



Calming Arunachal

The polity must foster a civic consciousness to allow equality of opportunity for all residents

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in Itanagar has decided not to act on the recommendations of a Joint High Power Committee granting permanent resident certificates (PRCs) to non-Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes of Namsai and Changlang districts. This decision follows violence in Itanagar, which included arson attacks on the residence of the Deputy Chief Minister. The government took this step to de-escalate tensions despite the fact that both mainstream parties, the Congress and the BJP, were on the same page on the demand to grant the PRCs. The non-APSTs include the Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis, Morans, Mishings, Adivasis and ex-servicemen belonging to the Gorkha community. Successive governments and members of these communities have said PRCs are needed to avail of job and educational opportunities elsewhere in the country, and currently the 26 tribes and numerous sub-tribes who claim to be native to Arunachal Pradesh enjoy this privilege. Members of some of the non-APST communities have been long-time residents of the reconstituted State, and to term them as “outsiders” reflects a chauvinistic mindset that denies a just demand. Previous governments, including one led by the Congress in 2010, had also buckled under pressure on the issue. The indigenous tribes opposing the move say this is one step away from providing Scheduled Tribe status for the non-APSTs, which they vociferously oppose. While this fear is overblown, the award of PRCs could ensure land rights that are otherwise denied to the non-APSTs.

The fact that the opposition to the demand took such a violent turn could be linked to a retaliation to attempts by the members of the non-APSTs to enforce an “economic blockade” of the State from the neighbouring parts of Assam last month. But these incidents suggest that barely any northeastern State is today free of the pattern of ethnic discord marked by some communities being branded “outsiders” and sought to be denied resident privileges. These include the Chakma issue in Mizoram, the hill versus valley disturbances in Manipur, the longstanding “migration” issue in Assam, the attacks on Sikh residents in Meghalaya, and even the Chakma/Hajong citizenship issue in Arunachal Pradesh itself. The pattern through all these is eerily similar, with ethnic identities trumping civic consciousness in bringing about discord that has even escalated into violence in some cases. Arunachal Pradesh has otherwise remained a peaceful State, and it is incumbent on the government and the polity to foster a civic consciousness that allows equality of opportunity for all residents in the State. This is a difficult task as identity issues persist and fester when there is inadequate economic development - which is the real bane of the Northeast today.

Buhari's return

The Nigerian President's re-election has raised hopes for economic reform

In handing President Muhammadu Buhari a huge overall margin in the polls, Nigeria has plumped for political continuity. In an election that had been postponed by a week, the anti-corruption crusader romped home with enough votes to avoid a run-off. In what had been set up as a close contest, Mr. Buhari, who heads the ruling All Progressives Congress, beat former vice-president Atiku Abubakar by about four million votes. The rumblings in the Opposition about vote-rigging by the ruling party may continue to be heard for a while, given the widespread delays and irregularities at polling booths, apart from incidents of violence and several fatalities. But some poll observers believe that the Opposition's claims are not backed by sufficient proof to make them legally sustainable. The question now is whether Mr. Buhari can convert his convincing mandate for a second term into policies that can boost investment and growth, generate jobs and narrow inequalities. The challenge of unemployment, at over 20% according to official figures, is made more formidable by the rapid increase in the working-age population. The prospects for change hinge on whether Mr. Buhari can live down his reputation as an old-fashioned interventionist leader and open the economy to competition. A test case of that makeover would be the passage of oil sector reform legislation aimed at the privatisation of the state-owned petroleum firm. Mr. Buhari's record in countering the Islamist Boko Haram in the north of the country and the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in the central region remain unfinished business. On the external front, of particular interest to investors would be the new Nigerian government's stance on joining the African free-trade agreement. Equally crucial would be Abuja's backing for Morocco's membership of the Economic Community of West African States, the 15-nation trading bloc.

Exactly 20 years since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerians have decisively left behind the uncertainties of repeated military coups that marred their immediate post-colonial history. Equally significant, recent elections suggest limited progress in the conduct of transparent elections compared to the previous decade. But the postponement of the poll by a week, just hours before voters were to cast their ballot, did not inspire confidence. In 2015, the delay was as much as six weeks. Moreover, the large number of poll-related deaths in the last few days points to a disturbing absence of official accountability. A peaceful election is one of the crucial indicators of a credible transfer of power through the ballot. Calm must return in Abuja and the ruling party and the Opposition have a duty to respect the rule of law. Among sub-Saharan Africa's largest countries, Nigeria should strive to clean up its act.

