

Pakistan: Troubled Democracy

By Lt Gen V A Bhat

Lt Gen Bhat served as the Director-General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) at the Department of Defence Production (Ministry of Defence).

It is a well-known secret that Imran Khan was the choice candidate of the deep state of Pakistan to become PM in 2018.

The Pakistan Army with the assistance of the courts created an environment by first having Mr Nawaz Sharif disqualified. He was accused of being corrupt and then sentenced. The Army allowed him to leave the country in 2017. Mr Nawaz Sharif took political Asylum in Saudi Arabia first and then went to UK for medical treatment. In the 1997 elections held after dismissal of the Bhutto government of Pakistan, Sharif returned to serve a second term as prime minister. Soon after taking office for the second time, Sharif, backed by Bhutto, forced the elimination of the constitutional provision that had enabled his previous dismissal from office. Sharif also set about trimming the powers of the President and the military.

During his tenure as PM his Army Chief Gen Musharraf tried to check mate their traditional foe India by infiltration of so-called Kashmir freedom fighters into the Indian Side of the LAC threatening the Srinagar Leh highway. The Indian Army relied on this only available route to carry out winter stocking for the army personnel in the Leh Ladakh region. It lead to a skirmish between the two Armies wherein the Indian Army gave a bloody nose to their Pakistan Army personnel so called Freedom Fighters. Internationally too, Pakistan had to face humiliation.

Relations between Sharif and his handpicked Army Chief Musharraf strained. In October 1999 Musharraf did not allow the aircraft of his PM to land in Pakistan when Mr Sharif was returning from an official visit to Sri Lanka. Musharraf seized power and ruled till 2008 till he could not hold on to power.

In the elections held in 2008 the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) emerged victorious and formed the Government with a coalition of smaller parties. After five years elections were held again and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) won the popular mandate and was called upon to form the Government.

The victory was not without controversy, though. The rival Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, led by Imran Khan, denounced the elections as rigged and held protests in Islamabad for several months.

During his third tenure Mr Sharif made attempts to improve relations with India and attended the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected PM Mr Narendra Modi in Delhi during May 2014 much against the wishes of the deep State. Relations worsened further and by 2017, Mr Nawaz Sharif was booked on corruption charges. His name figured in the list of Politicians who had amassed wealth and had accounts in Swiss Banks. Held Guilty in 2017 he was forced to resign. He was allowed to leave Pakistan and he took refuge in UK.

In the next elections held in 2018 the Deep State having removed all obstacles could achieve its aim of PTI party led by Mr Imran Khan to get a mandate to form the next Government. Mr Imran Khan a popular Cricket Captain had spewed venom on the Western Nations, and particularly United States of America. By the time he became PM the Pakistan economy was in shambles having incurred huge debts from IMF and China for building the road known as the China Pakistan economic corridor. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a massive bilateral project to improve infrastructure within Pakistan for better trade with China, aim being to connect the deep-sea Pakistani ports of Gwadar and Karachi to the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China and beyond by overland routes. In addition the Financial Action task force had put sanctions against Pakistan for harbouring terrorists and unable to control their actions. The newly elected Imran Khan Government was just about settling down when Terrorist attacked an Indian uniformed convoy in Kashmir in February 2019 killing 40 personnel. India retaliated by the Air force crossing the Line of Control and destroying hideouts of the terrorists in Pak occupied Kashmir. The demolition of the terror camps in Balakot was a brave retaliation mission to pay homage to the 40 martyrs of one of the deadliest terror strikes in India. Pakistan Air Force (PAF) took an impulsive action by sending a force to hit Indian targets on 27 February 2019 as a response to the IAF strikes at the JeM terror camp in Balakot. As the Indian Air Force was stepping towards a win, the Indian fighters were asked to turn-cold, an aviation terminology asking fighters to abandon the chase of enemy jets. Wing Commander Abhinandan Vardaman continued chasing the Pakistani fighter and shot down an F-16 jet. In the courageous process, his aircraft got shot down and Pakistan took him prisoner. Wing Commander Abhinandan Vardaman was released on 01 March 2019 by Pakistan.

