



Long road ahead

Budgetary support must be strengthened to make Ayushman Bharat a success

Ayushman Bharat has been rolled out as a health protection scheme that will provide guaranteed access to treatment that is free at the point of delivery to about 40% of the population selected on the basis of censused socio-economic indicators. It is the essential first step on the road to universal health coverage, although it has been launched by the NDA government quite late in its term, possibly with an eye on the 2019 general election. Since the Centre has announced that 10.74 crore families identified through Socio-Economic Caste Census data will be given an annual ₹5 lakh cover under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (the insurance component of the scheme), the question of eligibility appears settled. But the late start makes it virtually impossible for all those who are technically insured to avail of the services that state agencies must make available, within a reasonable time-frame. And, the allocation of just ₹2,000 crore during the current year to the PMJAY cannot provide the promised cover to the large population sought to be included. Not all States and Union Territories are in a position to raise their own share, and a few have not even joined the scheme. The challenge of funding, therefore, remains. And without adequate budgetary commitments, the implications of pooling the financial risk for such a large segment of the population through insurers or state-run trusts or societies make the outcomes uncertain.

Guaranteeing health-care access using private or public facilities presumes tight cost control. In the case of the PMJAY, this is to be achieved using defined treatment packages for which rates are prescribed. Costs are a contested area between the care-providers and the Centre, and many for-profit hospitals see the government's proposals as unviable. In the absence of adequate preparation, the Ayushman Bharat administration is talking of a rate review. More importantly, a lot of time has been lost in the NDA government's tenure, when State governments should have been persuaded to regulate the hospital sector under the Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, which dates back to 2010. The law broadly provides for standardisation of facilities and reasonable rates for procedures. Apprehensions of fraud have prompted Ayushman Bharat administrators to announce that some key treatments should be availed through public sector institutions. But public facilities have been neglected for long. Going forward, there are some clear imperatives. It is essential to reduce the pressure on secondary and tertiary hospitals for expensive treatments by investing in preventive and primary care facilities. Here, the 150,000 health and wellness centres of the National Health Protection Mission can play a valuable role. The first-order priority should be to draw up a road map for universal health coverage, through continuous upgradation of the public sector infrastructure.

After Salzburg

With her Brexit proposal rejected by the EU, the British PM's position stands weakened

The rejection of Prime Minister Theresa May's post-Brexit blueprint at the Salzburg summit rules out nothing as yet in Britain's rocky negotiations on withdrawing from the European Union. All the same, the development is a blow to Ms. May, who faces a possible backlash at the Conservative party conference this month. Her proposal, adopted by the Cabinet in July, has deepened divisions among the Tories. Two senior Eurosceptic ministers have quit. A controversial idea in the July white paper is for a hybrid arrangement, with Britain staying in the common market only for trade in goods and agriculture, and without the obligations of free movement of people. This is at odds with the EU stance of not allowing cherry-picking when it comes to its four basic freedoms – of movement of capital, goods, services, and labour. The other dispute is over the post-Brexit status of the soft border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Maintaining the status quo is critical to keeping the peace under the terms of the 1998 Good Friday agreement. Brussels seems flexible on its original proposal for full regulatory convergence and jurisdiction of EU courts over Belfast. This is meant to assuage London's concerns about two separate jurisdictions operating within the U.K. Britain's alternative proposal to avoid the return of checkpoints on the Irish border and to get around the difficulties of erecting invisible borders is to bring all of the U.K. under a common customs arrangement. Eurosceptics see this as aligning the country too close to the EU and curbing its freedom to negotiate trade deals outside the bloc. For Brussels, it would still amount to an unacceptable division of the EU's four freedoms.

European Council President Donald Tusk's remarks in Salzburg that the July proposals were not workable amplified these concerns. They drew angry reactions from Ms. May, who harked back to the *mantra* that a no-deal was better than a bad deal. But then, discrepancies in the opposing positions go back to the 2016 referendum outcome. Brussels had said then that while it regretted the verdict, it respected London's decision to leave. It stuck firm on established procedure and stressed that withdrawal negotiations could not commence until Article 50 of the EU treaty was triggered. It emphasised that exit from the bloc would involve costs for Britain, just as the benefits of membership entailed obligations. This accent on process could harden in the wake of the populist threat across the region to the European project. With elections to the European Parliament due next May, the leaders are keen that the anti-EU parties see the economic and political perils of quitting the bloc. Brexit uncertainty will linger, meanwhile.

Manufacturing nationalism

The decision to commemorate the 'surgical strike' of 2016 goes against the grain of Indian tradition



PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

Observing the politics of his day many years ago a wit in Britain is said to have remarked "Patriotism is the last resort of the scoundrel!" The wag in India would be forgiven if in a reference to political practice here he were to replace 'patriotism' in the *bon mot* with either 'nationalism' or 'secularism'. Right now, however, it is the observation on the uses to which the former is often put that is all too relevant for this country.