Think like a civilisation

The biggest casualty of unquestioning enthusiasm for war is democracy and rational thought



SHIV VISVANATHAN

This essay is a piece of dissent at a time when dissent may not be welcome. It is an attempt to look at what I call the Pulwama syndrome, after India's bombing of terrorist camps in Pakistan. There is an air of achievement and competence, a feeling that we have given a fitting reply to Pakistan. Newspapers have in unison supported the government, and citizens, from actors to cricketers, have been content in stating their loyalty, literally issuing certificates to the government. Yet watching all this, I feel a deep sense of unease, a feeling that India is celebrating a moment which needs to be located in a different context.

Peace needs courage

It reminded me of something that happened when I was in school. I had just come back from a war movie featuring Winston Churchill. I came back home excitedly and told my father about Churchill. He smiled sadly and said, “Churchill was a bully. He was not fit to touch Gandhi's chappals.” He then added thoughtfully that “war creates a schoolboy loyalty, half boy scout, half mob”, which becomes epidemic. “Peace,” he said, “demands a courage few men have.” I still remember these lines, and I realised their relevance for the events this week.

One sees an instant unity which is almost miraculous. This sense of unity does not tolerate difference.

People take loyalty literally and become paranoid. Crowds attack a long-standing bakery to remove the word ‘Karachi’ from its signage. War becomes an evangelical issue as each man desperately competes to prove his loyalty. Doubt and dissent become impossible, rationality is rare, and pluralism a remote possibility. There is a sense of solidarity with the ruling regime which is surreal. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was encrusted with doubts a week before, appears like an untarnished hero. Even the cynicism around these attitudes is ignored. One watches with indifference as Bharatiya Janata Party president Amit Shah virtually claims that security and war are part of his vote bank.

Thought becomes a casualty as people conflate terms such as Kashmiri, Pakistani and Muslim while threatening citizens peacefully pursuing their livelihood. One watches aghast as India turns war into a feud, indifferent to a wider conflagration. The whole country lives from event to event and TV becomes hysterical, not knowing the difference between war and cricket. It is a moment when we congratulate ourselves as a nation, forgetting that we are also a civilisation. In this movement of drum-beating, where jingoism as patriotism is the order of the day, a dissenting voice is not welcome. But dissent demands that one faces one's fellow citizens with probably more courage than one needs to face the enemy. How does one begin a conversation, create a space for a more critical perspective?

What war feels like

Sadly, India as a country has not experienced war as a totality, un-



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like Europe or other countries in Asia such as Vietnam or Afghanistan. War has always been an activity at the border. It did not engulf our lives the way World War II corroded Germany or Russia. War is a trauma few nibble at in India. When our leaders talk even of surgical strikes, one is not quite sure whether they know the difference between Haldighati or modern war. They seem like actors enacting an outdated play. In fact, one wonders whether India as a society has thought through the idea of war. We talk of war as if it is a problem of traffic control. Our strategists, our international relations experts fetishise security and patriotism. The aridity of the idea of security has done more damage to freedom and democracy than any other modern concept. Security as an official concept needs a genocidal count, an accounting of the number of lives and bodies destroyed in pursuing its logic. The tom-tomming of such words in a bandwagon society destroys the power and pluralism of the idea of India as a society and a democracy.

The biggest casualty of such enthusiasm for war is democracy and rational thought. Our leaders know that the minute we create a demonology around Pakistan, we cease to think rationally or crea-

tively about our own behaviour in Kashmir. We can talk with ease about Pakistani belligerency, about militarism in Pakistan, but we refuse to reflect on our own brutality in Kashmir or Manipur. At a time when the Berlin Wall appears like a distant nightmare and Ulster begins appearing normal, should not India as a creative democracy ask, why is there a state of internal war in Kashmir and the Northeast for decades? Why is it we do not have the moral leadership to challenge Pakistan to engage in peace? Why is it that we as a nation think we are a democracy when internal war and majoritarian mobs are eating into the core of our civilisation? Where does India stand in its vision of the civility of internationalism which we articulated through Panchsheel? Because Pakistan behaves as a rogue state, should we abandon the civilisational dream of a Mohandas Gandhi or an Abdul Ghaffar Khan?

Even if we think strategically, we are losers. Strategy today has been appropriated by the machismo of militarism and management. It has become a term without ethics or values. Strategy, unlike tactics, is a long-range term. It summons a value framework in any decent society. Sadly, strategy shows that India is moving into a geopolitical trap where China, which treats Pakistan as a vassal state, is the prime beneficiary of Pulwama. The Chinese as a society and a regime would be content to see an authoritarian India militarised, sans its greatest achievement which is democracy. What I wish to argue is that strategy also belongs to the perspectives of peace, and it is precisely as a democracy and as a peace-loving nation that we should out-think and outflank

China. Peace is not an effeminate challenge to the machismo of the national security state as idol but a civilisational response to the easy brutality of the nation state.

