

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

No green shoots in the farm sector

Rewrite the rules to stop this cycle of agrarian distress

The farm protests in Madhya Pradesh that left five people dead this week is symbolic of a wider agrarian distress engulfing India. Farmers are demanding loan waivers and remunerative prices for all crops, many of them encouraged by Uttar Pradesh's decision to write off loans given to small farmers. The governments of Maharashtra and Punjab, where the protests are spreading, have rightly resisted because loan waivers offer relief that is usually exhausted in two farming seasons. The malaise lies in successive governments treating agriculture as a source of votes and not an engine of growth. That kept the rural-urban wage gap wide at 45%, almost four times that of China, and shrunk the share of farming in GDP to under 14%, although more than half of India's 1.25 billion people still depend on it.

To be sure, India is reforming parts of its economy. But not farming. If farmers are to escape poverty, farming needs to become more like manufacturing: Teched up operations, free as far as possible from imponderables, churning out quality produce that fetch the right price. For this, three things need to change. The old, labour-intensive methods must give way to technology for efficiency and higher yield; Pricing and subsidy mechanism must be overhauled; and, most importantly, India must look at few people farming. For far too long, farming has been at the mercy of nature. The use of technology is patchy and only one-tenth of every rupee the government spends on rural areas goes to improving productivity.

Our farm subsidy policy encourages the production of low-value staples, and the output of fruits and vegetables is not covered by the government's minimum support price. Much of the farm distress now stems from a glut of potatoes, onion and tomatoes. The monopoly of traders over local markets is perpetrated by law, killing all chance of farmers getting a fair price. In the past, a single season of dry spell sent the economy into recession. Now failed monsoons trigger localised distress. But unless the rural economy is unshackled from the time warp, our dream of double-digit economic growth will remain just that: A dream.

Other conflicts are replacing the war with IS

It's regrettable that the Tehran attacks are being used to sharpen geopolitical divides

The only thing surprising about the terrorist attack on Iran's parliament building and the tomb of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on Wednesday, which seems likely to have been carried out by the Islamic State (IS), is that it had not happened before. The IS' hatred for Shia Muslims has been one of its defining characteristics. Iran, despite being surrounded by violence and instability, has not experienced a major terrorist attack on its cities for seven years. While a number of other Sunni groups have Iran in their crosshairs, their attacks have been minor and ineffective. What is more troubling is the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) decision to point the finger of blame at Saudi Arabia, despite the evidence of IS involvement and at a time when Riyadh has thrown in its lot with the anti-IS coalition.

The IRGC and other hardline elements in Iran to some extent see the IS as yesterday's problem. Their focus is beginning to shift back to a renewed Tehran-Riyadh geopolitical rivalry. The Saudi-led blockade of Qatar, attempts to divide Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen and Riyadh's encouragement of Washington to take a more hostile line against Tehran are only a few of the sins that the ayatollahs are laying at Saudi Arabia's feet. Both camps have dirtied their hands supporting terrorist activities against the other. These are sentiments that the Persian Gulf region could do without. The election of the moderate Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is a reminder that both Riyadh and Tehran have political voices who have previously argued Saudi Arabia-Iran cooperation would be mutually beneficial.

At present moderation is not winning the policy arguments if the recent events are any indication. This reflects the strength of hardline clerics and religious paramilitaries in these countries. The attacks are being used to sharpen the geopolitics of the region—and replace the war with IS with other forms of conflict.

beyondthebite

RAJDEEP SARDESAI

Right time for cricket with Pakistan

It's our turn to show that India's dominance over our neighbour extends to all aspects of society

If paanwallahs in north India are a signpost for the election breeze, then taxi-drivers in London are often astute sports forecasters. When my London cabbie turns out to be a Pakistani who predicts that his team is heading for a heavy defeat against India in the Champions Trophy, you know the men in green are in big trouble. After all, the one thing that Pakistanis pride themselves on is the notion of 'junoon' (obsession) with beating the 'Big Brother'. All that has changed now is why the whopping 124 run loss to India in Birmingham should not come as any surprise. The fact is that Team India today is simply a vastly superior side to Pakistan.

It wasn't always like this. When I was growing up in the 1980s, Pakistan would beat India more often than not. That, of course, was the formidable Pakistan team led by the great Imran Khan. Perhaps, the last ball six which Javed Miandad hit in a Sharjah match in 1986 gave the Pakistanis a psychological edge which they did not relinquish for years. It took the brilliance of Sachin Tendulkar in the 2003 World Cup semi-finals to instil self-belief and end a decade-and-a-half of Indian inferiority. Since then, with every passing year, it has become increasingly apparent that the gap between India and Pakistan has widened to

the point where today, with the possible exception of left-arm fast bowler Mohammed Aamir, not a single Pakistani player would get into an Indian ODI side. So what has changed? Rewind to the late 1980s when both the Indian and Pakistani economies were in serious trouble. First Pakistan, and then India in 1991, was forced to turn to the IMF for a bailout to avert a balance of payments crisis. India responded by abandoning its socialist credo and pushed ahead with economic liberalisation, unleashing the energies of a dormant entrepreneurship. Pakistan, by contrast, struggled to get its act together in a critical period, hobbled by corruption and political uncertainty.