The re-elected Indian Government in May 2019, abrogated Article 370. This article of the Indian constitution gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, after the state joined the Indian Union after Independence. Pakistan was livid calling it totally unacceptable, as Kashmir has been the bone of contention between the two countries. Pakistan never accepted J and K joining India in 1947. All efforts were made by Pakistan to internationalise this action by India. The world at large ignored the hue and cry raised by Pakistan.

Pakistan government gave extension to the Chief of Army Staff Gen Bajwa fearing an attempt by India to annexe the balance of the Kashmir valley being administered by Pakistan. Imran Khan governed with the blessings of the Army and all was well. Relations between Mr Imran Khan and the Army worsened gradually as Mr Khan continued to rave and rant against US. Mr Khan also tried to sideline Saudi Arabia the undisputed leader of the Islamic World. He aligned with Turkey and Malaysia by organising an Islamic conference without Saudi Arabia. This attempt failed and Pakistan was snubbed by the balance of the Islamic World. Final straw was when Imran Khan tried to have an ISI chief of his choice by retaining Lt Gen Faiz Hameed who has been transferred out by the army chief as Corps Commander of Peshawar. Mr Khan blinked first and Gen Hamed was relieved and a new ISI chief as desired by Gen Bajwa was appointed. Things moved fast. The Pakistan Army decides to dump Mr Imran Khan and engineered the events which followed. The smaller parties whose support Mr Khan needed to have majority withdrew support. These small parties joined hands with PPP and PML and brought a no confidence motion against PTI government led by Imran Khan. Not having the requisite numbers in favour of his government Imran Khan lost this no confidence motion and had to resign. The parties who had joined hands to defeat Imran Khan got together and formed a new government. Mr Shehbaz Sharif younger brother of Nawaz was elected as PM with the Bilawal Bhutto also holding an important portfolio. The supporters of Imran protested and indulged in arson looting burning public and private property. These supporters did not spare an Army Cantonment including the official residence of a Corps Commander was looted and burnt. Imran Khan was put under house arrest and his supporters were taken to task. Imran Khan was subsequently arrested in August 2023 and put in jail. He was charged with selling state gifts received by him during his tenure as PM, making public, state secrets, and having got land from a property dealer in UK for favours exchanged.

In all these cases Imran Khan was sentenced and jailed. In the meantime, Gen Bajwa retired in November 22 and General Asim Munir took over as Army Chief. The Pakistan house was dissolved in August 2023, thereafter Mr Kakar was running a caretaker Government. In the interim period Mr Nawaz Sharif reluctantly made peace with the Pakistan Army and was allowed to return to Pakistan. All cases filed against him were expeditiously heard and he was found Not Guilty in all cases, making him eligible to contest elections. Pakistan Election Commission (EPC) decided to hold elections on 08 February 2024. Gen Asim Munir had ensured that Imran Khan could not stand for elections as he was convicted in the cases filed against him. Working in Tandem with the Supreme Court, EPC withdrew the recognition to PTI ensuring they could not participate in the elections scheduled as a Party. Supporters of PTI decided to take in election as Independents. Bat was the election symbol of PTI. This BAT symbol was denied to the supporters of Imran Khan as they contested as Independents. It is under these circumstances that elections were held recently. Imran Khan has consistently proclaimed that elections being held are manipulated and fixed to make Mr Nawaz Sharif win the election and run the government as directed from behind the scenes by Army. In spite of making all efforts the elections held in Pakistan has thrown up a surprising result. Maximum seats were won by the independents supporting Imran Khan followed by PML and PPP. This election has drawn criticism from all over the world. Mr Sharif has appealed to all other parties to join hands with him and his party to form a coalition government. Final Tally of seats won by the contestants is PML 75 PPP 54 Independents backed by Imran Khan party PTI 101 MQM 17 others 12. To form a government 133 seats are required. Mr Sharif has appealed to all other parties to join hands with him and his party to form a coalition government to keep PTI out of power. Subsequent talks between PML, PPP, MQM and other smaller parties joined hands to form a government headed by Mr Shebaz Sharif of PML as PM and supported by PPP from outside. PPP will be giving support on case to case making this shaky alliance more fragile. Mr Zardari will be the President. The Independents have so far stayed together. Many losing Candidates have approached the courts alleging rigging and asking re-elections. A retired army officer approached the Supreme Court (SC) to annul the elections and have a re-election under the direct supervision of the SC. The retired officer's petition was rejected, the petitioner fined. The election of the president of Pakistan is being held on 09 March 24, the first test of the newly coalition government. The road ahead for the newly formed coalition government is extremely challenging to say the least. The economic situation is precarious and will need many reforms which will be unpalatable to the masses. Though the Army had tried its utmost to oust Imran Khan it has lost its plot. Back door manipulations by the Army will make the task of the new government much more difficult. The State of Pakistan is the weakest now as it was in 1971. The Taliban rulers in Afghanistan are making the task of the Army and any government difficult. The Afghans have never accepted the Durand Line as the international boundary between the two countries. The Taliban reiterated the group's stance on the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan when the acting foreign minister, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, said the government doesn't recognize the Durand Line that has delineated the two countries since 1893. The Dy Foreign minister of Afghanistan has threatened to divide Pakistan like it was in 1971 when Bharat created Bangladesh. To add to the already existing woes India has stopped the flow of Ravi water river to Pakistan with the completion of the Shahpur Kandi Barrage (Dam). The road ahead is very difficult for the Army backed PML government. Only time will tell if the present gamble by the Army Chief pays off or not.

