDING DOWN

THE DAILY STAR'S March 3 editorial breathes a sigh of relief at the return of Wing Commander Abhinandan and the de-escalation of hostilities between India and Pakistan. A war between the two South Asian nuclear powers, after all, will have a deep impact on Bangladesh. The editorial makes sure to congratulate Pakistan and PM Imran Khan on the "prudent, timely and diplomatic" gesture — returning Abhinandan. After reiterating its stand on peace between India and Pakistan, the editorial sums up what it sees as the core issues: "Pakistan must stop sheltering terrorists inside its territory. Indirect war may be a cheaper alternative for a country, an inexpensive expedient to bring to bear pressure on an adversary, but it can boomerang badly. Pakistan should follow up seriously with its peace gesture by starting to take tangible measures to tackle terrorism, and India should take PM Imran Khan at his word that Pakistan is willing to work with its neighbour to confront the menace of terrorism." India on its part needs to address the Kashmir situation to the satisfaction of the people of Kashmir.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### HILLS UNDER THREAT

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Haryana Assembly passes bill to open up the Aravallis to construction (IE, February 28). It is unfortunate that the Haryana government has succumbed to the pressure of the realtors. The Aravallis are being systematically destroyed. Equally tragic will be the destruction of Mangar Bani, the traditional sacred grove. Will the National Green Tribunal take suo motu action?

B.M. Pandey, Delhi

### NEW NARRATIVE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The subject is national security' (IE, February 28). With the 2019 election round the corner, the Pulwama tragedy, and its aftermath, is bound to get politicised given the crossroads at which Indian politics is at this moment. At a time when the promise of achhe din has turned sour, the BJP was in search of a new narrative. It is very likely that national security will take centre stage in this new narrative.

Abhijit Nair, Dombivli

### TIME FOR PEACE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Pilot project over, real one left' (IE, March 1). The PM's statement is uncalled for. Military operations are serious business and should not be used for politics. India and Pakistan have had a war-like experi-

## 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

ence. Pakistan cannot take India for granted. The world opinion is with India. Let us give Pakistan a chance to correct itself, and continue with our proactive diplomacy to fight terror and its perpetrators. The government should get the people of Jammu and Kashmir on board, and isolate its opportunistic leaders.

Madhu R D Singh, Ambala





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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@expressindia.com

**TELLING NUMBERS**

**AAP in Delhi: vote share up & up, with or without seats**

ON SATURDAY, the Aam Aadmi Party announced candidates for 6 of Delhi's Lok Sabha seats in the absence of an alliance with the Congress. Although results have been very mixed in Delhi's last two Assembly elections and a Lok Sabha poll in between, AAP's vote share has risen successively — without always translating into seats. In 2013, AAP polled less votes than the BJP but briefly formed a government in a post-poll coalition with the Congress. In 2014, AAP improved to 33% but the BJP jumped to 47% and swept all 7 Lok Sabha seats. In 2015, AAP shot up to 54% to sweep 67 of the 70 Assembly seats. The Congress vote share fell successively from 25%

in 2013 to 10% in 2015, while the BJP, which hit a peak in 2014, fell back to 32% in 2015. In both 2013 and 2014, the combined vote share of AAP and the Congress was more than that of the BJP; in 2015, AAP alone had more than the rest of the Opposition put together.

In Punjab, the other state where it has a presence, AAP polled 24% in 2014, which gave it 4 Lok Sabha seats while the Congress, in spite of a 33% share, won only 3 seats, and SAD-BJP with 35% won 6. In the 2017 Assembly elections, AAP remained at 24% and won 20 seats to emerge principal Opposition against the Congress (38%, 77 seats) while SAD-BJP slipped to 29% and 18 seats.

**A HUNG HOUSE & TWO SWEEPS**

Election	BJP		AAP		Congress	
	Seats	Vote share	Seats	Vote share	Seats	Vote share
Assembly 2013	31	33%	28	29%	8	25%
Lok Sabha 2014	7	47%	0	33%	0	15%
Assembly 2015	3	32%	67	54%	0	10%