Dissent as survival

In debating with our fellow citizens, we have to show through a Gandhian mode that our sense of Swadeshi and Swaraj is no less. Peace has responsibilities which an arid sense of patriotism may not have. Yet we are condemned to conversation, to dialogue, to arguments persuading those who are sceptical about the very integrity of our being. Dissent becomes an act of both survival and creative caring at this moment. One must realise that India as a civilisation has given the world some of its most creative concepts of peace, inspired by Buddha, Nanak, Kabir, Ghaffar Khan and Gandhi. The challenge before peacedom is to use these visions creatively in a world which takes nuclear war and genocide for granted. Here civil society, the ashram and the university must help create that neighbourhood of ideas, the civics that peace demands to go beyond the current imaginaries of the nation state.

Our peace is a testimony and testament to a society that must return to its civilisational values. It is an appeal to the dreams of the satyagrahi and a realisation that peace needs ideas, ideals and experiments to challenge the current hegemony of the nation state. India as a civilisation cannot do otherwise.

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Tailing a virus

The Zika outbreak response should not end when an outbreak ends



PRIYANKA PULLA

It is a time of peace and quiet for India on the Zika front. Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, which saw large outbreaks late last year, stopped seeing new cases before the year end. For health authorities, the temptation may be to consider the threat past, and move on to more pressing concerns, like the large number of HINI influenza cases this year. The truth, however, is that this is an excellent time to study Zika epidemiology in India. Public health officials must do this while disseminating data quickly and transparently, so that it can be analysed by the global scientific community. This is in India's best interests.

All strains can hurt

What are the data that health authorities should be collecting? First, they must leave no stone unturned in following up on every pregnant woman who was diagnosed Zika positive in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. When the epidemics began, there were worrying indications that Central and State health officials were downplaying the risk to pregnant women. Even though there is no evidence conclusively linking a particular viral strain or mutation with foetal anomalies, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said the Rajasthan strain did not have the S139N mu-

tation linked to microcephaly.

This is incorrect. Even though microcephaly was first observed as a consequence of Zika during the 2015 Brazilian epidemic, strains other than the Brazilian strain, which do not have the S139N mutation, have been linked with the abnormality. For example, in 2017, when the virus from a foetus with microcephaly in Thailand was sequenced, it did not have the S139N mutation. Researchers also showed that a 1966 Malaysian virus strain - isolated long before Zika was seen to cause microcephaly in Brazil - was as effective at infecting foetal mouse brains as the Brazilian one. In another 2017 study, published in *Development*, a strain from the African virus lineage, which was hitherto not thought to cause microcephaly, was seen to be more damaging to mouse brains than the Asian lineage (to which the Brazilian strain belongs). Given this research, we must assume that all Zika strains can cause microcephaly.

If this is the case, why did the link between microcephaly and Zika become evident only in the 2015 Latin American epidemic? Prior to this, numerous outbreaks had occurred in Southeast Asia. Yet, no one picked up on this phenomenon. Scientists have proposed several explanations for this mystery. One is that Zika has always caused microcephaly, although the link became obvious only in Brazil because so many people were infected. Another possibility is that poverty and malnutrition worsen the progression of the disease in pregnant women. This



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would explain why northeast Brazil, with its widespread poverty, was the most severely affected by microcephaly. Scientists are also probing whether simultaneous infection with dengue or chikungunya make the children of Zika-infected women more prone to foetal anomalies. Two studies published earlier this year show conflicting evidence for the role of dengue. The first, published in *Immunity*, showed that in mice, the presence of dengue antibodies led to more placental damage and restricted foetal growth due to Zika. Another study in *Science* showed that people infected by dengue were protected against Zika during an outbreak in Salvador, Brazil.

Given this conflicting evidence, scientists are very far from understanding what makes Zika deadly to foetuses. This means that any data on how the pregnancies of Zika-infected women pan out in India can be enlightening. Careful studies must be carried out to see if there is increased prevalence of microcephaly, and to understand the risk-factors. Already, the TORCH (Toxoplasmosis, Other, Rubella, Cytomegalovirus, and Herpes) infections are known to

cause foetal abnormalities, including microcephaly, among newborns. Wherever women are screened for TORCH, they must also be screened for Zika.

It's also important to remember that the Zika risk doesn't end after the baby is born healthy. The experience of Latin America showed that even healthy newborns can go on to develop symptoms later. This has led to estimates of the incidence of birth defects being revised upwards.

