



A climate risk

Only proper planning can insure against the inevitable extremities of nature.

Highlights:

1. The monsoon is nearing its halfway mark and July, which is among the rainiest months, began with a rainfall deficit but has since seen a revival. For most of last week, all-India rainfall has been over 50% more than what is normal for this time of the year.
2. Many regions in the Konkan coast and the southern peninsula have been seeing instances of extreme rainfall. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data on the regional distribution, the 'South Peninsula' has seen 29% more rain from June 1-July 25 than what is normal for this period.

Changing Climate patterns:

1. The monsoon is characterised by unexpected variability that forecast models can capture only in a limited way. However, much evidence is accumulating that there is a distinctive change in climate patterns.
2. The frequency and the strength of cyclones over the Arabian Sea have increased in the last two decades. There has been a 52% increase in the frequency of cyclones over the Arabian Sea from 2001-2019 and an 8% decrease over the Bay of Bengal compared to 1982-2002, when, historically, most cyclones have been in the Bay of Bengal, according to a new study in Climate Dynamics.
3. Even the duration of these cyclones has increased by 80%. More cyclones are bringing in more moisture from the Arabian Sea and contributing to extreme rainfall events over the western coast, the most recent example being cyclone Tauktae in May, which at 185 kilometres per hour was among the strongest cyclones to approach Mumbai. They drive storm surges that flood the coast.
4. Studies show that a heating globe has increased atmospheric moisture levels, contributing to short, intense spells of rains. The interaction between warming, rainfall and temperature is complex and variables such as aerosol emissions, particulate matter pollution, agriculture and forestry patterns must be accounted for.



5. However, the broader picture is that extreme events — bursts of torrential localised rainfall and prolonged droughts and heat waves — are likely to increase, making the role of accurate forecasts that are able to warn of such events at least three to five days ahead even more important.

Climate proofing:

1. The bigger challenge is to undertake the so-called climate-proofing of the most vulnerable regions and taking warnings of scientific risk assessment seriously.
2. Evacuations ahead of a flood or a cyclone are not always effective and what is needed is limited construction in places that have been marked vulnerable.
3. Just as it is possible to plan earthquake-resilient structures and site them scientifically, but hard to anticipate a major quake, similarly, proper planning can insure against the inevitable extremities of nature.
4. International climate change agreements to limit greenhouse gas emissions will yield benefits only in the very long term but what is done in the near future will mean the difference between surviving and thriving.

Money changer

India needs to move forward on introducing an official digital currency.

Digital Currency:

1. In contrast to India's continued ambiguity over the legality of cryptocurrencies, its stance on introducing an official digital currency has been reassuringly clear and consistent over time.
2. And, four years after an inter-ministerial committee recommended that India launch fiat money in digital form, the Reserve Bank of India has indicated that pilot projects to figure out its viability are likely to be launched soon.
3. RBI is currently working towards a phased implementation strategy and examining use cases that could be implemented with little or no disruption.
4. The clarity is welcome, given that the much-awaited Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021, is yet to be introduced.



5. In recent years, the significant rise of private cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ether has spooked central banks throughout the world and pushed the case for official digital currencies.
6. A 2021 BIS survey of central banks, which found that 86% were actively researching the potential for such currencies, 60% were experimenting with the technology, and 14% were deploying pilot projects.
7. China, having already engaged in pilot projects for its digital RMB, is in fact planning a major roll-out soon. There has been little doubt, therefore, that India needs a digital rupee. The important questions are about the details and the timeline.

Deliberating digital Rupee:

1. There are crucial decisions to be made about the design of the currency with regards to how it will be issued, the degree of anonymity it will have, the kind of technology that is to be used, and so on.
2. It is possible that the question of the degree of anonymity, especially, will be quite a challenging one. While official digital currencies can borrow the underlying technology feature of private cryptocurrencies, they significantly differ from the latter in their philosophy and goals.
3. Also to be considered are the possible impacts of the introduction of an official digital currency on people, the monetary policy, and the banking system.
4. There are risks to be considered as well, not the least of which will be those emerging from cyberattacks. What is more, many laws need to be amended to make the digital rupee a reality.
5. So, while India might have done exceedingly well in digital payments in recent years — the Deputy Governor said they have grown at a compounded annual growth rate of 55% over the last five years — the digital rupee will be something else altogether.