New India's Global Leadership

By Alok Tiwari

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In an ever-changing environment of international relations, India’s diplomatic journey unfolds with strategic evolution, commitment to regional stability and nuanced approach to new challenges. Shifting from a ‘Look East’ policy to a proactive ‘Act East’ policy with a ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy and ‘Security and Growth for All in the Region’ (SAGAR) initiatives jointly emphasize India’s role in shaping geopolitics. India has made remarkable progress in terms of its geopolitical landscape. The Prime Minister of India in the last ten years, has undertaken more than 130 visits covering 70 states around the globe. The idea of ‘Security and Growth for All’ along with efforts in developing the cultural linkages which has shaped the ‘Soft Power Diplomacy’ under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. All these factors have greatly contributed to developing and shaping the landscape of foreign policy of India.

Act East Policy: A Holistic Approach to Indo-Pacific Stability

The Look East policy, which began in 1991, has undergone major changes, including a focus on economic integration with Southeast Asian countries. This reflects a broad and comprehensive strategy that goes beyond economic interests to include socio-cultural cooperation and strategic dimensions. Recent developments such as the India-Vietnam logistics agreement promoting military cooperation demonstrate the emphasis on security of the Act East policy. This represents a departure from the purely economic orientation of the Look East policy, signalling India’s willingness to actively participate in the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. Policy changes align to address contemporary challenges and align with like-minded partners, as evidenced by India’s active participation in forums such as the Quad.

Economically, India’s ties with Southeast Asian countries have deepened, with trade reaching \$131.57 billion in 2022-23. This economic integration will not only strengthen the bilateral relationship but also position India as a key player in regional economic dynamics. Strategically, the Act East policy highlights India’s commitment to the rules-based international order, particularly in fora such as the Quad, where maritime security is a key concern.

The South China Sea, a critical dimension in maintaining regional stability, underscores the strategic importance of the QUAD. Territorial disputes and militarization in this region by various nations, including China, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Taiwan, highlight the need for cooperative measures. The Act East Policy positions India as a close ally of the Australia-UK-USA (AUKUS) alliance, contributing to efforts in overcoming challenges in the South China Sea.

India’s role in safeguarding vital sea lanes and chokepoints in the Indo-Pacific is emphasized, given its robust economy and naval capabilities. The Act East Policy aligns with India’s commitment to a rules-based international order, particularly advocating for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to ensure equal accessibility in the maritime domain.