Total Delhi seats: Assembly 70, Lok Sabha 7

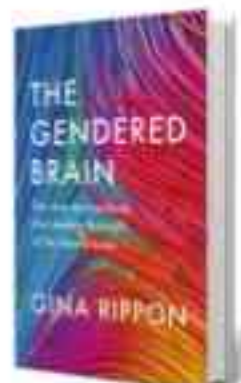
**TIP FOR READING LIST**

**ARE MALE & FEMALE BRAINS DIFFERENT?**

WILL THE child play with Barbie or play a game of Lego? In this gendered world, we live with notions that one's gender determines one's skills and preferences, from toys and colours to career choice. Does that mean that our brains are different? It's a myth that a new book sets out to explode. Gina Rippon, professor of cognitive neuroimaging at Aston University, Birmingham, draws on her work to show how these stereotypes mould our ideas of ourselves. *The Gendered Brain* examines how science has been misinterpreted or misused to ask the wrong questions, instead of challenging the status quo. Rippon goes into modern neuroscience and urges the reader to move beyond a binary view of people's brains and instead to see these as highly individualised, profoundly adaptable, and full of unbounded potential. *As The Gendered Brain* reveals, conclusive findings about sex-linked brain

differences have failed to materialize. Beyond the 'missing five ounces' of female brain - gloated about since the nineteenth century - modern neuroscientists have identified no decisive, category-defining differences between the brains of men and women. *Nature* magazine writes in its review. *The Guardian's* review advises readers: "All systemising brains out there owe it to themselves to read this calm and logical collection of evidence and science, and all empathisers will understand its importance."

*The Guardian* has also published an interview with the author, quoting her as saying: "We are at the point where we need to say, 'Forget the male and female brain; it's a distraction, it's inaccurate.' It's possibly harmful, too, because it's used as a hook to say, well, there's no point girls doing science because they haven't got a science brain, or boys shouldn't be emotional or should want to lead."



**AN EXPERT EXPLAINS**

**India-Pak: How a pattern ended**

In every military crisis from 1987 onwards, India trod with caution while Pakistan seemed to revel in the opposite. India's newest response signals it is prepared to counter the myth of Pak's 'nuclear impunity'



C RAJA MOHAN

IN THE beginning, there were traditional wars between India and Pakistan — in 1947-48, 1965 and 1971. Over the last three decades, we have had a series of military crises — in 1987, 1990, 1999, 2001-02 and 2008 to mention a few — that threatened to blow up into a regular war, but didn't.

The terror attack in Kashmir that killed 40 CRPF men last month set the stage for a new military crisis that promised to follow the familiar pattern. But New Delhi chose a different response this time — Indian fighter aircraft dropped bombs on a terror camp in Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkwa and engaged the Pakistan Air Force in aerial combat for the first time since 1971.

As in 1987, so in 2019, there is an apparent discontinuity in the nature of India-Pakistan military conflict. If Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons made a big difference in 1987, India's willingness to call Pakistan's atomic bluff seems to have broken the mould again.

**'Strategic patience'**

But first to nuclear weapons. Many see Pakistan's nukes as a response to India's first nuclear test in May 1974 that was called a "peaceful nuclear explosion". If the nomenclature of "PNE" reflected India's penchant for self-deception, Pakistan was already on the path to acquiring nuclear weapons.

The trigger for Pakistan's nuclear programme was the war of 1971 — which led to the transformation of East Pakistan into Bangladesh. To the utter shock of Rawalpindi, its two allies — the US and China — did not or could not stop the Indian Army from assisting in the breakup of Pakistan.

The first order of business for Pakistan's leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who took charge of a shrunken Pakistan in January 1972, was to put its nuclear weapon programme on fast track. Gen Zia-ul-Haque, who ousted Bhutto in 1977, intensified the nuclear quest and proudly announced in 1987 that Pakistan had accomplished its "atomic mission". By the late 1980s, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had begun to put together India's own nuclear arsenal.

Optimists hoped that the dangers of escalation to a nuclear level would compel India and Pakistan to freeze their conflict and manage their bilateral relations responsibly. But the Pakistan Army leadership had other ideas. It saw the nuclear balance giving it the opportunity to embark on a low-intensity conflict against India by supporting cross-border terrorism.

The Pakistan Army had bet that its atomic quiver had neutralised India's vast conventional military superiority and given it the

**TRADITIONAL WARS UNTIL 1971, RESTRAINT AFTER 1987**



1965



1971



1999

Traditional wars until 1971, the last time IAF was used. Since 1987, Indian armed forces did not cross LoC, even during Kargil conflict. Until now. Photos show an Army jawan in sugarcane fields of Gurdaspur (1965); a Sea Hawk taking off from the INS Vikrant deck (1971); Bofors guns in operation in Kargil (1999). Express archive

freedom to bleed India with a thousand cuts. As Pakistan unleashed terror through outfits like Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Toiba to target India's civilians and military, New Delhi seemed paralysed by the nuclear factor and unable to retaliate effectively.