Getting India's military convergence formula right

For genuine military jointness, a blending of minds and tailor-made solutions are critical.

Issues before the IAF

1. Media reports suggest that counting even ageing aircraft, the IAF is 25% short on fighter squadrons. A pan service shortage of about 400 pilots, almost 10% of their authorised strength, further aggravates this.
2. Therefore, the IAF has a point when it warns against splitting assets, for, there may be nothing much to split. Whether now, or in any future joint arrangement, the service chief is responsible for the operational availability of assets. He alone will be blamed for failures. So he must protest with all his might.
3. Vulnerabilities should be known to all stakeholders. But shortage alone is not at the core of the IAF's objections. It is also the prospect of operational plans for the IAF being made outside the service.

Finding common ground

1. Confidence needs to be developed that rightly staffed apex joint organisations can draw up professional operational plans for airpower.
2. With dwindling budgets, a steadily deteriorating security situation and the march of technology, the armed forces understand the need to synergise. But natural human faults interfere.
3. For instance, different services do not co-exist well where they are colocated. Bitter fights over land, buildings, facilities, etc. mar optimal operational synergising.
4. Then there is the issue of giving each other the best, or of wanting to be with each other. The Andaman and Nicobar Command suffered from the lack of a substantial operational charter, and the services not positioning appropriate personnel or resources there.
5. Moreover, as a joint tenure did not benefit a career, no one strove for it.

Recommendations:

1. Major reorganisations must strictly follow the sequence of written concepts, their refinement through consultation, simulation or tabletop wargaming, field evaluation and final analysis before implementation.



2. This would help address command and control, asset adequacy, individual service roles, operational planning under new circumstances and the adequacy of joint structures.
3. Who gets to lead also matters. The Western Command between the Indian Army and the IAF, the Northern Command with the Indian Army, Maritime Command with the Indian Navy and the Air Defence Command with the IAF may be an acceptable formula.

Way Forward:

1. As we hurtle towards inevitable reorganisation, some specifics are required. The first is the need for a comprehensive National Security Strategy to guide the services develop capacities required in their respective domains.
2. The second is the need to transform professional education and inter-service employment to nurture genuine respect for others.
3. The third is that the armed forces must resolve their differences among themselves, as the politicians or bureaucrats cannot do it.
4. The fourth is to ensure good quality staff, inadequate numbers, at apex joint organisations, to reassure individual services and those in the field that they are in safe hands.
5. The fifth is the acceptance of the fact that what works for other countries need not work for us. We may need tailor-made solutions which may need more genuine thinking. For genuine military jointness, a genuine convergence of minds is critical. Decrees have limitations.

Lessons from India's food security response

Government measures to tackle the food crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective.

COVID Relief: Food, Livelihood, Health

1. With a reduction in COVID-19 infections as the second wave weakens in India, it is important to focus on the pandemic's disruptive impact on the food security and livelihoods of the poor and marginalised.
2. The deadly virus has been around for two years and it is not clear as to how and when it will end. However, we do have enough in terms of a hindsight



analysis of policies and interventions that promise food and livelihood security, along with the strengthening of health support, for millions facing the wrath of the pandemic.

Pivoting safety nets

1. Coming to the impact of COVID-19's fallout, vulnerable and marginalised families in India continued to be buffered against the food crisis by its robust Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
2. Key measures initiated by the Union government included allowing the States to lift their allocations for six months in one go, in anticipation of a surge in demand for food grains through the public distribution system.
3. As data shows, there was an unprecedented spike in the uptake of subsidised and free foodgrains during the lockdown. The public distribution system became a lifeline for millions hit by the pandemic.