(INDIA-ASEAN TRADE from 2017-2022)

India’s Trade with ASEAN	2017- 18	2018- 19	2019- 20	2020- 21	2021- 22	2022- 23
EXPORT (USD Billion)	34.20	37.47	31.55	31.49	42.32	44
%Growth	10.47	9.56	-15.82	-0.19	34.43	3.95
IMPORT (USD Billion)	47.13	59.32	55.37	47.42	68.08	87.57
%Growth	16.04	25.86	-6.66	-14.36	43.57	28.64
TOTAL (USD Billion)	81.34	96.80	86.92	78.90	110.4	131.57

Source: (Department of Commerce, Government of India)

Neighbourhood First Policy: Prioritizing Regional Relationships

India's historic ties with its neighbours underpin its "Neighbourhood First" policy, which reflects India's desire to prioritize regional relations and foster an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Originating from the Gujral Doctrine in the mid-1990s, this policy is a departure from the "big brother" mentality that recognizes asymmetries and supports policies of convenience and mercy. The policy gained momentum when the NDA government took office in 2014 and under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the unprecedented step of inviting all SAARC leaders, including those from Pakistan to the swearing-in ceremony. It represents a commitment to promote sustainability in the immediate environment. Credit lines totalling USD 14.37 billion have been extended to countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Maldives, with a significant portion earmarked for connectivity projects. This financial and infrastructure support aims to build a mutually beneficial foundation for stability and prosperity.

The policy recognizes the important role of peace in South Asia for development, while stressing that strengthening relations with its neighbours is an immediate priority. This policy actively participates in regional diplomacy and promotes political communication through dialogue and common solutions to bilateral issues. It focuses on communications, economic cooperation, technological cooperation, disaster management, and military and defence cooperation. Initiatives like the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) grouping and military exercises like Surya Kiran and Sampriti demonstrate India's commitment to promoting strong ties and regional security. This policy reinforces India's commitment to shared development and mutual prosperity.

SAGAR Initiative: An Approach to Maritime Cooperation

The Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflects India's commitment to boost cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. SAGAR's vision is based on several pillars: security, capacity building, collective action, sustainable development and maritime connectivity.

- **Security:** SAGAR prioritizes improving coastal security to protect land and sea areas. This is essential for maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Capacity Building:** Deepening economic and security cooperation is a key principle in promoting seamless economic trade and maritime security. The plan aims to create the necessary opportunities for sustainable growth.
- **Collective Action:** SAGAR promotes collective action to combat threats such as natural disasters, maritime piracy, terrorism and emerging non-state actors. Joint efforts ensure a harmonious response to common challenges.
- **Sustainable Development:** Sustainable regional development is a key focus that emphasizes cooperation between countries for mutual growth. SAGAR envisions a region where economic development is balanced with ecological sustainability.
- **Maritime Relations:** Trade with countries outside the coasts of India is an important aspect of promoting confidence, respect for maritime rules and peaceful settlement of disputes. SAGAR sees India as a responsible maritime actor contributing to global sustainability.

India's Diplomatic Development: Strategic Realignment

In short, India's diplomatic journey from 'Look East' to 'Act East' and simultaneous adherence to the Neighbourhood First policy and the SAGAR initiative represents a strategic realignment that prioritizes stability and cooperation. Share the prosperity. Policy East positions India as a key player in the Indo-Pacific region, proactively addressing the region's challenges and opportunities.

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How The Indian Navy Can Secure Its Sea Lanes

By Raja Menon

The writer is a former rear admiral in the navy and author of “A Nuclear Strategy for India”.

A beginning can be made by permitting a true power projection aircraft carrier of about 80,000 tonnes because without it, we may be overwhelmed in our waters.

It requires 30 years to build a Navy, said a famous Royal Navy Admiral during World War II, and added that it requires 300 years to build a tradition. We are not far from India’s independence centenary. The country will also be the world’s third richest nation in terms of GDP. What kind of armed forces will India need in 2047? Certainly not the force structure of today conceived two or three decades ago, in the closing years of the 20th century. The Defence Acquisitions Council has approved, in principle, the need for a third aircraft carrier. How large should the carrier be and what will be its role?