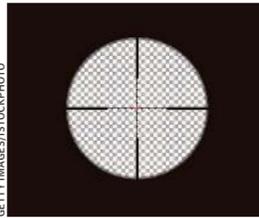
Commemorating an action
Even as we have grown accustomed to election time being turned into silly season by rival political parties scrambling for attention, nothing could have prepared us for the latest missive from the University Grants Commission (UGC), a body originally conceived to nurture our institutions of higher education. It is reported that the UGC has issued notice to the universities that they should prepare to commemorate the 'surgical strike' on India's north-western border which we are informed had taken place on September 29, 2016. This is disappointing to say the least, for we build public universities so that they hold up a mirror to ourselves, not so that they serve the interest of the government we elect. Public universities in a democracy are to be allowed independence from

the government of the day and, equally important, its individual members must be assured freedom from the dictates of the majority within them. This is not a utopian proposal as much as something essential for the advancement of knowledge, to which our progress is tied.

As in the age-old dictum, "all is fair in love and war", everything appears acceptable to this government as it prepares for the election of 2019 looming ahead. It has gambled on the value in its game plan of keeping alive the memory of India's response to a cross-border intrusion in the recent past.

Two questions arise when we reflect upon the action that is to be commemorated. First, how significant was it? Second, is it a wise thing to do to bring details of a military action into the limelight? In the history of India's defence engagements on the western front since 1947, the action in question is hardly the biggest or brightest.

War years and response
Surely, India's response to the infiltrators from Pakistan who had invaded Kashmir in 1948 was more impressive. While, of course, the wars of 1965 and 1971 were far bigger, in 1948 India not only was struggling to find its feet after the trauma of Partition but also was a fledgling country beset with economic hardship. That in the midst of all this the Indian armed forces air-lifted to Srinagar were able to achieve what they did is remarkable, especially given the terrain. Only the political leadership of the time is accountable for why the action did not fully secure India's borders by removing the invaders from the entire State of Jammu



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and Kashmir, an outcome believed to have been considered attainable by the then Brigadier, K.S. Thimaya, who had participated in the action and had asked for some more time to achieve the end.

In an inexplicable move, Nehru had vetoed this proposal and taken the matter to the United Nations. The Mountbattens, who were allowed to influence events in India for far longer than they deserved to, are believed to have had a role in this. But whatever is the truth, nothing that could have been achieved at the border in 2016 can match the action of 1948. Surely the people of India can see this, arousing scepticism over the motive for the commemoration of a mere 'surgical strike'. None of India's Prime Ministers had gloated over victory in war. Lal Bahadur Shastri's humility helped him steer clear of this in 1965, and Indira Gandhi, not given to undue modesty, did not make capital out of the India-Pakistan war of 1971, which had left the adversary not just bloodied but halved. It was left to others to liken her to Durga. In their dignified silence, India's former Prime Ministers had followed the practice of great leaders who refuse to glory in aggression. The countries of Europe remember the sacrifices of their soldiers in the two World Wars but they do

so with restraint. Can it be said that they love their country less for merely wearing a flower for a day, not requiring their great universities to celebrate victory in war?

Having the edge

A second reason for avoiding public remembrance of the 'surgical strike' of 2016 would be that it undermines any advantage that may be possessed by India. While it may at times be necessary to pursue infiltrators to their lair, it can be strategically unwise to keep advertising your past actions. Here Oscar Wilde's advice to the young that "one must always be a little improbable" is a good principle to follow even in matters of defence. The enemy should be left constantly guessing how you will react, so that you would be able to exact even greater damage when he attempts to hurt you the next time round. Politicians reveal their amateurishness in matters military when they boast in public of the deeds of our soldiers.

In general, it is unfortunate that India's politicians are unable to make common cause when it comes to national security. Something of this kind is much needed in a matter that is being aired in our television debates right now. In a relatively rare moment of sanity emanating from them, an anchor suggested that henceforth defence acquisitions be made through bipartisan committees so that there is transparency. This would avoid the mud-slinging that we are left to witness over the Rafale deal and ensure that the national interest is upheld.

Above all, dragging our armed forces into a jingoistic nationalism to serve some narrow political end

stems from an ignorance of India's eternal tradition. Ashoka Maurya renounced violence after his victory at Kalinga and spent the rest of his life spreading the idea of non-violence. The Chandela kings, after victory in war, built exquisite temples at Khajuraho, leaving them for the use of their people. For a soldier to aspire to reward, whether of wealth or fame, was considered a fate far worse than death. This after all is the message of the Bhagavad Gita. Apparently some of India's politicians are unaware of their inheritance.

