

THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | SHYAM SARAN

# 'India really needs to enhance its counterterrorism capabilities'

The former Foreign Secretary on isolating Pakistan diplomatically, the world's responses to the Pulwama attack, and New Delhi's Kashmir policy

VARGHESE K. GEORGE

*Shyam Saran, senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, is a former Foreign Secretary. He served as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Nuclear Affairs and Climate Change and was also chairman of the National Security Advisory Board. Against the backdrop of post-Pulwama India-Pakistan tensions, Mr. Saran explains the important components of India's counterterrorism strategy, says no one has the right to hand out nationalism and patriotism certificates, and calls the coverage on television of terrorism "reprehensible". Excerpts:*

Considering where we are, what do you think is the future course of India-Pakistan relations?

I cannot see much happening until the elections in India are over. The nature of the political dispensation that emerges from the elections will decide the direction of bilateral ties later.

Pakistan evokes very strident public opinion in India. Do you think that might continue after the elections also, forcing the government's hand?

Over the years, Indians are getting more and more angry with the continuing support for terrorism by Pakistan, and the stridency can be explained by this fact. One should not be very surprised that there is a very negative perception about Pakistan in India. Having said that, we have to think of how we can find a way out of this. You have to have a strategy that convinces decision makers in Islamabad that continuing with this policy will impose a high cost on Pakistan and it will not be in its interests. That cannot be achieved by angry rhetoric.

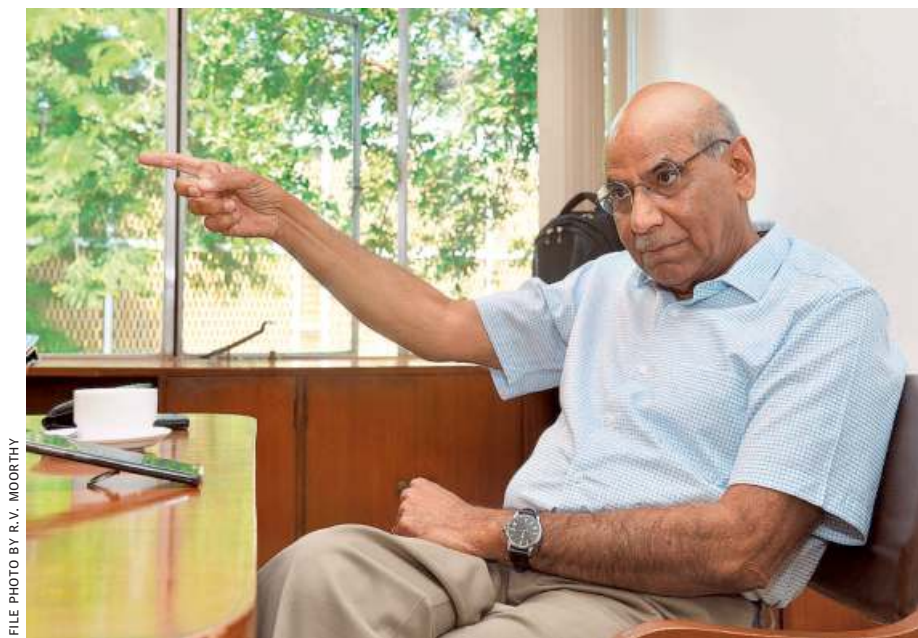
India tried to do that with the deep strikes in Pakistan. That was a message to Pakistan's decision makers. How are they taking this message?

If you look at the situation

objectively, whatever message we may have tried to convey to the Pakistani side, we have not been able to claim significant damage and casualties through evidence that is credible both domestically and internationally. There is also a report - I don't know how credible that is - that our aircraft never crossed the LoC, let alone flew into sovereign Pakistani territory. We have to wait and see what the government has to say on this particular aspect. If that is true, then the deep penetration was through precision-guided missiles and not with aircraft. But still, one could argue that a target deep inside Pakistani territory has been hit and India has lowered the threshold for response. Has it changed the strategic calculus of Pakistan? I don't think so.

So, in the unfortunate event of another terror strike, India will have to better the last response. Are we now bound to an escalation ladder?

