



## Slippery slope

India must diversify its energy basket more proactively

India's economic fortunes continue to be tied to the sharply fluctuating price of oil. At a gathering of prominent oil ministers in New Delhi on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged oil-producing countries to reduce the cost of energy in order to aid the global economy in its path towards recovery. Mr. Modi also called for a review of payment terms, demanding the partial use of the rupee instead of the U.S. dollar to pay for oil, in order to ease the burden on oil-importing countries in the wake of the strengthening of the dollar. With well over 80% of its oil demand being met through imports, India clearly has a lot at stake as oil prices have risen by as much as 70% in rupee terms in the last one year. Notably, speaking at the same event, Saudi Arabian Energy Minister Khalid A. Al-Falih refused to openly commit to lower oil prices, opting instead to say that the price of oil could have been much higher but for the efforts taken by his country to boost supply. This is not surprising given the absence of significant rival suppliers in the global oil market willing to help out India.

India's policymakers now face the difficult task of safely steering the economy in the midst of multiple external headwinds. For one, the current account deficit widened to 2.4% of gross domestic product in the first quarter of 2018-19 and is expected to reach 3% for the full year. The rupee, which is down about 16% since the beginning of the year, doesn't seem to be showing any signs of recovery either. Further, the growth in the sales of petrol and diesel has already been affected adversely as their prices have shot through the roof. All this will likely weigh negatively on the prospects of the Indian economy, the world's fastest-growing, in the coming quarters. In this scenario, the decision to marginally cut taxes imposed on domestic fuels is unlikely to be of any significant help to consumers. What is required is a steep cut in Central and State taxes for the benefit to carry through to the consumers, which, of course, is unlikely given the government's fiscal needs. Another long-term solution to the oil problem will be to increasingly tap into domestic sources of energy supply while simultaneously encouraging consumers to switch to green alternatives. This will require a stronger policy framework and implementation. In the short term, the government could look to diversifying its international supplier base to manage shocks better. But such a choice carries geopolitical risks, such as in the case of Iran. Since it will take a length of time to wean the economy off oil imports, policymakers should also be willing to think beyond just the next election if India's over-reliance on oil is to come to an end for good.

## Istanbul mystery

Where in the world is Jamal Khashoggi?  
The Saudi government must tell us

The disappearance of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi has triggered a diplomatic storm. Countries including the U.S. and Turkey as well as international organisations like the UN have turned up the pressure on Riyadh to reveal the truth. The journalist, known for his columns in the *Washington Post* critical of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has not been seen since he entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2. The Turkish authorities have released video footage of Mr. Khashoggi entering the consulate and said there is no footage of him leaving the building. Saudi Arabia maintains that the journalist, who visited the consulate for a divorce certificate, left safely, but has not offered any evidence for this. Mr. Khashoggi's Turkish fiancée, who waited for him outside the consulate for hours, vows he never returned. There are already several theories doing the rounds on what might have happened to him. The most horrifying among them draws from reports quoting Turkish investigation officials that Mr. Khashoggi was killed inside the consulate and his body dismembered for disposal. On the same day that he entered the consulate, a 15-member team from Saudi Arabia had arrived in Turkey and was inside the consulate building. Turkish officials say they were military and intelligence officials, including a forensic expert, who carried out the assassination within two hours of Mr. Khashoggi's arrival, and left immediately thereafter.

Saudi Arabia has so far rejected the reports of Mr. Khashoggi's killing. But if he did leave the consulate, as Saudi officials claim, the burden of proof is on them to prove that he actually did so. They have not even been able to offer a credible explanation on what happened to him, except to repeatedly claim that he left the consulate safely. They took 13 days since Mr. Khashoggi's disappearance to let Turkish officials finally search the consulate premises. Even U.S. President Donald Trump, a strong backer of the kingdom's 33-year-old Crown Prince, warned of "severe punishment" if Riyadh was found to be responsible for the disappearance. The controversy is particularly damaging for MBS, as Mohammed bin Salman is widely known, who spent millions to project himself as a social and economic reformer who could lead Saudi Arabia into the 21st century. Chief executives of some of the potential big-ticket investors, including JP Morgan, Blackstone and BlackRock, have already pulled out of an investment conference due to be held in Riyadh next week, which MBS is expected to address. Any delay in letting the world know the truth about Mr. Khashoggi will only make matters worse for the kingdom, which is already known for its poor human rights record, including on MBS's watch. The international community, including the U.S., a crucial ally of Saudi Arabia, has a moral responsibility to maintain the pressure on the kingdom till it reveals the truth.

