

Too afraid to make a phone call

Let us not give in to terrorism by infecting ordinary families with fear



This is a tale of three sisters. I know one of them: she is in her seventies and lives alone in a small town in India. Her older sister lives with her sons, who are dedicated government servants, in a bigger city in India. And her eldest sister, who had moved to Pakistan with her husband's family during the post-Partition years, lives with her children in Karachi or Islamabad. I am not sure which city, but it is a Pakistani city. This situation is not unusual for the older generations of middle-class Muslim families, who saw one or more siblings leaving for Pakistan in the 1940s and '50s.

Only a phone call away

All three sisters are widows. As their children have either moved to other places for work or are busy with their careers, these three sisters, who have not come together for decades, have very little to do except reminisce. Their greatest pleasure is to chat on the phone, a process made easier these days with digital options. After decades of worrying about the cost of phone calls, now they can ring each other up for next to nothing. The eldest sister calls every few days, for some of her happiest memories are of India.

Of course, I did not know all this until I received a call from the youngest sister, who is the only one who knows me, some days ago. After I had recovered from my surprise and we had exchanged the usual greetings, I asked her why she had called. "Is everything OK with you?" I enquired in Urdu.

"What can be wrong with me, beta? Allah looks after me, and my neighbours help out."

I did not ask more, as I knew that she was a childless widow and lived alone. So I asked a direct question: Why have you called me? (I don't think she had ever called me before, not even when I was still working in India.)

I needed to ask you about my sisters, she said. I do not have anyone else to ask, and I know you live abroad, you know officers, you are a journalist.

It was then that she told me about her two sisters, of whom I had not known until then (or had forgotten



SATVIK GADE

about). But I still did not understand her problem. I did not know her well enough for her to call and ask for money, and in any case she belonged to an affluent (though not rich) and proud family, which would never borrow from strangers or even friends. She explained the matter to me.

Border problems

This was her issue. Her oldest sister, the one in Pakistan, was used to calling her and her other sibling twice a week. But now a problem had cropped up. Neighbours and relatives had told this old woman, living alone with her iPhone, that she should not respond to any call from Pakistan. It might be considered anti-national, they had told her. The other sister had already stopped responding to calls from her Pakistani sibling, because her sons were government servants in India and she did not want to cause them any trouble. The eldest older sister in Pakistan was worried about at this sudden lack of response and was now calling even more often.

As I listened to the story, the tragedy of Partition flashed through my mind: all those millions killed and dislocated! And it was a tragedy that never seemed to end. Why was a woman in her late seventies afraid of receiving a phone call from her older sister, now in her late eighties, just because a political border separated the two? Why had another sister stopped taking these calls because she was afraid it would cause pro-

blems for her sons?

This old woman wanted answers from me, because she knew I wrote for newspapers. What could I say to her, except reassure her that at least in India we have politicians, officers and bureaucrats who would not persecute someone like her for talking to her sister in Pakistan? But she was nervous, worried. Neighbours have told me stories; both Hindus and Muslims have advised me not to talk to my sister, she murmured, only half-convinced by my assurances. "I am an old woman," she said. "I do not want to choose between my own welfare and my older sister. And how can I tell her not to call? What do I say to her when she asks why my other sister is not responding to her calls?"

I could not really answer her, because it is not an answer for an individual to give; it craves a collective voice, a collective conscience. It requires a collective voice with a collective conscience, for a collective voice without a conscience can only be the violent baying of a bullying mob.

Let us act decisively against terror of any sort, of course, but let us not divide the hearts of ordinary people. Let us not create an atmosphere of paranoia. We owe Mahatma Gandhi's India – and basic humanity – at least that much. Let us not give in to terrorism by infecting ordinary families with fear.

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A case for aggressive diplomacy

Indian state responses cannot be reactive to the agenda of terrorist groups



Pakistan and India are strange nations. Just as the conflict after India's bombing of the Balakot terror camp was winding down, Pakistan alleged on March 5 that it had thwarted the entry of an Indian submarine into its waters. India responded that Pakistan was indulging in false propaganda. On the same evening, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry issued a statement that its High Commissioner to India, Sohail Mahmood, would be returning to Delhi and talks with India on the Kartarpur Corridor would go ahead. It was a signal that tensions were officially being defused. India confirmed the talks on Kartarpur and also sent back Indian High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria to Islamabad.

The morning and evening's events of March 5 could cause genuine confusion among the public. But it appears as though Pakistan, through its morning assertion, was playing to its domestic audience, while its evening statement was a signal to the international community that it had no further desire to climb the escalation ladder with India.

