

O HERALDO

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Shimla Agreement suspension: A strategic blunder by Pakistan

Pakistan's abrupt decision to suspend the 1972 Shimla Agreement, in retaliation for India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, is a grave miscalculation that undermines its own security and plays into India's hands. This reckless move, prompted by India's response to the horrific Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people, exposes Pakistan's strategic vulnerabilities and risks escalating tensions in a region already on edge. Far from strengthening its position, Pakistan has scored a self-goal, dismantling a critical diplomatic framework and leaving itself exposed to India's superior military and geopolitical leverage.

The Shimla Agreement, signed by Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto after India's decisive victory in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, was a cornerstone of peace between two adversarial nations. It established the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir, mandated bilateral dialogue to resolve disputes, and prohibited unilateral actions to alter the status quo. India's magnanimity was evident in its return of over 13,000 km² of captured territory, a gesture of goodwill that underscored its commitment to stability. For over five decades, the agreement has served as a vital restraint against all-out conflict, despite Pakistan's occasional violations, such as the 1999 Kargil War.

India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance was a calibrated response to the Pahalgam attack, the deadliest in Kashmir since 2019. The attack, widely attributed to Pakistan-based terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba and its offshoot The Resistance Front, prompted India to demand that Pakistan dismantle its support for cross-border terrorism. By leveraging the treaty, India sought to pressure Islamabad into fulfilling its international obligation to prevent its territory from being used for anti-India activities.

More than an act of aggression, it is a legitimate effort to hold Pakistan accountable for its complicity in terrorism.

Pakistan's countermeasure — suspending the Shimla Agreement — is a strategic disaster. The agreement's core provisions, including the commitment to dialogue and respect for the LoC, provide a structured mechanism to manage disputes, particularly over Kashmir.

By unilaterally abandoning this framework, Pakistan has effectively removed the diplomatic guardrails that prevent military escalation. This is a dangerous misstep, especially given India's military superiority. With the agreement in abeyance, India is theoretically unconstrained in pursuing punitive measures, such as surgical strikes, cross-border operations, or even efforts to reclaim territories ceded in 1972 or liberate parts of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Pakistan's leadership, often dictated by its dominant military, has gravely misjudged the consequences. The suspension of the Shimla Agreement hands India a strategic advantage, allowing it to justify retaliatory actions as a response to Pakistan's own violation of bilateral norms. Consider the irony: India seeks justice for the Pahalgam victims, and Pakistan's decision has lowered the diplomatic threshold for such actions.

The LoC, once a mutually respected boundary, is now a potential flashpoint, and Pakistan's weaker conventional forces are ill-equipped to counter India's might in an open conflict.

Pakistan's attempt to justify its decision — accusing India of "fomenting terrorism" and violating UN resolutions — rings hollow. The international community has long recognised Pakistan's role in harbouring terrorist groups, and its track record of violating the Shimla Agreement, as seen in Kargil, undermines its credibility. By contrast, India's actions are rooted in self-defence and a demand for accountability, earning it greater sympathy in global capitals. Pakistan's economy, already teetering, cannot afford the fallout of heightened tensions or conflict, especially when India's diversified economy and robust alliances provide it with far greater resilience.

The suspension of the Shimla Agreement isolates Pakistan diplomatically and weakens its position on Kashmir. The agreement's emphasis on bilateralism has long been India's preferred approach, resisting third-party interventions that Pakistan has sought. By abandoning it, Pakistan risks inviting international scrutiny that could further expose its support for terrorism. Meanwhile, India stands to gain, as the absence of the agreement frees it to pursue a more assertive posture without violating bilateral commitments.

It is hoped that Pakistan's leadership recognises the folly of this decision and seeks to de-escalate before the situation spirals. India, firmly in the right, should capitalise on its strategic advantage, whether through targeted military actions to deter future attacks or intensified diplomatic efforts to isolate Pakistan globally.

The Shimla Agreement's suspension is Pakistan's loss, not India's. By dismantling a framework meant to prevent conflict, Pakistan has exposed its vulnerabilities and emboldened India to act decisively. This is not the path to stability but a dangerous gamble that Pakistan is destined to lose.

comment



SOTER D'SOUZA

Tides of betrayal: Goans crown their own captors

The diplomatic smile of an aspiring Goan politician which greets you may only end up stabbing you from behind. The sweet talk of secular Goykarponn in public may turn out to be deadly communal in private. The shouting on the streets against the government may melt into support for the same corrupt regime no sooner elections are announced. The political alternatives which pop up promising better days may prove to be nothing more than the divide and rule strategy to split opposition votes.