Since the turn of the century, India has seen a spell of prolonged political stability nurtured by fine democratic traditions while Pakistan has seen its prime ministers being jailed and assassinated even as the military has maintained its supremacy. In particular, the Pakistan army's brazen attempt to patronise terrorism against India and Afghanistan has now created a dangerous cocktail of guns and Islamic radicalism within its borders. Where India is now the fastest growing large economy in the world with a much-coveted place on the G20 high table, Pakistan has almost become a pariah state, identified with the



A cricket fan at the India-Pakistan Champions Trophy match, Edgbaston, England, June 4, 2017.

REUTERS

global export of terror.

These contrasts are now reflected on the cricket field. Where India with its financial muscle and frenzied crowd support has become the capital of the world game, Pakistan hasn't seen a test match being played on its soil since 2009 when a Sri Lankan team bus was attacked by terrorists in Lahore. Where Indian cricketers have benefitted from the Indian Premier League and constant exposure to top-class competition, Pakistani cricketers have been forced to ply their trade, for

the most part, before near-empty stadiums in the Gulf. Nowhere is the disparity between a highly-skilled and fit Indian team and a mediocre Pakistan side more apparent than in the shambolic state of the Pakistani fielding. Even an average club side would have fielded better in Birmingham.

Which is why this is as good a time as any to play Pakistan at cricket, if only to avenge the defeats of an earlier era. Even today, out of the 128 one-dayers played between the two countries, Pakistan holds the edge. They have won 72 matches, we have won 52 and there have been four no results. Forget the 'hyper-nationalists' who would like us to boycott all cricket with Pakistan. India-Pakistan cricket may seem like war minus the shooting to some but it remains eminently preferable to a potential bloody conflict on the border. In the Cold War years, recall how the Communists used sport to prove the superiority of their 'system'. Now, it's our turn to show the subcontinent in particular that India's dominance over Pakistan extends to all aspects of society, especially the sport we all are so passionate about.

Post-script: Last week, at a cricket conclave, former Pakistan captain Aamir Sohail asked me why India-Pakistan cricket flourished only when the generals were in power in Islamabad. I said: When the military rules Pakistan, terrorists are under the control of the army and so less prone to mischief. For once, the otherwise volatile Sohail seemed stumped for a counter-response.

Rajdeep Sardesai is a senior journalist and an author. The views expressed are personal

SAFETY NET



Encryption has offered opportunities for terrorists and criminals to hide many of their nefarious activities and potential evidence

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Regulating cyberspace: Security vs user privacy

The debate is between users' privacy and governments wanting to prevent crimes through surveillance

SUBIMAL BHATTACHARJEE



The terrorist attacks in London last weekend have resulted in a strong demand from British PM Theresa May for cyberspace and social media to be regulated.

Recently, the European Union Justice Commissioner for Human Rights Vera Jourová had alluded to proposing three or four plans in June this year that would require encrypted communications to provide law enforcement access to encrypted data with a swift and reliable response in a mix of voluntary and mandatory options. The latest Google transparency report claimed that it received 45,000 government requests for user data worldwide between July and December 2016, with 31,000 of them coming from outside the US.

Clearly a situation has emerged where the balance or imbalance between privacy and security concerns are hitting us right in the face and there is no clear solution. Social media in the last decade has become a sort of force multiplier for terrorists and other violent extremist groups in terms of communication. This has been further complicated with the introduction of encryption for communications over the internet. While encryption is a legitimate tool for ensuring privacy and

security for the network and its users, it has also offered opportunities for terrorists and criminals to hide many of their nefarious activities. Their emergence has made terrorists reduce their recourse to code languages and steganography, which allowed at least some form of tracing possibilities. Since April 2016, when WhatsApp incorporated end-to-end encryption for all messages sent via the app, the matter of finding a workable balance between privacy and security has become the concern of many stakeholders.

The situation is no better in India. A public interest litigation case on the WhatsApp privacy policy is being heard by a five-judge constitution bench in the Supreme Court of India and most of the substantial issues are being discussed including the vexed issue of privacy vs security. The department of telecom in its deposition in early April this year mentioned to the apex court its plan to put in place a regulatory mechanism for OTT platforms.

So what are the solutions and is there a workable mechanism in the context of growing legitimate security demands, the march of technology and the past response from OTTs? Clearly cyberspace has to remain a free medium and not become a surveillance domain to allow all forms of surveillance in the name of security. Meanwhile the EU Justice Commissioner's expected points could help the discourse move in a more focused direction.