A national spirit

Nations are imagined communities. They first arise in the minds of the people. The state can only tap into this national spirit; it cannot create it. Ashokan edicts in the four corners of the country, erected at a time when transporting people and communicating ideas was a Herculean task, testify to the fact that at least some Indians had imagined a community long ago. This imagination had revolved around ethical conduct and transcended cultural, linguistic and religious differences. Over two millennia later it was to erupt in the form of a national movement when Gandhi's call to unite against a colonial power was instinctively heeded by millions of ordinary Indians. By the 21st century, Indians imagine themselves as a community, it may be said, of diverse nationalities. They must view with amusement the ersatz nationalism being manufactured over a routine action somewhere along India's north-western border.

Pulapre Balakrishnan is Professor at Ashoka University, Sonapat

Missed opportunity or ill-timing?

The acrimony over the proposed Foreign Ministers' meeting has set back India-Pakistan ties



MURTAZA SOLANGI

That was quick. A quick cool breeze turning into a scorching slap of hot wind of the desert. We had a rocky start when the routine congratulatory letter by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan calling for constructive engagement was translated as the signal for resumption of dialogue. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) wasted no time to embarrass Pakistan's Foreign Office for its lack of capacity to understand the diplomatic language. Despite another facepalm over the contents of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's phone call with Mr. Khan, the Pakistan Foreign Office put up a brave face to ease the tension between the U.S. and Pakistan on the eve of Mr. Pompeo's five-hour visit on September 5.

The pundits in Islamabad saw a prize for the patience. Besides the same ol', same ol' statements issued unilaterally from both sides, there was something special discussed on the sideline related to India and Pakistan. While the U.S.

insisted on pulling the plug on India and Afghan-centric militants, Pakistan prodded the U.S. to push Delhi for positive engagement and a commitment to act positively should India accede to normalisation and finding mutually acceptable solutions to long-standing problems.

On the heels of the U.S. visit to the region, Mr. Khan sent Mr. Modi a letter, presumably to respond to his congratulatory letter but actually to bring a thaw into the frozen relationship. The letter might not be rich on style but did offer something to both countries. It offered Pakistan a face saver by mentioning Kashmir, Siachen and Sir Creek, while it offered India the possibility of resumption of trade and the T word. Pakistan was willing to talk about terrorism, Indians have always wanted to talk about it as they have maintained it as the main hindrance in the resumption of the comprehensive dialogue.

Back and forth

On Thursday, September 20, the MEA spokesperson acknowledged the letter from Mr. Khan, requesting a meeting of the two Foreign Ministers, Sushma Swaraj with Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and said a meeting would take place but should not be construed as the resumption of the dialogue process.

The U.S. Department of State



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wasted no time by welcoming the scheduled meeting in an almost condescending tone. Within 24 hours, the very next day the MEA Spokesman made a U-turn, cancelling the meeting. Had it been just the cancellation, it would have been taken lightly, but the direct accusation against Mr. Khan by naming him created a new crisis.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the party now ruling Pakistan, had in the past used very harsh language against former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who had contested the 2013 elections on the promise of improving relations with India. "Modi ka yaar gaddar (Modi's friend is a traitor)" was a theme that ran for almost the entire campaign period against Mr. Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in the elections this summer. The PTI had accused the PML-N of establishing personal relations with Mr. Modi and doing personal business with him instead of promot-

ing the national interests of Pakistan. The party had hit Mr. Sharif hard for Mr. Modi's visit to Lahore in December 2015 and had blasted his government on an Indian businessman's visit to Pakistan in April 2017.

With the controversial elections of July 25 behind him, Mr. Khan turned the corner. His first informal acceptance speech offered the olive branch to India. "If India moves one step, we will move two," he said.

Islamabad was rife with rumours that he wanted to invite Mr. Modi besides his friends in Bollywood and cricket friends for his oath-taking ceremony on August 18.

Somehow Mr. Khan was prevented from inviting Mr. Modi, but one of his cricket buddies, Navjot Singh Sidhu, did turn up. While his seating arrangement and the *ja-pha* (bear hug) with the Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, created quite a stir in India, Pakistan government circles were bullish on the offer to open the Kartarpur border crossing for Sikh pilgrims. While *The New York Times* even suggested that the Pakistani military had tried to reach out to the Indian side to discuss outstanding issues, a story never denied by the military, the very ambiguity created a positive atmosphere before the scheduled meeting between the top diplo-

rats of both countries on September 27.