Herd immunity

The other important bit of actionable information that health authorities can and should gather concerns population immunity. To study immunity, authorities must conduct seroprevalence surveys, in which they screen people in several States for antibodies to Zika. Many Indians could well have such antibodies, which means they are protected to some extent. The reason they are likely to have antibodies is because the Rajasthan outbreak virus was around in the State since at least 2016. Moreover, as a recent paper by researchers from the National Institute of Virology revealed, the Rajasthan strain is endemic to Asia, which means it could have been in India for decades now. Still, exposure to the virus does not guarantee a lifetime of protection. So, seroprevalence surveys are needed to identify pockets of low immunity in India. Health authorities can then focus their efforts on these regions, because they would be most vulnerable to future outbreaks.

It is true that seroprevalence studies are not easy to do, given

the cross-reactivity that plagues flaviviruses. The Enzyme-linked immunosorbent Assay (ELISA), which is commonly used in seroprevalence studies to detect antibodies, can throw up false positives for Zika if a person has dengue antibodies. This is because dengue antibodies can neutralise Zika and vice versa.

Separating dengue from Zika

The good news is that researchers are working to develop alternative tests that are specific to Zika alone. One multinational team, including Swiss firm Humabs BioMed, has developed an ELISA test that is able to distinguish Zika from dengue. The test was used in a survey at Managua, Nicaragua after a large epidemic hit the city in 2016. It found that in 2017, 56% of tested adults had antibodies to Zika, suggesting that the city wouldn't see another large epidemic in the near future. India should consider doing such surveys too.

The outbreaks in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have seemingly ended, which is good news. But given that the virus is already in these States, and these States have well connected transportation links, there is reason to expect future outbreaks when the mosquito season begins again. Outbreak response should not end when an outbreak ends, because that is when efforts to contain the next epidemic begin. If India is lucky, the next epidemic will not be a big one. But it is not an assumption that health authorities should make.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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India's response

In the wake of the Pulwama incident, the response from India has left Pakistan isolated on every possible front (Page 1, “India bombs Jaish camp in Pakistan's Balakot” and “India gets support from Australia, France”, both February 27). Economically it is on the verge of collapse. Therefore it is bound to follow its old tactic, of proxy war, by instigating elements in Jammu and Kashmir and existing modules in India. Now that the first step, of airstrikes, has been taken, India must strengthen its intelligence infrastructure so that we are prepared for the underhand tactics of Pakistan.

ASHISH KUMAR, Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh

■ While many are upbeat that India has responded after the Pulwama incident, we should not play down the circumstances which led to the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. There are some questions which need immediate answers: what was the source of the explosives used in the Pulwama attack? Why has the government been unable to stop the alienation of youth in the Valley? Unless the government tries to address the flaws in its Jammu and Kashmir policy, ending extremism will remain a pipe dream.

VIMAL VASUDEVAN, Alathur, Palakkad, Kerala

■ If Indian intelligence services had drawn flak for the security lapses in the wake of the Pulwama attack,

they have more than made up for it with the precision air strikes against terror elements in Pakistan. Amid speculation of the crisis escalating into another mutually destructive war, India, by virtue of being the larger country and a robust democracy, must agree to talks to defuse the tension in the subcontinent.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN, Thiruvananthapuram

■ India's pre-dawn air strike should not lead to triumphalism or chest-thumping. Pakistan has captured an Indian pilot. In the current highly volatile situation, it is important to ensure that the situation - with the electronic media having a field day - does not escalate into war. In a conventional war,

Pakistan cannot match India's forces. The consequences of the use of the nuclear arsenal would be too catastrophic to bear thinking about. The UN, the U.S., Russia, China and others should impress on India and Pakistan, which are home to a sixth of the world's population, the need to defuse the tension. Voices urging restraint and peace over belligerence and war should not be dubbed unpatriotic and drowned in the din of hyper-nationalism.

G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

■ It is no surprise that a rogue nation like Pakistan would retaliate. However, it is disheartening that one of India's fighter pilots has been taken into custody by Pakistan. The entire nation is

behind him and wants his safe return. India should act strongly, exploring all options, against Pakistan.

SREERAG RAMAN SREENIVASAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Dogs under check

No doubt every living creature has the right to space but people who support community dogs should ask themselves how they would feel if they are chased and bitten by a

community dog even if the animal has been vaccinated (Chennai, “Corporation to intensify sterilisation drive against stray dogs”, February 27).

The suffering can be very traumatic. Safe living is also a fundamental right, especially as Chennai city is estimated to be “home to 58,000 dogs”.

SAMPATH R., Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The second deck headline that accompanied the report, “BJP spokespersons stress pre-emptive focus of strikes” (Feb. 27, 2019), erroneously said that the party MPs had been asked to stick to government line. Actually it was the *spokespersons* who had been asked to adhere to the government's line.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com