# A security architecture without the mortar

Many of India's national security inadequacies stem from the absence of a national security vision



HAPPYMON JACOB

In April this year, the Narendra Modi government set up a Defence Planning Committee (DPC) to assist in the creation of "national security strategy, international defence engagement strategy, roadmap to build (a) defence manufacturing ecosystem, strategy to boost defence exports, and priority capability development plans". Earlier this month, it also decided to revive the Strategic Policy Group (SPG) within the overall National Security Council (NSC) system. Are these committees indicative of a newfound 'national security consciousness' in the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government today?

That the government has set up/revived these committees only in its final year in office goes to show that it is cognisant of the fact that its national security performance has been found severely wanting. More so, given the sorry state of the country's national security, it — erroneously, if I may add — hopes that further centralisation of national security and defence decision making in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) under the National Security Adviser (NSA), would salvage its national security reputation.

### Deteriorating environment

India's national security environment has steadily deteriorated since 2014. Both the overall violence in Jammu and Kashmir and ceasefire violations on the Line of Control reached a 14-year high in 2017, a trend that refuses to subside in 2018. There are far more attacks on security forces and security installations in J&K, and militant recruitments and violence

against civilians in the State than at any time in the past decade-and-a-half. The pressure from China is on the rise. While the government's spin managers valiantly claim that the surgical strikes of 2016 gave a befitting response to Pakistan, and the stand-off at Doklam conveyed to China that India is no pushover, the reality is that surgical strikes hardly made any significant gains, and the Chinese forces (by all accounts including a report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs) are back in the Doklam plateau with more force. The report goes on to fault the government for "continuing with its conventional/defence foreign policy towards China". New Delhi's neighbourhood policy continues to be in the doldrums and there is a clear absence of vision on how to balance, engage and work with the many great powers in the regional and the broader international scene. The frenzied foreign policy activities we are witnessing today are essentially diplomatic firefighting and damage control of a government in its last lap.

### Absence of defence reforms

India spends close to \$50 billion annually on defence and yet there are serious concerns about the level of our defence preparedness. Notwithstanding the feel-good rhetoric about the Indian Army's readiness to fight a "two-and-a-half front war", it might be useful to speculate on the potential outcome of such a scenario. Rhetoric can neither make a country secure nor win wars. Even more worryingly, India might be ill-equipped to fight the wars of the modern age. What India requires then is not empty rhetoric but long-term strategic thinking of which there is little in sight.

One reason why there is little bang for the buck from the \$50 billion lies in our almost non-functional higher defence organisa-



tion. India's defence policy is on auto-pilot with hardly any political oversight or vision. There is little conversation between the armed forces and the political class, and even lesser conversation among the various arms of the forces. This will soon become unsustainable for a country that aspires to be a modern great power.

Besides setting up or revamping these bureaucratic committees, there is little talk about serious defence reforms in the country. One of the most serious lacunas in our defence management is the absence of jointness in the Indian armed forces. Our doctrines, command structures, force deployments and defence acquisition continue as though each arm is going to fight a future war on its own. Not only do the various arms of the Indian armed forces plan their strategies in silos but even their rhetoric is partisan (consider the Army Chief, Gen. Bipin Rawat's statement about the Army, not the armed forces as a whole, being prepared for a "two-and-a-half front war").

### In the neighbourhood

China has progressed a great deal in military jointmanship, and Pakistan is doing a lot better than India. In India, talk of appointing a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has all but died down. Leave alone appointing a CDS, even the key post of military adviser in the National Security Council Secretariat

(NSCS) remains vacant. And the government seems to mistakenly think that by having the NSA chair, the SPG and DPC will take care of the fundamental problems in the country's higher defence sector.

Recall also that the post of the NSA is not a legally-mandated one. So one might rightly wonder how an unelected and retired official with no parliamentary accountability has come to occupy such a crucial position in the country's national security decision making, and whether this is healthy in a parliamentary democracy.

The NSC, which replicates the membership of the Cabinet Committee on Security, almost never meets under the new regime, and the National Security Advisory Board, initially set up by the Vajpayee government, to seek 'outside expertise' on strategic matters, is today a space for retired officials. As a result, there is little fresh thinking within the government or perspective planning on the country's national security or defence.