Such bitter experiences of being deceived by those who appeared ideologically neutral and politically sincere is causing many Goans to ask, "whom can we trust?"

Nowadays, many of the reactions and responses to controversial issues in Goa, which are viral and trending, no sooner subjected to the test of critical thinking may appear far from logical and reasonable. But speaking your mind attracts the label of being negative and disruptive. Any line of thinking and uncomfortable truths

The political change has to begin with the thinking and behaviour of those who elect politicians



which do not conform to the story that is politically sold may get dismissed as conspiracy theories. Any attempts to set right the political pattern of thinking and reasoning becomes a threat and gets silenced by bad mouthing and side-lining.

These are no straight forward times wherein what is considered normal behaviour can be practiced without inviting trouble for oneself. Blind trust or faith in what is widely hailed and promised as 'political change' without subjecting it to critical scrutiny may land up with unexpected betrayals, like political defections and a fundamentalist government. What meets the eye, or what are shown as initiatives to save Goa, may not be the actual reality in a dysfunctional social and political environment. Goan society is reeling under 'Political Co-dependency'. Navigating in such a politically sick society

can be both mentally confusing and exhausting.

In the context of politics, co-dependency is understood to be about increased control by political leaders or systems to manipulate citizens into a dependence on the State for their well-being, security, or identity. Certain behaviours adopted by citizens as a coping mechanism in such an oppressive and deceitful political climate can, in turn, unintentionally, land up enabling or perpetuating corrupt political structures. This blind loyalty helps such manipulative regimes to shield corrupt practices from criticism or reform, as citizens prioritize loyalty to the leader or system over ethical governance. Understanding the psychological phenomena which drives the social and political mess becomes important if any effective intervention is to emerge.

For the 'desi' or 'bhakt' mentality a term like Political Co-dependency will sound foreign, to be suspected as a legacy of colonial influence. This is understandable as mental health is hardly a priority for a culture driven by blind religious and political loyalty. Machiavellianism is the sacred text worshipped in political power games. A culture which is structured on inequality cannot be expected to recognise the difference between what is healthy and abusive in politics. A society in the habit of disciplining others feels threatened and gets defensive no sooner the focus gets turned inwards.

When abuse and violence by authorities in religious institutions gets legitimised as divinely guided by their followers or flock, a religious co-dependency, it is not difficult for politicians to get themselves worshiped as divine avatars by posing as protectors of religion and culture. Political leaders who seek to capitalise on religious co-dependency will use religious symbolism, promises of religious salvation, or appeals to faith to secure political power. Citizens, feeling emotionally connected to both their faith and their political leaders, may see such manipulation as justified or even necessary, further enabling corrupt and undemocratic practices within the political system. Can compromised citizens accepting sponsors from politicians for undertaking religious pilgrimages and for cultural events be expected to behave differently when it comes to voting? The occasional street protests can hardly be considered

representative of a 11 lakhs voter population. This drum beating often lacks accountability, transparency and consistency which are a prerequisite to cultivate public trust. The pattern of protests which blow hot and go cold according to political seasons and the spurt in political controversies to scapegoat individual politicians rather than confronting the system are meant to entertain the public. Seasoned politicians in government are hardly rattled by such outbursts and dismiss such discontent as the work of a few disgruntled opponents. They know that flashing money guarantees support and ultimately votes.

The battle to tackle a dysfunctional democracy in Goa cannot begin in convention halls and on the streets. It has to start with the mind and conscience of every citizen, in the home and family. The political change has to begin with the thinking and behaviour of those who elect politicians. As long as the electorate continues with unreasonable expectations from those it elects to govern, replacing politicians will change nothing. The blunders of citizens in their choices of political leaders during elections cannot be undone with PILs in courts. What clean politics can one expect when politicians are worshipped for their patronage to illegal constructions and unlawful activities, government jobs, sponsors and doles?

The battle to cleanse Goa's politics, to Save Goa, can only be possible with the convergence and consolidation of initiatives and not through duplication of efforts and competition for self-mileage over controversial issues. What is required are transparent and accountable civil society leaders and participatory grass-root processes for meaningful political change. This can only happen if the underlying thinking and behavioural patterns of political co-dependency are recognised by individual citizens and consciously dismantled. This is what the Satyagraha model of Mahatma Gandhi was about. The fasts and non-cooperation movement were focussed on self-purification, cultivating the Soul Force of Satyagrahis to non-violently neutralise the oppressive and exploitative political dynamics of colonial rule.