Thanks to the fear of nuclear escalation, New Delhi bought into the dogma that "strategic patience" is better than "military adventurism". An important part of the dogma was the proposition that the Line of Control in Kashmir was sacrosanct and can't be crossed under any circumstances.

Even when it had to fight a limited war — for example to vacate Pakistani aggression in Kashmir's Kargil sector in the summer of 1999 — New Delhi issued strict instructions to the armed forces not to cross the LoC. The same was true for the military confrontation with Pakistan during 2001-2002, following the attack on Parliament.

While the government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee ordered full-scale military mobili-

sation to confront Pakistan's support for cross-border terrorism on both occasions, the Manmohan Singh government during its decade-long rule convinced itself that military confrontation with Pakistan did not produce any significant political gains — either in the reduction of cross-border terrorism or in the resolution of political disputes with Pakistan. It decided against a military response to the terror attacks on Mumbai at the end of November 2008.

If India chose the "responsible" path of "nuclear restraint" and respected the "sanctity of the LoC", Pakistan seemed to revel in the opposite. It hoped that the fear of escalation to a nuclear war would bring the international community to compel India to make major concessions on Kashmir.

**'Offensive defence'**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, came with a very different theory — that it is pos-

sible to strengthen India's deterrence against major terror attacks from Pakistan — and a commitment to break out of the constraints imposed by nuclear weapons. They also refused to accept the mythology that there is some kind of "divine sanctity" to the LoC. They note that Rawalpindi's support for cross-border terrorism means Pakistan does not deify the LoC.

Under Modi, New Delhi adopted the strategy of what some have called "offensive defence". It has chosen to raise the intensity of its military response to Pakistan's continuous infiltration of terrorists into Kashmir and step up Army actions beyond the Line of Control. New Delhi also conducted "surgical strikes" in September 2016 against terror launchpads across the LoC in response to an attack earlier that month against an Indian Army brigade headquarters in Uri.

The IAF bombing of Balakot in the early hours of February 26 and its aerial encounter with the PAF the next day are part of the strategy to counter Pakistan's "nuclear impunity". Many are worried that Modi's strategy has increased the danger of the South Asian rivals peering down the nuclear abyss.

But Modi and his advisers might argue that it may be worth exploring where the nuclear brink is rather than resigning forever to the impossibility of countering Pakistan's terrorism. Unlike its predecessors, the Modi government is not frightened by the talk of international intervention and mediation on Kashmir in the event of escalation.

Modi and his advisers are confident that the global reaction can easily be managed. New Delhi seems to believe that international concerns on escalation can, in fact, be turned into pressure against Pakistan to curb its support for terror. That there has been little international empathy for Pakistan (China is the lone exception) after the Balakot bombing underlines the shifting geopolitical fortunes of India and Pakistan over the last three decades.

In its addition to nuclear weapons and jihad terror, Pakistan appears to have forgotten the importance of keeping up with India on the economic front. India's GDP edging towards \$3 trillion today is nearly ten times larger than Pakistan's at about \$300 billion. In its obsessive quest for "strategic parity" with India, Pakistan is beginning to fall behind Bangladesh on economic and social development.

Nuclear weapons certainly changed the military balance in favour of Pakistan at the end of 1980s. Pakistan's steady but relentless relative national decline may be turning that balance in India's favour in the early 21st century. This may not immediately lead to India prevailing in the prolonged conflict with Pakistan. Nor will Rawalpindi find it easy to change the policies of the last three decades. We may not know how the present and future crises might end, but there is no question that Balakot has changed the familiar script of India-Pakistan military crises.

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

**Poverty to vulnerability: Rethinking social protection**

India is no longer largely chronically poor; it is now more unequal and vulnerable with pockets of deep poverty. Its future shared prosperity will depend to a large extent on how its social protection system evolves and catches up with its diversity and demography. World Bank economists weigh in.

**IN ELECTION YEAR EXPERTS EXPLAIN PART 2**

SHRAYANA BHATTACHARYA, JOHN BLOMQUIST & RINKU MURGAI

A STEADY, safe, well-paid job is the best protection against economic hardship. But when this ideal situation is not possible, social protection programs help people become more resilient to risks. Typically, a comprehensive social protection system requires three types of instruments to work together.