More fireworks

All that changed on Friday, September 21, with the cancellation of the meeting that almost insulted the Pakistan PM. While the Pakistan Foreign Office and Mr. Qureshi expressed their disappointment, they stayed within the diplomatic ambit and did not attack the Indian side. That changed when Mr. Khan on Saturday, September 22, attacked Mr. Modi without naming him and chiding him as the small man holding a big office. As if that was not enough, the statement by the Indian Army Chief threatening Pakistan and the retaliatory statement by the Pakistan Army spokesperson has made the situation more toxic than the pre-election situation. We expect more fireworks in New York City during the UN General Assembly.

Will the two men in Delhi and Islamabad find a way to untangle the relations should Mr. Modi continue to rule after the upcoming elections in India is a question that hangs in the air in both countries now. Politics is the art of the possible, and thankfully both Mr. Modi and Mr. Khan are politicians.

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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.

More questions

Bringing in a 'novice company' in the place of a 'Navratna' and the issue of pricing require a detailed explanation from the ruling party as far as the Rafale deal is concerned. The line being adopted to try to paint anyone who questions or criticises the establishment as anti-national is unacceptable. This is an issue that concerns India's security and we need to know what transpired between the governments of India and France; why a private company was chosen; why there was a reduction in the number of aircraft; and, of course, the pricing. The stonewalling on having a JPC inquiry is only adding fuel to the fire (Editorial, "The plane truth", September 24).
G.B. SIVANANDAM, Coimbatore

The Hindu at 140
That *The Hindu* is celebrating its 140th anniversary is a matter of

great joy (24-page tabloid, "The Hindu@140", September 20). The occasion reminds me of the past, as my father was a voracious reader of the daily. He usually settled down with a copy and read it without a break, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. He devoted time to preserving cuttings of columns and preparing albums of reports. My memory of one of these – the life history of Rajendra Prasad – is still vivid. I was a student at that time and often read this. It helped me improve my English.
V. RAMARAO, Chennai

I have been a reader since 1964 when I joined Southern Railways. Those days, my colleagues and I used to make sure that we incorporated a new word we spotted in the daily in our official correspondence, which helped us gain the appreciation of our superior officers. The standard of English was high. I often used to preserve special

issues. Let me move to the present. There are quite a few typographical errors across the pages and inappropriate hyphenation. As a prestigious daily, there must be a conscious effort to overcome these irritants.
N. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

The presence of the daily in my life is important as it helped shape my personality. It was a professor in my college who made me aware of the daily when I was a graduate student, in 1994. I always recommend it to my students to improve their English and knowledge of current affairs.
SHIVNARAYAN S. WAGHMARE, Parli-Vaijnath, Maharashtra

I am delighted that a daily, which is one of the most trusted and edifying newspapers in India, is celebrating another milestone. As a child, in 1998, I remember my father sitting on his lap and teaching me the English alphabet using the headlines.

The paper is a part of the family.
RAMALA KINNERA, Hyderabad

I have been reading the paper for more than three decades now. It has become a habit and I start experiencing panic attacks if the daily does not reach the house before 6.15 a.m. The English I learned from the paper is also what helped me land a lucrative job in the U.K. In all my training sessions, I always make it a point to talk to my candidates about the benefits of reading the paper.
S. GOVINDARAJAN, Chennai

One-teacher school
The moving photofeature, on R. Ushakumari, the only teacher of the Kunmathumala Agasthya Eka Adyapaka School inside a biosphere in Kerala, is the highest honour that can be conferred on her (Section 2, 'Framed' page, "The lone teacher", September 23). It is nothing but the sheer passion to

teach poor children that must be the driving force behind her all these years. When every vocation, including teaching, has become money-oriented, here is a special person who has been doing her job quietly and efficiently. She stands head and shoulders above the others. It is not known whether she has been honoured by the State and Central governments.
V. LAKSHMANAN, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

Ms. Ushakumari's story is amazing – travelling from her home by scooter, to getting on a ferry, even helping the boat man, and then trekking to the school in the jungle for the sake of poor tribal children. In an age where teachers seek teaching assignments in towns, cities and

metropolitan areas, this teacher's noble attitude to ensure that the children get a proper education is stunning. It is surprising why the Central government is oblivious of her existence.
J.P. REDDY, Nalgonda, Telangana

Every week, the 'Framed' pages continue to amaze the reader. The teacher's story reminded me of the literary masterpiece, *The Legends of Khasak* by O.V. Vijayan. Each picture depicting the life of the teacher and her students conveyed life and warmth. The image of the children waiting for the arrival of their beloved teacher was riveting. The one with the bulldozer was depressing.
SAJIN T.S., Kochi, Kerala

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The opening sentence in the graphic that accompanied "ISRO setting up launch pad for Gaganyaan mission" (Sept. 22, 2018) erroneously said the *moon mission* would send a three-person crew to space. Actually, it is a *manned space flight* programme.

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