Increase entitlements

1. A dynamic analysis of the food security scenario and feedback from different stakeholders allowed the Government of India to increase entitlements given to National Food Safety Act (NFSA) beneficiaries in 2020.
2. For instance, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), 81.3 crore NFSA beneficiaries received an additional 5 kg of foodgrains per person per month and 1 kg of pulses per family per month, free of cost, for eight months from April to November 2020.
3. Under the Atmanirbhar Bharat package, 8 crore migrants were provided 5 kg of foodgrains per month, free of cost.
4. The government also allowed NGOs/civil society organisations to buy rice and wheat at subsidised prices directly from nearby Food Corporation of India (FCI) warehouses.
5. The PMGKAY was introduced in 2020 for eight months to provide relief to 80 crore beneficiaries covered under NFSA from COVID-induced economic hardships.
6. The scheme was reintroduced this year for the third phase implementation for two months till June and later extended till November under the fourth phase.



Addressing challenges

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has once again drawn attention to addressing the aspects of access and portability of food entitlements. It is critical to leave no one behind in times such as these and crucial for states to find solutions so that no one goes hungry.
2. Ensuring that food support focuses on at-risk groups, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, single women-led households, transgender persons, HIV-affected persons, displaced persons, refugees and orphan children, is at the heart of 'Leave No One Behind.
3. The scale of India's public food distribution systems is immense and has gone through constant navigation and improvement, which is commendable. But more needs to still be done to improve access and inclusion among the missing vulnerable population.

Way ahead

1. First, the introduction of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme is an innovation that can be a game-changer, allowing beneficiaries to access their food entitlements from anywhere in the country.
2. This is especially important for a country like India with a massive mobile population and migration between States. The scheme takes the massive digitisation of the supply chain, distribution and access to the next step, ensuring anyone benefits from anywhere in India.
3. Second, climate change will continue to affect agriculture and food security, and the impact on the poor and vulnerable can be devastating. Massive efforts are needed towards programmes that focus on building resilient agriculture that is adaptive to changing weather and needs through the introduction of newer varieties of crops, efficient irrigation systems, and the promotion of crops as per the agro-climate zones
4. Thirdly, a third of all food produced is wasted. There should be enhanced efforts to prevent losses.
5. Finally, 2021 offers a unique opportunity for advancing food security and nutrition through transforming food systems with the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit, the Nutrition for Growth Summit and the COP26 on climate change.



Are law and technology a solution to fake news?

Fake news and its associated social problems have been a major concern and the Indian government has been attempting to bring in several legal amendments to deal with its creation, propagation and effects. Social media companies, too, are investing billions of dollars into technological solutions such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify fake news and its proliferation.

Highlights:

1. Looking at statistics on the justice delivery system in India, the legal system needs to become more robust before it can be considered an effective solution. Further, the formulation of laws in themselves does not prevent a wrong action.
2. In summary, to train large AI models, massive computing power and energy is required and this has been expanding since 2017, along with an ever-increasing carbon footprint.
3. Further, since the models tend to use text already present on the Internet, there is a tendency for the AI to reflect strong negative human biases.

Fake News:

1. Fake news is disinformation that has no basis in reality but is presented as fact. Being designed to manipulate both the intellect and emotions of a person, it can evoke strong emotional reactions in its reader, which could sometimes result in violence.
2. India's diversity is its strength, but also the source for numerous conflicts that have persisted over the decades. These conflicts, being rooted in historical claims around politics, culture and religion, will intensify if the historical assumptions and data behind related fake news are not contextually analysed.
3. The problem is aggravated by the decline in history learning programmes worldwide. While the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) curriculum has elements of historical thinking, State boards are primarily focused on the memorisation of content.

Historical thinking:

1. The Constitution of India provides a long-term solution under Article 51A (h), which says, "It shall be the duty of every citizen to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform." While the National

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Education Policy, 2020, captures the needs of the nation, it misses out on historical thinking.

2. Historical thinking is the set of thinking skills required for learning history. It consists of concepts like points of view, evidence, validity and reliability of the source, contextualisation, and corroboration, apart from other skills.
3. Historical thinking skills can also be applied to law, forensic science, politics and research, and dealing with 'fake news'.
4. In the case of fake news, a person would have to be able to read a piece of news, examine the source for bias and ascertain whether the claims being made are factual or whether they constitute deliberate misinformation.

Since fake news is designed to appeal to emotion, it becomes all the more important that a person is skilled at interrogating evidence, contextualising the information and corroborating it with alternate sources. If historical thinking has such widespread application, why is it missing from active public discourse and in the education system?