Even as we write this, the vital sea lanes of the country are in peril. Shipping companies are reluctant to use the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Insurance rates for cargo have skyrocketed, making both imports and exports costlier, owing to the indiscriminate attacks on merchant shipping by the Houthis operating from Yemen. The safety of sea lanes are a general public good, and yet only the US and the UK have retaliated against the Houthis.

India, after which the ocean on which all this occurring is named, is in a defensive posture with naval ships merely tasked with anti-piracy patrols. This will hardly dissuade the Houthis, much less punish them for interfering with the general world order. In the years to come, the possibilities of having to fight and win a naval battle will gradually recede. Our two existing aircraft carriers are essentially sea control ships, built to win naval battles by conferring air dominance over the ocean. Only the US, and increasingly the Chinese, have aircraft carriers that can project power and influence political decisions ashore by operating near troublesome shores.

Today, we have the chance to build, buy or acquire a true aircraft carrier, capable of operating 70 to 80 strike aircraft or five squadrons. When a carrier of this nature is present off the shores of a country, decision-makers in the capital are constrained in their freedom to decide what options are open to them. A classic instance of this strategy is the presence of the American carrier USS Gerald Ford off Lebanon, while the Israelis were attacking Gaza. The US, without firing a shot, kept Hezbollah from interfering and at the same time deterred Tehran, at who’s bidding the Hezbollah operate.

New Delhi was aware that what the Houthis were doing damaged the national vital interests of India and its maritime trade. New Delhi was also aware that the Houthis would not dare take such a major step without the blessing of the Ayatollahs in Tehran. India’s External Affairs Minister quite rightly made a courageous and bold journey to discuss matters with Teheran. There, he stressed the cooperative enterprises between Iran and India and mentioned the aggression by the Houthis. Now consider how much more effective the EAM’s trip to Tehran would have been if simultaneously, a large Indian aircraft carrier was operating off Aden. That would have been a classic instance of the use of navies as instruments of state policy — mainly foreign policy.

In 2047, as the world’s third most powerful nation, New Delhi will be expected to contribute to the maintenance of world order and the public good, and not merely be a consumer of the public good. This overarching formula applies to all three-armed forces. No longer will they be able to cocoon themselves in a timid defensive posture, concerned only with territorial integrity. In fact, for the world’s third most powerful nation, to say that they are obsessed with territorial invasion would be laughable.

There are deep issues here for the Army and Air Force. In 2047, India's GDP would be in the region of \$ 30 trillion. The defence budget of that at 2 per cent would be approximately \$600 billion or roughly what the US defence budget is today. The Army's share of that amount at the present 60 per cent would be \$360 billion. Would anyone contend that the major portion of \$360 billion is spent on keeping 6,00,000 soldiers guarding the Himalayan heights? Surely the Indian army cannot be kept tied down on the border by an incompetent political class unable to come to a border settlement with China?

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No Guarantee That AI-Driven Intel Would Ensure Better Security

By Vappala Balachandran

The Author is a Former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat.

It's not so much the lack of data that stifles final decision-making but human failure in arriving at the correct decisions.

There is high hope that artificial intelligence (AI) will improve the entire gamut of intelligence collection and interpretation, leading to prompt and correct decision-making. The present generation might not remember that there was a similar buzz in 1998-99, when then CIA Director George Tenet set up 'In-Q-Tel', a hybrid model of private sector venture capital firms operating with government technology procurement models. Its original name was 'Peleus', which was changed to 'In-Q-Tel' to remind us of 'Q' in James Bond movies.

This was to meet the difficulties in organising and sorting 'unstructured data' that was overwhelming American intelligence agencies. Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh exposed this problem facing the National Security Agency (NSA) in his article 'The Intelligence Gap' published in The New Yorker on November 28, 1999. In-Q-Tel was also aimed at helping the CIA hunt for Osama bin Laden, for which the CIA had created a special division to collate and synthesise intelligence data.