That is based on the assumption that we really have no leverage beyond reacting militarily. I think the counterterrorism strategy of India, which has military response as a component, also has other important components. For example, we really need to enhance our own counterterrorism capabilities - in terms of intelligence, neutralising targets,



FILE PHOTO BY R.V. MOORTHY

better SOPs for security forces, better technology. Also, to do more efficiently what we are doing currently, to isolate Pakistan diplomatically. Already, its reputation is at its lowest. It is significant that despite tensions between the two countries, the OIC [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation] still went ahead with the invitation to [External Affairs Minister] Sushma Swaraj-ji. So Pakistan is facing international pressure. Therefore, instead of merely looking at the military options, we need to have a much more comprehensive view on what our counterterrorism strategy should be. Efforts should be made to ensure that such an act of terrorism does not occur again.

There were a lot of initiatives following the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, to develop counterterrorism capabilities, such as the idea of a National Counter Terrorism Centre. Is the progress of these initiatives disappointing for you?

I think a lot of new me-

You cannot have a solution to the Kashmir issue which is entirely dependent on security measures.

chanisms came into place. For example, the National Investigation Agency. Our technical capabilities have also increased. It should be appreciated that for a hundred successes that you have in preventing terrorist incidents from taking place, there is always the possibility of one failure. That is the nature of the whole phenomenon of terrorism. This fact needs to be appreciated, while we do all we can to make it more and more difficult for a terrorist to plan and carry out an attack. This is also the reason why we must focus on the vulnerabilities on our side. For example, if we are not completely successful in stopping drug-smuggling across the India-Pakistan border, it should come as no surprise that a terrorist could also slip in. Here, counterterrorism is not merely military opera-

tions, but also of governance.

Talking of international response, how do you assess the responses of the U.S., China and Russia to the incident? They appear to be conscious of Pakistan's strategic value.

Well, this is a challenge you will have to deal with yourself. Every country, including India, works according to its national interests. Currently, China has a higher - in fact, unprecedented - level of commitment to Pakistan than before because of the critical role the latter is playing in the Belt and Road Initiative [BRI]. They say that the CPEC [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor] is the flagship project for the BRI. The current U.S. administration has taken some measures against Pakistan, but it also has compulsions connected to its plans for Afghanistan. It has come to the conclusion, wrongly in my opinion, that Pakistan has an important role to play in that. Even when countries are sympathetic to India, have good counterterrorism

cooperation with India, they have other considerations too, and there may be limits beyond which they may not be ready to go in targeting Pakistan.

Is there a new equilibrium between India and Pakistan after this round of conflict?

I don't accept the suggestion of any equilibrium between India and Pakistan. India is a much bigger economic and military power. If you look at the trajectory of these two countries in recent years, the gap between them is only growing. India's growth story, its march towards the status of a great power, has not been impacted even remotely by Pakistan's activities against it. Pakistan's efforts to 'bleed India through a thousand cuts' and derail India's economic success have continuously failed. We should reflect on this fact in our sober moments. On the other hand, by pursuing such a policy against India, Pakistan has ended up with a radicalised society and a vulnerable economy. It has also earned the reputation of being the breeding ground of global terrorism. Pakistan is hurting itself, and today its per capita income is less than that of Bangladesh. So, there is no balance between India and Pakistan to speak of. India should focus more on achieving some approximate balance with China, which is its real challenge. Pakistan, even with its use of cross-border terrorism as an instrument of state policy, is a distraction from dealing with the real issues confronting India in its march towards great power status.

That takes us to the question of the responses within India to terrorism. There is mass hysteria being sought on most mainstream

television channels. How does this impact national security?

Well, what is happening on Indian television these days is reprehensible. At moments like these, we need to have a reasoned debate. We cannot have a situation where anyone who raises a question, or who has a different point of view, is immediately branded as an anti-national and non-patriotic. Who gave the right to an anchor or a political leader to give certificates to others on nationalism and patriotism? That is not acceptable to me as an ordinary citizen of this country.

High officials in the government, including the Prime Minister, have made such statements.

Wherever it comes from, it is not justifiable. Yes, we are in the midst of an election season. Even elections should be an occasion to have polite and civil conversations. Democracy is something that we take pride in. If that is going to be eroded, all of us will suffer.

In the last five years, the Government of India has discontinued engagement with Pakistan and separatists on the question of Kashmir and has continuously sought to undermine the regional political parties. How wise is that policy?

