

“...quantity as monitored by all stations between 5pm and 6pm

words. That's not all. If the information isn't maintained by a government office, it won't be mandatory

applicable. With the way you've set it up, if it does not pertain to his charge. However, Section 4 (5) of the UP rules says, "...if a part or whole of

raised the hackles of RTI activists

ties. The rules, notified on December 3,

complainant's appeal. "This provision makes RTI activ-

investigative causes that either go against the spirit of the RTI Act.

Nag... frequently deposited before the Citizen's Tribunal in the wake of 2002 riots.

India's Intelligence Quotient: Is Pathankot a Deflection or Inflection Point?

The Needle's Eye



CHAITANYA KALBAG

When we abandon rhetoric and posturing and put our heads together and start to think of what is going to make our economy better, then things start happening

President Barack Obama delivered his final State of the Union speech at 9pm in Washington and New York on Tuesday. That is the same prime time every evening when we Indians endure multiple SOTUs emanating in hot gusts from our television screens. Americans are luckier. They get to hear a SOTU oration just once a year.

I reproduce three of the four big questions that Obama posed for Americans in his speech, because they could well be posed for Indians as well. How do we give everyone a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy? How do we make technology work for us, and not against us, especially when it comes to solving urgent challenges like climate change? And how can we make our politics reflect what's best in us, and not what's worst?

These are good questions for Indians in 2016. When we abandon rhetoric and posturing and put our heads together and start to think of what is going to make our economy better, then things start happening.

First, though, we have to get past the windbagery. There has been a lot of that, especially after the New Year's terrorist attack on the Pathankot Air Force base.

We have heard of intelligence failures, a poor tactical response, whether or not National Security Adviser Ajit Doval should have sent in the National Security Guard or whether the army ought to have been rushed into the airbase. There was also a premature claim by the authorities that all the terrorists had been 'neutralised' the very first day, January 2. As we know, it took three more days before all the terrorists were confirmed killed and the base secured. Even now, it is not clear if there were four attackers, or six. There were many lapses, including the ease with which the attackers got into the base over an 11-foot fence and then rested a

whole night in a disused equipment shed.

But it was not all bad. India lost seven men, and as Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar was at pains to stress, only one of them died in direct combat. It takes a long time to clear up after a terrorist incident - authorities are still piecing together evidence from the November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris. Nine of those attackers are dead but two are still on the run including purported mastermind Salah Abdeslam.

I counted at least 58 terrorist attacks in India so far this century. These are the major ones, the biggest one being the November 26, 2008 attacks in Mumbai that left at least 191 people dead at multiple locations. The question is, how many more attacks would have taken place if our intelligence agencies and the police were not vigilant? Every successful terrorist attack implies a failure of intelligence and security. But how prepared are we for large-scale terror attacks? Before we examine this, let us also consider the fact that terror attacks on India represent the permanent war that we are engaged in. When I worked with an international news agency a boilerplate phrase that reporters used in stories on subcontinental tensions was "India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence, two of them over Kashmir." The reality is that, starting from 1947 when Maharaja Hari Singh acceded to India, our western neighbour has waged proxy war against us, starting with the in-

vasion of Kashmir by rapacious Pathan tribesmen that drew the two new armies into first combat. Especially after India and Pakistan tested atomic weapons in May 1998, making ours the only permanently hostile border in the world separating two huge nuclear-armed militaries itching to obliterate one another. Pakistan has preferred using irregulars, whether you call them jehadis or Fridayen or terrorists or freedom fighters, rather than engaging

the enemy in a full-scale war. There is little else that you can expect from a theocratic state where every National Security Adviser is a retired general, and where the army is inextricably linked to a web of businesses, including drug- and gun-running, that make it near-suicidal to engage in a conventional war that might wipe out its 'industrial' assets.

We should not forget that the last conventional war in 1971 led to the surrender of East Pakistan and the humiliation of a ceasefire imposed by Indira Gandhi on General Yahya Khan in the west.

India's monumental mishandling of the 1987 Kashmir elections and the insurrection that broke out in the Valley two years later only played into Pakistan's hands. If we are talking about failures of intelligence and preparedness, we cannot get worse examples than the shepherds who

spotted Pakistani infiltrators in Kargil in 1999, immediately after Atal Behari Vajpayee drove across the border to embrace - who else? - Nawaz Sharif in a 'historic' peace breakthrough. That was a war that Pakistan again blamed on 'non-state actors' but involved their own Northern Light Infantry soldiers in mufti.

Nor can we forget the New Year's Eve 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC 814, and the humiliating release by Vajpayee's government of three militant leaders in exchange for the hostages. Chief among the three was Masood Azhar, who promptly whipped up the Jash-e-Mohammed, which staged the December 2001 attack on India's parliament. Now how worse can a security failure be than letting terrorists strike at the very core of your democracy?

The parliament attack nearly led to a full-scale war. Back then I was Asia Editor at Reuters. India and Pakistan both fell within my watch and I remember spending many nights sweating over detailed plans to evacuate staff and their families if nuclear-tipped missiles were launched by either country. We have lived through that, and much more, and Pakistan continues to wage war on India through its cat's paws.

Of greater importance than the finger-pointing that starts when an incident like Pathankot takes place is our failure to set up a robust, cast-iron intelligence machine. P Chidambaram, who was named the home minister after the traumatic

Mumbai 2008 attacks, admitted in a recent column that his biggest regret is not setting up a National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), which was hazyooked by the blackmail and backstabbing that paralysed the UPA-led coalition government in Delhi.

Equally shocking - and this goes back to Obama's questions above - was the failure by Manmohan Singh's government to set up the much-daily-moaned NatGrid - the National Intelligence Grid that would have pulled together data from core security agencies to form a pattern that could prove invaluable in the fight against terror. Raghu Raman, a former army officer who was NatGrid CEO, told me that he and his team prepared a Detailed Project Report in 110 days flat, but the grid was never set up during his five-year stint. Chidambaram was moved from the Home to the Finance Ministry in July 2012, and both the NCTC and NatGrid went into deep freeze. Raman was fired the moment Narendra Modi took office in 2014.

Besides Doval, himself a former director of the Intelligence Bureau, the Prime Minister's Office has two other senior intelligence officers in key posts. RN Ravji is the Director of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and former IB director Asif Ibrahim is Modi's special envoy on counter-terrorism and extremism. You couldn't ask for a better brains trust to craft a better readiness-and-response strategy. Will these men make Pathankot a point of deflection or inflection?

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ANIRBAN BORA



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