However, no reports appeared in the public domain as to how this hunt had been helped by In-Q-Tel before 9/11. On the other hand, Computer Network said on April 20, 2002, that "applications for In-Q-Tel funding have skyrocketed from about 700 during the operation's first two-and-a-half years of existence to more than 1,000 in the last six months" after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

In this background, we need to study a November 2023 Stanford University paper, quoting intelligence expert Amy Zegart, formerly with the US National Security Council, that AI could be "incredibly useful for augmenting the abilities of humans... from large amounts of data that humans can't connect as readily". For example, the man-hours spent in tracking Chinese surface-to-air missiles by scrutinising hundreds of satellite images could be saved by an AI algorithm to enable analysts to do deep thinking on Chinese intentions.

This is because various intelligence agencies are now facing what she describes as 'five mores' (challenges): 'more threats' from actors irrespective of geography; 'more data' that is 'drowning' their analysts; 'more speed'; 'more decision-makers' and 'more competition'. The US remains globally vulnerable.

The third, fourth and fifth points need more explanation as some of us are not used to the American style of opinion-forming for decision-making: Zegart says that in 1962, during the Cuban missile crisis, then US President John F Kennedy had 13 days to deliberate on policy options after discovering Soviet missiles in Cuba. In 2001, then President George W Bush had to do that within 13 hours after 9/11. Today, the decision time could be 13 minutes or less.

The fourth 'more' in the US is that the decision-making power is not merely concentrated in the White House. Decisions are altered by the Congress, while the media and 302 million social media users swing opinion formation, unlike in other countries. The fifth is 'more competition': anyone with a cell phone can be an intelligence collector. Last year, France 24 stated that Mnemonic, a Berlin-based NGO documenting human rights abuses in Ukraine, had collected three million digital records since the Russian invasion.

Zegart also underlines the difficulties of AI in its adoption for strategic conclusions and decision-making. Firstly, only a handful of large private corporations are capable of making 'frontier models'. When it is converted into governance, a question arises as to who will be in control regarding its security. The second question is: who will mitigate its risks? The third is its ethical control. She wants American academics and others to ask 'tough questions' about human-centred AI in national security. Would we be able to do this in India? The fourth is yet another risk that would affect the final analytical capability of AI in this background: "If you consider nuclear or financial catastrophe, how do we mitigate those risks? AI is very good at following the rules. Humans are really good at violating rules".

To this, I would contribute another dimension to the role of AI in decision-making in national security situations. As someone who has studied several cases of the so-called 'intelligence failure', I have found that it is not so much the lack of data that stifled final decision-making but human failure in arriving at the correct decisions. How will AI remedy that?

A 1974 study by the Strategic Studies Institute of the Army War College, Pennsylvania, on the 1941 Pearl Harbour attack — which killed around 2,400 soldiers, destroyed eight battleships, three cruisers and 188 aircraft — had found that the decision-makers had nine prior indicators that, if considered seriously, could have led to preventive measures. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War (first phase), the Agranat Commission had found several advance indicators that were not considered by then Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. The New York Times (December 1, 2023) made the same observation about the October 7 Hamas attack.

On October 23, 1983, vehicle bombings killed 241 American marines and 58 French soldiers in Beirut (Lebanon). It was treated as an intelligence failure till 2001, when a 1983 alert by the US NSA emerged in the District Court of Columbia, during a civil damages suit, linking Iran with the bombing with a mention of Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour, then Iranian Ambassador to Syria.

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Intriguing Shades of Law and Order

By Sanjay Sahay, IPS

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The differential dealing of law and order by the police and powers that control it, forces them to get into a bind more often than not. It happens very often when the issues are critical or the clashes need to be brought under control at the earliest. Understanding, what would flare up and what would be the proportionate nature of the force required to douse it, is the trickiest issue for the police and over the years no great effort has ever been to improve professional expertise in this regard. The effectiveness of the police law and order preparedness is generally shown to the world by the numbers deployed.

Of late the obstructionist logistics of a battle scale has made its way, with the tech peppering at most times, cameras, drones etc. Rubber bullets, water jets and tear gas shells remain the frontal interface. Had law and order skills of the police developed into an art / science and beyond it a practice in this country, commensurate to modern day requirements? Or is it each to his will or the local police manager's understanding of the situation.