All that the SPG and DPC would achieve is to further bureaucratise the national security decision making and centralise all national security powers under the PMO. While I concede that this might provide a little more coordination in decision making, let's be clear that these committees are hardly sufficient to get the country's national security system back on track. To expect the NSA to chair all these committees and then action their recommendations while at the same time running the country's national security affairs on a day-to-day basis is unrealistic, and would end up producing sub-optimal outcomes. Top-heavy systems hardly work well unless supported by a well-oiled institutional mechanism.

There is some hope that these committees would take a close, hard look at the state of modernisation and domestic defence in-

dustry in the country, both of which are in a sorry state. Under the present system, where the ratio of revenue to capital expenditure in defence is roughly 65:35%, any serious attempt at modernisation would be impossible. While the committees would be cognisant of this, there is precious little they could do now, just months before the government faces a crucial election.

### No vision

At the end of the day, many of India's national security inadequacies stem from the absence of a national security/defence vision. Ideally, the country should have an overall national security document from which the various agencies and the arms of the armed forces draw their mandate and create their own respective and joint doctrines which would then translate into operational doctrines for tactical engagement. In the absence of this, as is the case in India today, national strategy is broadly a function of ad hocism and personal preferences.

Despite the BJP's hypernationalist credentials in the field of national security and defence, its appetite towards defence reforms has been lukewarm, its willingness to create a broad national strategy has been non-existent, and much of its energy geared towards utilising national security issues for domestic political gains. Consequently, the state of India's national security and defence is worse off today compared to when it took office in May 2014. And in the meantime, we are becoming a country without a coherent national security purpose.

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## Slow burn to rage

After the #MeToo explosion, not just workplaces but men and women have to go back to the drawing board



VAISHNA ROY

The degree and extent of the revelations over the last fortnight have revealed an ugly, festering side to our society. The long, arduous and often invisible history of women's struggle needed this spectacular release valve. And it's historically appropriate that social media became the multiplier and aggregator of voices. For too long, men got away because women were isolated, but social media has provided the scaffolding for an interlinked sorority that would have been hard to imagine even a few years ago.

### Living in fear

It feels like the slow burn that blazed during Nirbhaya has been reignited again. Over and over, women are raging about how they thought they were lone victims, how they could not speak up for fear of inflicting familial 'shame', how they feared benevolent 'protection' would mean confinement at home or being married off. Losing a job, losing independence, losing face — these are not small fears. Women are revealing how

seniors and officials they complained to, reinforced these fears. Of how they abandoned jobs and cities because they would not provide what the late journalist Vinod Mehta, with stunning insouciance, referred to as "non-consensual carnal favours" in his book.

To have been subjected to humiliation and harassment and to have stayed silent when it happened is to bear a crushing burden of fury and self-loathing. This public outburst, warts and all, is a watershed for women's empowerment and has to be seen as such. Yes, it is outside due process. But without this massive collation of narratives, single episodes would have remained isolated transgressions that could be defused. The realisation that toxic masculinity at the workplace is a raging epidemic needed to be brought home forcefully for it to be taken seriously.

Some of the fallout is not great. Already, first-person accounts are dissolving into unverified lists. Fakes are jumping onto the bandwagon. People are urging disclosures, offering up their timelines almost like a panacea or certificate of courage. This is unwise because vulnerable women might be pressured to think it could be just that. While being cathartic, disclosures might not always help in either healing or closure, especially in low-profile cases. And creating a



scramble of stories draws the fire away.

Collateral damage might be inevitable, but it is never correct. Individual lives matter; and they must continue to matter as this campaign unravels. Anger might be good, even desirable, at this stage, but at some point it will be spent and lasting solutions must be sought. That process has begun.

### Drawing lines

After this explosion, not just workplaces but men and women will have to go back to the drawing board. For instance, how will we navigate desire? We are sexual beings, and desire is an undercurrent rippling beneath many of our encounters. And desire cannot be moral-policed and judged by age, sex or marital status. Do we want the excision of all expression of sexual interest at workplaces? Or is it possible we will learn a language of trust where desire can be expressed and rejected/accepted

without repercussions. For men, it means subordinating desire to respect and learning that reciprocity is not a divine right. For women, it means learning to reject with confidence, learning how to deploy power.

The phrase 'sexual freedom' has been thrown about freely. For early feminists, 'sexual freedom' was a hard-won victory. They fought to reify female sexuality, for women to not be recipients but participants in the sexual act, for sex to exist outside patriarchal constructs of marriage. Unfortunately, 'sexual freedom' has been appropriated and subverted by men to imply 'sexual availability'. They use it not so much for relationships of equal power and dignity but to perpetuate misogyny. Drinking, staying single, using a dating app, everything is interpreted as an invitation. Men have used the 'sexual freedom' trope to create a sub-culture where a woman rejecting demands for one-night stands or nude photos is deemed 'uncool'; a milieu that puts immense pressure on women to acquiesce.