■ First, promotional instruments invest in the ability of families to survive shocks on their own — by enhancing productivity, access to job opportunities and incomes through human capital infrastructure, wage legislation, labour policies, skills training and livelihood interventions.

■ Second, preventive instruments aim to reduce the impacts of shocks before they occur by enabling households to use their savings from good times to tackle losses in tough times. This is mainly done through social insurance programs.

■ Third, protective instruments mitigate the impacts of shocks after they have occurred through tax-financed redistribution from the non-poor to the poor. These programs would classically be called anti-poverty measures as they target social assistance or safety net programs to the poor or destitute, whether in kind or cash.

When social protection schemes were created in India after Independence, most of

the country was reeling from famine, de-industrialisation and multiple deprivations. Half the population was chronically poor, the country had an aggregate food deficit, financial and banking networks were underdeveloped, growth rates were weak, and technology available for program administration was rudimentary. Therefore, India's policymakers focussed almost exclusively on anti-poverty, protective instruments.

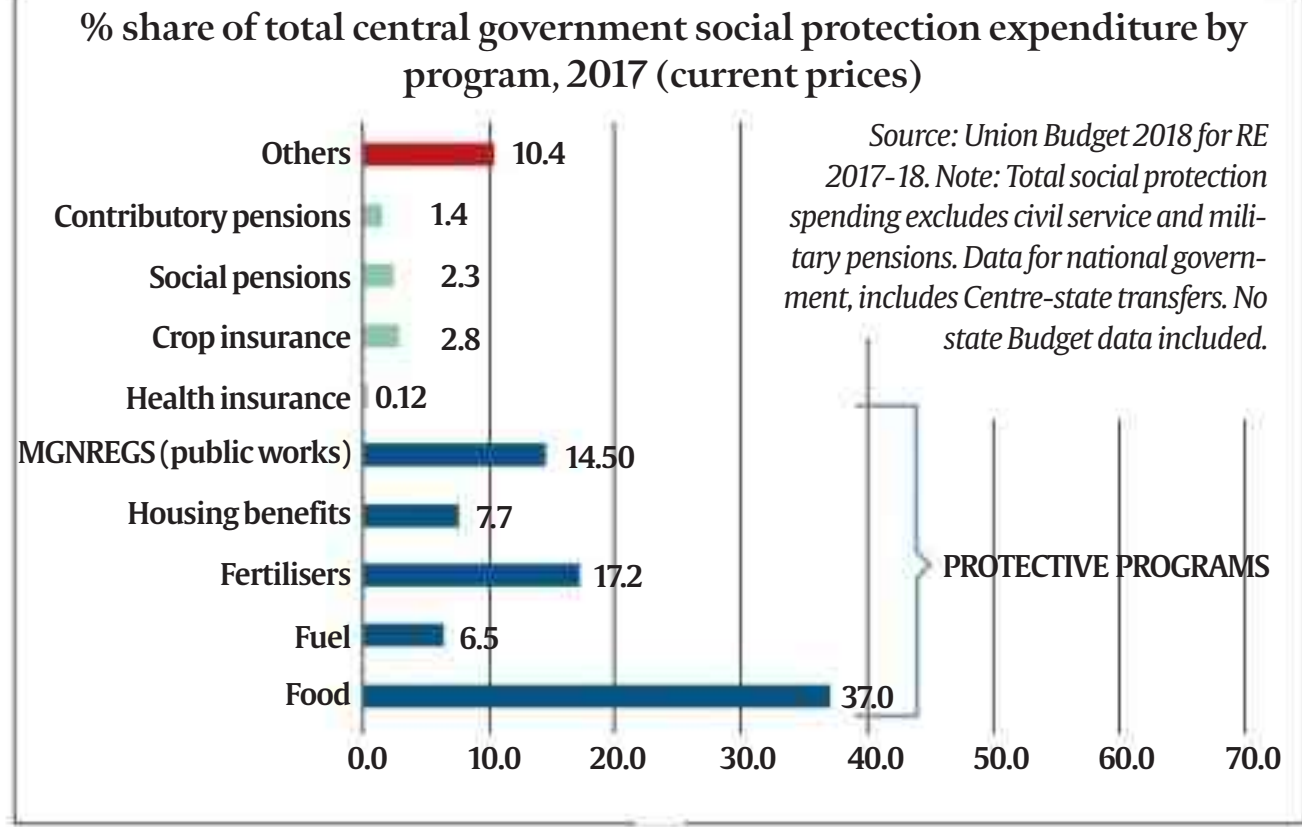
But that India no longer exists, and the country's social protection system needs to evolve and catch up with the needs of its new demography and risk profile. Analysis of the latest available data from 2012 highlight three stylised facts that are important to guide this evolution.