Winding down tensions

It was U.S. President Donald Trump who provided the first clear indication of the involvement of major powers in defusing tensions between India and Pakistan. Apart from the Americans, the Chinese and Saudis also seem smack in the middle of the India-Pakistan equation. If the Indian intention post-Pulwama was to isolate Pakistan, that doesn't seem to have happened.

For the two governments, given that the score was level – one had shot down a F-16 and the other had shot down a MiG-21 – they could now respond positively to global concerns. As for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 'Operation Balakot' had given him ammunition to use in his election rallies.

The Modi government's decision to go ahead with the Kartarpur talks days after tensions were at the peak, and after withdrawing the Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan, is bizarre, but it serves two purposes. One, it is an effort to win votes in the Punjab. Two, it shows India as being reasonable before



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the international community.

There is little doubt that India got away with its pre-emptive strike in Balakot because Pakistan's denials that it has nothing to do with fostering groups like the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) carry no credibility, including among thinking members of its own civil society. Further, the JeM even claimed responsibility for the Pulwama terror strike. There's also little doubt that India and Pakistan narrowly escaped a full-fledged conflict, the extent of which can never really be predicted amid social media propaganda, fake videos, domestic pressures and ugly jingoism on both sides.

The Vajpayee years

The India-Pakistan nuclear 'deterrent' was first put to test by General Pervez Musharraf, who planned the Kargil incursion months after Pakistan went publicly nuclear in response to the Indian nuclear tests of May 11 and 13, 1998.

As India began clearing the Kargil heights of the Pakistani Northern Light Infantry masquerading as 'mujahideen', there was enormous pressure on Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to use the Indian Air Force across the Line of Control after the loss of two MiG aircraft. But Vajpayee held firm against both public and IAF pressure. During the Kargil conflict, Pakistan's then Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed and Minister Raja Zafar-ul-Haq made it clear that its nuclear weapons were not for show, but for use. Pakistan's conduct during Kargil exposed the state as irresponsible and led to numerous international calls for respecting the LoC. Had India retaliated across the LoC then, or hit back against Pakistani retaliation during this year's confrontation, the country's "miltabishment", to borrow Pakistani journalist Najam Sethi's expression, in Rawalpindi may well have been pondering the unthinkable nuclear option.

Pakistan went to great lengths to ob-

tain its nuclear capability to insulate itself against India and no "miltabishment" can survive there if it's unable to even the score with India. The nuclear option is built into the trajectory of its survival as a state.

India can ignore such default Pakistani options at its own – and the region's – peril. Looking strong in an election year might be good for a political party's prospects, but will do nothing to enhance India's credentials as a responsible state that thinks long term.

During the Kargil war in 1999, after the Parliament attack in 2001, and post the Mumbai attack in 2008, two Prime Ministers of India had the option of retaliation, but they did not exercise it. Instead, India's patience projected the responsible nature of the state, which was in stark opposition to Pakistan's tattered credibility.

It is a commentary on the sorry state of India's covert capabilities that key figures in the terror network in Pakistan operate unhindered. A key planner of the 1999 IC-814 hijacking and founder of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Fazlur Rehman Khaleel, was recently received at a Pakistani air base in Waziristan. That's the ground reality. Whatever Pakistan is doing to rein in the JeM and LeT is being dictated by the threat of sanctions from the Financial Action Task Force, not by Indian pressure. These actions will vanish if the threat of sanctions dissipates.

Talks and more talks

A conventional response to terrorist groups can demonstrate intent, but does very little to whittle down their abilities. Covert capabilities coupled with deft and persistent diplomacy is the only way forward in such difficult circumstances.

The Modi government's inability to reach out to Kashmiris and its actions against the Hurriyat leadership at a time when the separatists have lost control of the public mood underline an uncaring attitude. This has also created a fertile ground for Kashmiri youth to join terrorist ranks.

Indian state responses cannot be reactive to the agenda of terrorist groups, however brutal their actions are. A calm, mature, informed and long-term strategy with aggressive diplomacy at its core, one that leverages India's economic strength, remains the country's best bet to deal with the terrorist threat from Pakistani soil.

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SINGLE FILE

The Huawei debate

The U.K. and Germany acknowledge potential risks to national security, but differ on how these should be managed

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM



Europe's pushback against banning Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei from the 5G mobile network markets is in stark contrast to the U.S.'s stance. Washington has long suspected the world's largest maker of telecommunications equipment of espionage and cyber sabotage.