Women cannot buy into this. It is disconcerting to read of misbehaviour by colleagues or classmates going unchallenged; an implicit acceptance that these males are more powerful than their female counterparts. In situations of power parity, women cannot cede

away agency. Yes, it's hard to say no, to lose friendships, or to snub 'popular' men. But women have to slay these demons rather than seek redress in victimhood. For starters, it is terrific that women have subverted 'humiliation,' the weapon used to silence them, and turned it on men.

In the melee, words like 'rape', 'assault', 'harassment' have been used loosely. But every incident has to be regarded separately, and there must be proportionality in how we respond to each. If an advance, whether unwelcome or impulsive, has been deflected easily, it is neither criminal nor harassment. A direct or indirect sexual proposition needn't be read as assault as long as the right to reject is respected. This defines freedom.

Once the dust settles, substantial solutions are needed. Institutional responses must become quicker, wiser, and more robust, but behavioural changes are even more urgent. The problem is fundamentally one of socialisation. Men have to unlearn a lifetime of imbibed contempt for women. It can only be addressed by familial and social sensitisation that begins from infancy, creating a society that grants women equality and dignity by default. If today's anger can begin that process, it will have been a success.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### The #MeToo whistle

By shielding Union Minister M.J. Akbar, the Narendra Modi Government is only making a mockery of the 'Beti Bachao' campaign, started with much fanfare after it assumed power. It is obvious that the BJP's think tank believes that the accusations against the Minister are elite-based, restricted to a minuscule section, and hopes that the episode would have little effect on the majority. The Minister's brazen response is borne out of a falsified conviction that happenings that occurred years ago can hardly be proved in a court of law. Morality has been sidestepped. It is said that Caesar's wife should be above suspicion. If a government at the Centre turns a blind eye to the cries of affected women and protects its Minister

with only electoral gains in mind, persons with patriarchal tendencies are only going to get emboldened to indulge in such unsavoury acts with impunity, showing no sense of remorse. The silence of the Opposition parties is also intriguing.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

■ The increasing number of women coming forward and revealing the 'wolves in sheep's clothing' points to the disturbing fact that sexual harassment is even more prevalent in our society, especially in one's working environment, than we imagine. The question that's been raised time and again by the accused and many others is why the women concerned are raising their voices after so many years after the

incidents. The answer is we seem to be forgetting that some of the women were brave even then, did raise their voices at the time, but were suppressed. It shouldn't matter if it took so much time to tell everyone about the harrowing experiences. What matters is that women are speaking up. The #MeToo campaign has given them the encouragement to speak. It takes immense courage to share one's stories with the whole country. The system needs to take action now.

RITU ARYA,  
Bathinda, Punjab

### After Sabarimala

Kerala is simmering following the verdict by the Supreme Court in the Sabarimala temple case. Hindu outfits and the political opposition appear to be upping the ante and

mobilising people upset over the verdict in order to ostensibly corner the Left government in the State. The law is of recent vintage while tradition predates it. Those who respect tradition can continue to stay away from the pilgrimage. Aggrieved parties have already approached the Supreme Court seeking a review petition. However, there must be restraint from stoking social polarisation over the issue. Whipping up passions in order to reap electoral dividends will only cast a shadow over the credibility of political parties (Page 1, "Bid to build consensus on Sabarimala issue", October 16).

M. JEVARAM,  
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

### Castles in the air

The idea of "Charter Cities" in general in Indian

conditions will not hold good keeping in mind population pressures and volatile political circumstances. The "Smart City" concept that was conceptualised some time ago could not take off due to difficulties in its implementation. However, the idea can still be taken forward as a model unit in some Indian city. Planners can see how it works out.

N. VIJAI,  
Coimbatore

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The contents panel (Front page, October 16, 2018) wrongly designated Ranil Wickremesinghe as the Sri Lankan President. He is the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. The error was corrected in the later editions.

The headline and the first paragraph of a report, "RBI to buy Government Securities ..." (Business page, October 16, 2018) had the figure \$ 120 billion. It should have been ₹ 120 billion.

The second paragraph of a report, "Six sixes in an over" (Sport, October 15, 2018) said: "Only Garry Sobers, Ravi Shastri, Hershel Gibbs and Yuvraj Singh have managed the feat in the history of the game." The list did not include Ross Whiteley.

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