First of all, we have an issue with Pakistan to resolve on Kashmir, which is the return of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir [PoK]. It is illegal occupation. Therefore, Jammu and Kashmir has to be part of the agenda of India-Pakistan engagement. Secondly, while cross-border terrorism continues, there have been periods of relative peace that

the security forces have achieved in the Valley which should have been utilised by the political class in order to resolve the political issues that are internal. There have been repeated failures on the part of the political leadership on this question. Instead of using the periods of peace to reach out to people and seek political solutions, the political class slips into complacency. Any policy that pushes more and more political constituencies away in Jammu and Kashmir, by saying they are anti-nationals, unpatriotic, separatists - who are you then going to end up talking to? You cannot have a solution to the Kashmir issue which is entirely dependent on security measures. This is what our Army officials and paramilitary leadership will tell you: we can create some relative peace, but we are not the answer to the political issue.

The approach of former Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh went beyond merely seeking the return of PoK. They both sought to involve Pakistan in a resolution to the Kashmir conflict, right?

Yes. What Dr. Singh said about Kashmir is this: 'I do not have the mandate to change the border of India. But I do have the mandate to make the borders as open as possible to exchange goods and the movement of people.' That is not the final solution. While that final solution is still awaiting us, these are the things we can do to make life better for people on both sides of the LoC. That does not in any way compromise our claim over the whole of Jammu and Kashmir.

Broadly speaking, that was Vajpayee's policy too, right?

Yes.

SINGLE FILE

## Promise amidst strife

It is an encouraging sign that Sudanese protesters are rising above ethnic and religious divisions

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM



Since December, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Sudan's embattled President, has stared down the deepening resistance against his 30-year rule with brutal repression. Protests sparked by a price hike have morphed into the 'just fall that's all' movement, leaving many dead and several others detained, including opposition figures and journalists. The dissolution of the federal and provincial governments, declaration of a year-long national emergency, and installation of military officials in key positions are desperate acts of a dictator who seized power in a 1989 coup.

Mr. Bashir was indicted in 2009 by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sudan's Darfur region, the first instance of a sitting head of government charged by The Hague court. But the former army officer's subsequent election as President is but one apparent limitation of the Rome Statute. When Mr. Bashir flew out of South Africa in 2015, despite the High Court's instruction against leaving the country, it was one more occasion on which he was allowed smooth passage.

There is little sign of the autocrat loosening his grip in the wake of ongoing protests, except handing the ruling National Congress Party leadership to his deputy. Mr. Bashir has since put on hold a controversial move to make him eligible to run for a third term in 2020. The months-long protests have been characterised as the most formidable opposition to Mr. Bashir and parallels have been drawn with the region's 2011 Arab Spring. But the beleaguered President has cautioned the Opposition of civil war and prolonged instability in some of the countries in the region.

The rate of inflation in Sudan is among the highest in the world. The country is among the bottom 10 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International. The combination of a large working age population and widespread unemployment is not healthy for the nation. Moreover, Sudan's foreign currency reserves have dwindled since oil-rich South Sudan seceded in 2011. A ballooning trade deficit has compounded this situation, as the economy was opened up during Sudan's bid for WTO membership. Meanwhile, the government's efforts to earn debt relief have been hampered by lack of multilateral aid because Sudan, although out of the U.S. trade embargo, is still on its terror sponsor roster. It is lobbying hard to be taken off that list and is wooing investments in the energy sector. But foreign firms would be wary of falling foul of U.S. regulators, especially after investigations showed illegal transactions some years ago with Sudan and Iran.

Reports suggest that the protesters, mostly comprising millennials, have been rising above religious and ethnic divisions of the kind that led to the 2011 partition of Sudan. That is a most encouraging sign in this strife-torn nation. It is time Mr. Bashir sets in motion a peaceful transition.

The writer is a Deputy Editor at The Hindu in Chennai



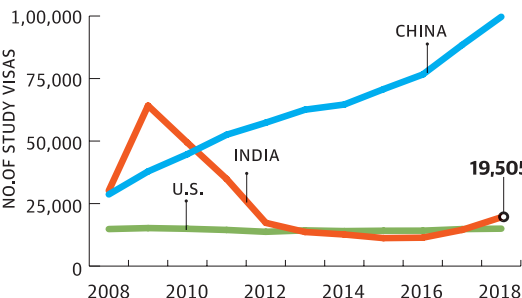
DATA POINT

## Heading to the U.K.

The number of Indians going to the United Kingdom to study and work was higher in 2018 compared to 2017. This increase in 2018 came after a period of little change between 2012 and 2017. Indians were granted the highest number of work visas in 2018. By Faizi Noor Ahmad and Varun B. Krishnan