These concerns are rooted in the perception that Chinese state-owned entities, recipients of large subsidies, routinely pass on sensitive information to the government. That reading was strengthened when China enacted the National Intelligence Law in 2017 requiring citizens and organisations to cooperate in national intelligence activities. Huawei is a privately listed firm, but there are suspicions that it can still access sensitive data. These suspicions stem from the fact that Huawei's founder used to be in the military.

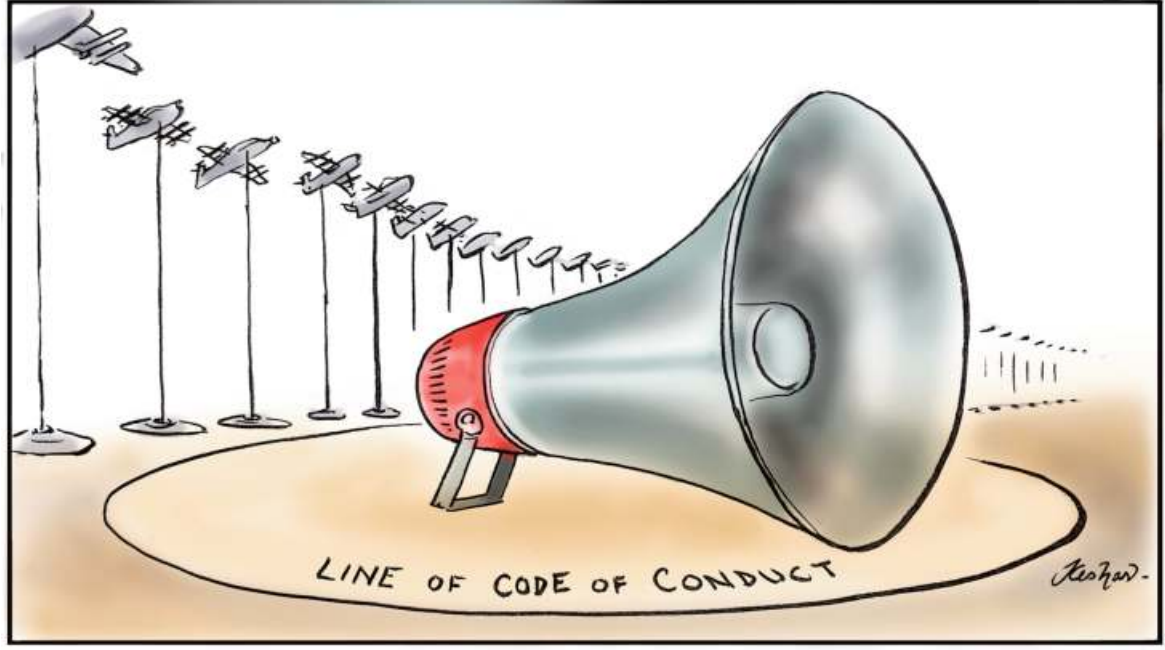
A 2011 open letter by its deputy chairman was aimed at an image makeover after the company was forced to divest itself of a U.S. tech start-up. But the next year, the House Intelligence Committee recommended that Huawei be blocked from future mergers and acquisitions. In 2014, classified documents showed that the U.S. National Security Agency had been hacking into Huawei to ascertain the latter's links to the People's Liberation Army. Within months of those revelations, the U.S. charged five Chinese army officials of stealing trade secrets from U.S. institutions. The next year, Chinese President Xi Jinping signed an agreement with his U.S. counterpart to cease cyber commercial espionage.

In the ongoing tussle, the Donald Trump administration in the U.S. has banned Huawei's participation in the 5G roll-out and canvassed allies in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network to follow suit. Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's head of finance, is challenging her detention by the Canadian government and faces extradition to the U.S. for Huawei's alleged Iranian sanctions evasion.

In February, U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence cautioned the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation states in Munich that the security of the West could not be guaranteed by reliance on the East, in an oblique reference to the telecom firm. Authorities in Britain and Germany acknowledge potential risks to national security from Huawei. But their responses diverge in terms of how the threat should be managed, as also factoring in the extensive trade and diplomatic ties with the world's second largest economy.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has backed the country's cyber security agency. Mi6 seems to attach some weight to U.S. caution over Huawei. But Britain's other security services seem opposed to objections merely rooted in the technology supplier's country of origin. Instead they emphasise on evidence-based threat perception and the adoption of tougher cyber security standards. Another recommendation is for mobile service providers to diversify their sourcing of telecom equipment. The debate continues.