(For full text, read <http://read.h/t/BOSI>)
Subimal Bhattacharjee advises and writes on issues of defence and cyberspace policy

The views expressed are personal.

Tangible cooperation still remains elusive

India would do well to ensure that it pulls the US closer economically, diplomatically and militarily

BENJAMIN SCHWARTZ



The history of India-U.S. relations is excellent proof that most theories of international relations are wrong. These theories hold that nations develop partnerships based on mutual interests and common values. But if these theories were true, America and India – democratic, English speaking, pluralistic nations challenged by unemployment, terrorism, and growing Chinese ascendancy – would be far closer.

But common interests aren't enough to drive history. It is telling that President Trump's first trip abroad was to Saudi Arabia, a country with little in common with the United States compared to India. Yet Trump's decision is understandable. There were real deals to be done in Riyadh – a \$100 billion plus in defence sales among others.

The US-Saudi partnership is nearing its 100-year mark and it remains a remarkably stable arrangement. The original pact – US military protection in exchange for stable oil prices – grew to include foreign policy cooperation and Saudi weapons purchases that lower the cost of America's military industrial base. It's precisely this highly transactional quality that sustains this relationship despite conflicting national interests and a vast cultural divide.

The India-US partnership rests on a much firmer foundation but tangible cooperation remains elusive. Maybe these two factors are interconnected. Might India and America's "natural alliance" – in Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's words – have produced an assumption that cooperation would emerge organically and therefore deal making was unnecessary? While a "strategic partnership" has been burgeoning since the 2005 Civil Nuclear deal, neither nation has seen this important goal as an urgent priority.

Today this partnership has never been

WHILE A "STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP" HAS BEEN BURGEONING SINCE THE 2005 CIVIL NUCLEAR DEAL, NEITHER NATION HAS SEEN THIS IMPORTANT GOAL AS AN URGENT PRIORITY

more compelling. China's economic and military growth is pulling countries including Russia and Pakistan into the Chinese diplomatic orbit. This trend will not reverse in the foreseeable future because of systemic Pakistani and Russian economic weakness. Recognising this shift, the Chinese are far more assertive in their military manoeuvring. India can respond by pulling the US closer economically, diplomatically, and militarily, but we still hear critics question America's trustworthiness. But trust is not a reliable concept upon which to make foreign policy decisions. The House of Saud was mistrustful of America in the 1930s and remains so today. Yet, Saudi leaders created conditions that compelled the US to establish a durable partnership.

It doesn't take the cunning of a desert tribal leader for India to construct conditions for an effective partnership with America. First, Indian leaders should do everything that can be done to embrace the diaspora. A century ago only 5,000 people of Indian heritage lived in America, but today they number three million and may be the most economically successful demographic. From America's best hotels, most prestigious medical centres and prominent law firms to Silicon Valley's tech giants, Indian Americans are a powerful force in the U.S. economy. And today with five Indian American Congressmen and one US Senator, this community is a political force as well.

Second, nothing is more effective in getting America invested in India's future than by getting Americans invested in India's economy. The history of American diplomatic and military policy consistently shows that the U.S. government is more inclined to support foreign countries when the economies of those countries are intertwined with that of the US.

Third, the Indian government need not purchase \$10 billion worth of US weapons systems, but it should rebalance its foreign defence acquisitions to encourage American defence companies to become India's champions in Washington. American companies also have a proven track record of integrating foreign countries into the global aerospace and defence supply chains (see Turkey, South Korea, and Japan). With Indian private companies becoming defence manufacturers, American companies are their natural partners, but Indian government orders need to be made for these relationships to be commercially viable.

Politicians, and political rhetoric, come and go, but tangible cooperation brings nations together. It's time to see more of this between the US and India.

Benjamin Schwartz is director, defence and aerospace, US-India Business Council

The views expressed are personal

Komal Rane
innervoice
THE POWER OF READING WILL COMPLETE THE MEANING OF LIFE

Komal Rane
When I was small, I was more interested in picture books, because at that age a child relates to the pictures more than words. When we enter our youth, we try to read books which we can directly relate to incidents in our life. Reading leads to increasing our knowledge as well as it enhances one's vocabulary.

If we start reading good books at a very early age, it develops our ability to think and reason. So if you're reading a good novel

which shares the author's experiences in life and how an author tackles that particular situation, it will help you take some good decisions in life. A good book brings a lot of positive energy. We can read and reread it till the message in it is etched in our mind. That positive energy will help us also radiate it to people around us.

The most beautiful thing about reading is that the information we gather is never wasted. It stays on with us forever, and the lessons we learn will come handy when in a difficult situation.

Books are like true friends who always show the right way. The biography of a sportsperson is filled with motivation and ambition, a book on spirituality will enhance the soul, academic books are meant to educate us and an autobiography teaches us life lessons.

Every book has a special purpose and is different in its impact on us. So to live life to its fullest, keep reading.

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.

innervoice@hindustantimes.com

comment