More often than his understanding, quite often he may play a second fiddle, with government / political leadership usurping the law-and-order decision making process. What is of utmost importance today is whether law and order is handled as a pure law and order issue or it is seen through the prism of politics and acted upon accordingly.

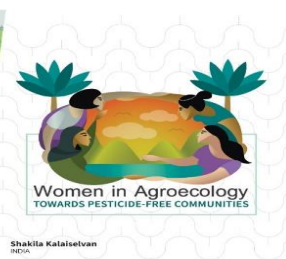
There would have been by now very clear-cut SOPs of handling law and order situations in this country, which could have spelt out everything, leaving very little to discretion. The standard response to size of the gathering, the nature of its movement, its history, nature of permissions, preventive and other actions, use of media and communication, should have become a drill by now. Protests: area wise / scale wise, in peace areas, in troubled areas, in border or Naxalite areas and what could not be desegregated for a standard professional response. The purpose of the law-and-order arrangements must be made very clear. The slippery issues range from kid gloves treatment to getting in war mode to totally leaving the scene empty for turmoil.

Turning a blind eye has not been unheard and more so when there are communal clashes. From “When a big tree falls, the earth shakes a bit,” to the agitating farmers being ploughed by a jeep to death, the Indian law and order arrangement are replete with instances, which keeps on being repeated in public utterances, bringing glory to no one, certainly not the police. There is not much of choice between being foolhardy or overzealous or dictated by non-professional masters. A nemesis scenario is the likely outcome. The police operations can be straightjacketed in this regard, provided there is will to do so. Doing anything different or doing anything more or less than the mandated should go through a harsh approval process. Do we have the requisite expertise and spine to deliver, what we are mandated to? At times it is a media battle too.

LAW AND ORDER IS A SHOW OF ITS OWN KIND, THE MEDIA HAS ADDED ANOTHER DIMENSION TO IT.

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India is Proud of: **Shakila Kalaiselvan** **Founder of “The Pallur Dalit Women’s Collective”**



FIGHTING HUNGER AND LANDLESSNESS, THESE DALIT WOMEN NOW REAP THE FRUITS OF THEIR OWN LABOUR

“Pallur Dalit Women’s Collective” is a group of 80 women from marginalised communities who, after years of bondage and labouring, are growing their own food organically. Shakila Kalaiselvan of Vellore had not experienced the security of the next meal, a strong family system, or the freedom of education. As a child, she started working with her mother in the fields shortly after her father abandoned them. However, after hours of labour, they never earned enough to have a satisfying meal and even had to sleep hungry on some days. Even after Kalaiselvan’s marriage and three children, she continued agricultural labour, growing produce for consumers, but was never able to meet her or her children’s nutrition needs. In 2016, her paths crossed with Burnard Fatima Natesan, a seasoned activist of Dalit and tribal rights. Over the last four decades, Natesan has been bringing justice, education and self-sustenance to these communities through her NGO, Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED).

Their meeting opened up an opportunity for Kalaiselvan to take over unutilised pieces of government land and start farming on them for herself. Studies by Oxfam show that 80% of farm work in India—sowing, winnowing, harvesting, and other labour-intensive, non-mechanised processes—is done by women. “Coming from extreme marginalisation, poverty and caste-based discrimination, none of these women can ever eat what they sow. Landlessness and debt mark their lives, generation after generation,” says Natesan. “So, we decided to help these women fight back by forming them into collectives which then claim illegally occupied and poramboke lands (which do not fall under revenue records) to do organic farming on them,” Natesan tells Social Story.

Founded in 2016, the Pallur Dalit Women’s Collective enabled 40 women to meet district authorities to identify three hectares of such illegally occupied or unused common lands and start farming on them. They were given initial resources such as seeds (which are usually taken over by seed companies and controlled by dominant caste landowners) and equipment. Today, the movement has grown to 80 women belonging to two collectives working on 15 farms in the villages of Vellore district. They plough these lands that are often overgrown with weeds and thorns, and level them to grow food grains, fruits and vegetables. This collective effort has given smiles to many poor Dalit families in that area who have now a respectable living due to earnings which they make from this initiative.

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