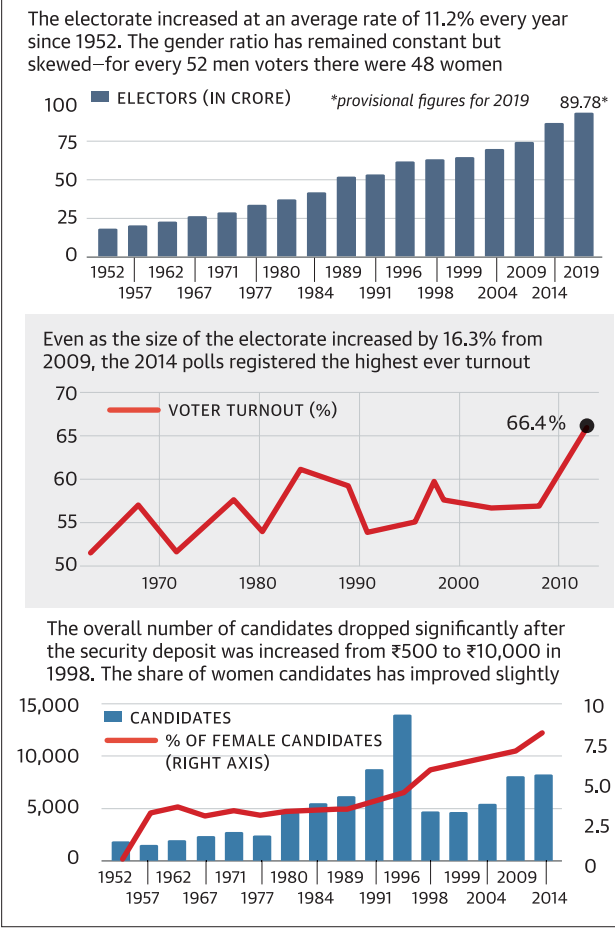
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DATA POINT

World within a country

The size of the Indian electorate, which will vote in April and May this year to elect representatives to the Lok Sabha, is as big as the combined electorates of 36 democracies in the world. By Srinivasan Ramani and Vignesh Radhakrishnan



Testing the biggest democracy

The latest electoral rolls released in January 2019 show that 89.78 crore people are registered to vote in the coming election. The map shows a comparison of State-wise electorates with those of other democracies around the world (in their latest elections). For instance, the size of Tamil Nadu's electorate, which is 5.89 crore, is comparable to that of Turkey's 5.93 crore, while Uttar Pradesh's (14.43 crore) is nearly as big as Brazil's (14.73 crore)



Source: www.idea.int; Election Commission of India; Election Atlas of India: Parliamentary Elections 1952-2014

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 12, 1969

Chandra Shekhar refuses to express regret

The Executive Committee of the Congress Parliamentary Party to-day [March 11, New Delhi] decided to persuade Mr. Chandra Shekhar, a Congress member of the Rajya Sabha to express regret for some of his remarks against Mr. Morarji Desai during the debate on Birla affairs. But Mr. Chandra Shekhar, who met the Leader of the party, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, later in the evening [March 11], is understood to have refused to do so. According to the decision taken by the Executive Committee, disciplinary action will now be initiated against Mr. Chandra Shekhar. Under the rules - as quoted by Mr. Sonavane at the meeting this morning [March 11] - a show cause notice will have to be issued and the matter should be referred to the General Body which is to decide on two-thirds majority. There is a feeling that reference to the General Body may lead to further complications. The whole episode it is feared may lead to a serious rift within the Party.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 12, 1919.

Blind Relief Association.

With a view to starting systematic work for prevention, cure and relief of blindness an association called "The Blind Relief Association" has been inaugurated here [Mumbai] with the Hon'ble Mr. Gokaldas Parekh as its Chairman. It is estimated that blindness is more prevalent in India than in the western countries and its causes to a great extent are preventable. Yet no systematic effort has hitherto been made for prevention, cure or relief of the unfortunate blind. The Association has secured the services of two experienced eye specialists, Drs. Prabhakar and Chatrapati, and has enlisted the co-operation Mr. C.G. Henderson I.C.S., of Nasik, who has been doing a good deal of practical work in this connection. The scheme proposed by the organisers is an ambitious one.

POLL CALL

First-past-the-post system

The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system is also known as the simple majority system. In this voting method, the candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner. This system is used in India in direct elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. While FPTP is relatively simple, it does not always allow for a truly representative mandate, as the candidate could win despite securing less than half the votes in a contest. In 2014, the National Democratic Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party won 336 seats with only 38.5% of the popular vote. Also, smaller parties representing specific groups have a lower chance of being elected in FPTP.

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