■ First, despite the dramatic fall in households below the poverty line to 22%, the challenge of chronic poverty remains. Despite a decline in poverty levels, India shelters pockets of deep poverty and these households are geographically clustered. A significant 15% of households that were poor in 2005 remained poor in 2012. That's 37 million households — the population of Germany.

■ Second, inequality across locations and demographic groups has increased. The poverty rate of six of the poorest states in the country is twice that of other states. Seven low-income states — Chhattisgarh, MP, UP, Odisha, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Bihar account for 45% of India's population but nearly 62% of its poor — continue to need strong safety nets programs. Within states, poverty and vulnerability remain highest amongst Adivasis. Women are largely missing from the workforce, and face serious risks to their mobility and well-being.

■ Third, the majority of India is no longer

**PROGRAMS AND PRIORITIES**



Source: Union Budget 2018 for RE 2017-18. Note: Total social protection spending excludes civil service and military pensions. Data for national government, includes Centre-state transfers. No state Budget data included.

poor. Instead, half of India is vulnerable. These are households that have recently escaped poverty with consumption levels that are precariously close to the poverty line, and remain vulnerable to slipping back. Programs must ensure that those who've escaped poverty are able to sustain improvements.

As families move out of poverty and the middle class grows, social protection programs can no longer be singularly focused on chronically poor households. In 2016, while traditional safety nets such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) expended \$16 billion, the life and accident insurance programs spent less than \$16 million together. Programs such as PDS and MGNREGS

still constitute half of social protection spending in the country.

It's critical that programs help those vulnerable to poverty to anticipate and manage risks and shocks better, not only attempt to provide aid to relieve deprivations experienced by the poor. Three types of portable tools are needed to prevent the new vulnerable class from falling back into poverty and debt traps — health insurance, social insurance (in case of death, accident and other calamities) and pensions. Portability is key to ensure migrants receive support while they try to build new lives in new places, as state governments often use residency criteria to target benefits.

At present, only 4% of households in India use government social insurance programs. Use of private sources of insurance is higher, particularly for wealthy households. IHDS 2012 data show that 27% households report members using/benefiting from private insurance. Unsurprisingly, the bottom 20% report very low uptake of private options for market-based insurance. Most Indian households — poor and non-poor — rely on personal savings to deal with health, accidents, or climate shocks. Micro surveys and administrative data also highlight major gaps in pension and health insurance coverage.

Recent policies have taken steps in the right direction. The boost in crop insurance, new pension plans for the elderly, the rise in contributory pensions for those who have the wherewithal to save, and larger coverage of health insurance programs will help India re-balance its social protection architecture to match the needs of the rising numbers of its vulnerable people.

However, the need to re-balance the mix of programs between protection and prevention may not require a dramatic change in the current umbrella social protection budget. Given the huge diversity in the economic profile of India's states, a variety of approaches will be called for.

For instance, the needs of the rising middle class with access to private insurance markets in Delhi and Maharashtra will differ markedly from the needs of poorer states such as UP and Bihar. Delhi should be enabled to spend its centrally allocated social protection resources differently from UP. In states where many poor and vulnerable households are still not able to save enough to insure themselves against crises or times

of high prices, social assistance will remain a core intervention. In low income states, anti-poverty programs such as PDS or MGNREGS, if implemented well, can serve twin goals of protection and prevention by ensuring India's vulnerable don't become poor, and that the poor live with dignity during times of drought or food price inflation.

Effective safety nets can dramatically reduce the number of poor and the likelihood that poverty will be transmitted from one generation to the next. Strengthening their delivery systems is key, while allowing state governments to choose the optimal mix of preventive and protective programs to suit their state's needs within an umbrella social protection budget.

If insurance coverage is adequate and expands, many families would not need to rely on safety net transfers in the face of old age or health crises which would otherwise push households into long-term poverty and debt traps. Thus, an increased emphasis on interventions that help anticipate risks should be expected, particularly in medium- and high-growth states.

India is no longer a largely chronically poor country but a more unequal and vulnerable country with pockets of deep poverty. India's future shared prosperity will depend to a large extent on how its social protection system evolves and catches up with its diversity and demography.

Bhattacharya is Senior Social Protection Economist; Blomquist and Murgai are Lead Economists, *The World Bank*