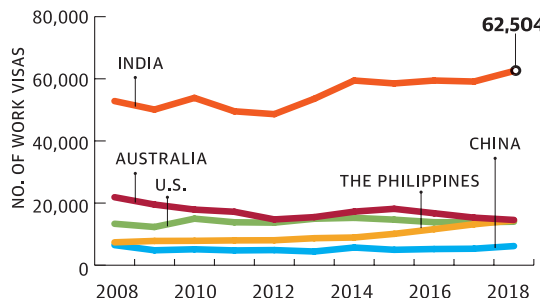
Picking up

In 2018, the no. of Indians going to study in the U.K. showed an increase of 35% from 2017, the highest increase since 2009



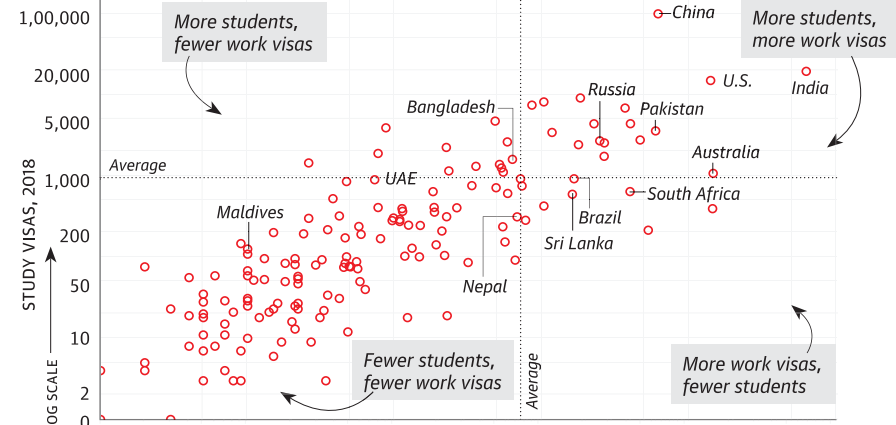
Work, work, work

The number of work visas received by Indians in 2018 showed a marginal increase of about 6%, but Indians remained the top recipients of work visas by a large margin



Study-work equation

China had a high number of students going to study in the U.K., but significantly fewer work visa recipients compared to the number of students, whereas the number of Indian work visa recipients was three times the number of Indian students going to the U.K.



FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 6, 1969

## Astronauts crawl into lunar module

The U.S. astronauts to-day [March 5] completed their first transfer from one space vehicle to another. This further vital step to an eventual American manned moon shot came however well behind the schedule set for the Apollo 9 spaceman trio now in their third day of orbit. Astronauts Russell Schweickart and James McDivitt edged one after another through the narrow passageway connecting the mother craft to the linked Lunar Module (LEM). Their transfer came after the two, with fellow astronaut David Scott, had battled to overcome problems with their navigational equipment. Snags hit both the sextant and the telescope which was blocked at 75 degrees. It was deemed advisable to try to solve these problems before the ship switch was started.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 6, 1919.

## Rice Situation in Calicut.

Yesterday (March 4, Tuesday) at about 3 P.M. the big bazaar was started by the news of a great looting at the rice market near the southern pier. Crowds gathered and several shops were closed. The police rushed to the beach. The excitement however did not last long. It seems that some poor men went to a rice merchant and demanded rice at the fair price of Rs. 13 fixed by Government for Burma rice. Since the merchant refused, some hundreds of men who were evidently prepared for it, rushed into the shop and threatened to loot. But soon the police came and the looters disappeared. The police then passed through the bazaar in armed array for a demonstration that was hardly required. The rice merchants were asked to open their shops and sell rice at Rs. 13 and lo, over 200 bags were at once sold for ready cash! This fact and the fact that the looters did not care to loot the thousands of bags lying practically unprotected on the open beach, showed that it was not a criminal attempt but was a threat to the merchants who had raised the prices quite artificially.

CONCEPTUAL

## Hamiltonian spite

BIOLOGY

This refers to spiteful behaviour that is exhibited by certain organisms towards other organisms of the same species that is aimed to improve the chances of survival of their own genes. It is believed that while organisms can be altruistic towards other organisms that are closely related to them genetically, they can also exhibit spiteful behaviour towards others of the same species that are genetically distant. Such behaviour helps the organism reduce competition against its genes for limited resources. The idea is named after English evolutionary biologist William D. Hamilton.

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