(The author has worked with community initiatives related to Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention, HIV/AIDS Prevention, Panchayati Raj, Anti-Corruption, Environment Protection and Social Justice.)

people's edit

LET US CHOOSE HUMANITY

MEENAZ BHANU

In the discussions that follow the screams of terror, the loudest sound today is not that of demands for justice, but of debates over religious identity. The tragic killing of innocent civilians in the Pahalgam terror attack should have unified the nation in grief and outrage. But instead, we find ourselves caught in an endless cycle of communal distractions: Were the victims Hindu or Muslim? Did the terrorists ask about religion before pulling the trigger?

It is deeply saddening to see social media flooded with arguments about communal identity instead of collective mourning or calls for justice. In this clamour, the real issue is being sidelined: **A gruesome act of terror has occurred on Indian soil, and justice is yet to be served.** Every second spent debating religious labels is a second stolen from the pursuit of accountability, truth, and healing.

Over the years, India has faced numerous terror attacks some from across borders, others from within. Each time, there's a brief wave of unity, but it quickly dissolves into communal blame games. This time, the narrative has taken an even more disturbing turn: instead of mourning the loss of innocent lives, people are dissecting the event through the lens of religion.

Why should it even matter what faith the victims followed? Terrorism doesn't differentiate between Hindu or Muslim, Sikh or Christian, child or adult. Its only aim is destruction. When we let ourselves get caught in this binary, we allow the terrorists to win not with bullets, but by dividing our hearts and minds. Whether it was a planned act to set a false narrative and divert attention from ongoing issues is a question that must not be ignored.

The Pahalgam attack should have been a turning point. Yet again, innocent blood has stained the soil of Kashmir. Families are devastated. Mothers have lost children. Children have become orphans. But what dominates headlines and hashtags? Whether or not the killers identified their targets based on religion.

This conversation is not only insensitive, it is deeply dehumanizing. It strips the victims of their individuality and reduces them to communal statistics. Instead of standing with the bereaved, we are busy analyzing their names and faiths.

As a society, we are dangerously close to normalizing hatred and division. We are so conditioned to view everything through a communal lens that even terrorism the most inhuman of acts is being communalised. The question reportedly asked by one of the terrorists has taken the spotlight, overshadowing the reality that brothers of all faiths were killed.

Social media was once hailed as a tool for democratising voices. Today, it is a battlefield of ideologies, often devoid of humanity. What we need is empathy. What we need is awareness.

Terrorism should be tackled with the full force of the law without bias, without delay, and without discrimination. Justice must not wear the lens of religion. Every victim deserves dignity, regardless of their name or faith.

The victims are not statistics. They are people who had dreams, families, and futures. Let us remember their names for their humanity, not their religion. Media outlets must stop giving airtime to divisive voices.

It is time for civil society, religious leaders, and influencers to come together to heal not harm. India's strength lies in its diversity and in standing united against all forms of extremism.

The real question is not what the terrorists asked before they killed. The real question is what we are asking ourselves after the killings. Are we asking for justice, or are we letting hatred guide our conversations?

Let us choose humanity. Let us demand justice. Let us ensure that the voices of the dead are not drowned out by the noise of communalism.

Need to identify Bangladeshis

In the wake of the recent terror attacks in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, the Goa government has reportedly initiated a series of stringent security measures, including directing three Pakistani nationals to leave the state and country latest by April 27. It is learnt that 17 others on long term visas have been placed under surveillance.

Document verification of migrants will also be undertaken across various pockets and necessary action taken against those who fail to prove their identity. All hotels will have to strictly ensure that records of visitors are maintained. It is common knowledge that terrorists many a times travel on forged passports and false travel documents. It would be prudent to check the passports of the visitors from Pakistan in order to see whether they are forged. A check also needs to be kept on Bangladeshi nationals who are residing in the state.

There could be several Bangladeshis who have infiltrated into India from across the border and are staying in India illegally. It must be said that the relationship between India and Bangladesh has not been cordial in recent times and there could be Pakistanis who have travelled to Goa from Bangladesh and pose a threat. Bangladesh's support to

anti-Indian Islamic fundamentalist groups is quite well known.

The Goa government could also issue a travel advisory for Goans not to travel to Jammu and Kashmir and cancel all vacation plans to that state up until such time that things have normalised there.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Chhattisgarh has to be wary about Naxals

The anti-Naxal operations in Chhattisgarh is at its peak. Naxal hotbeds Bijapur and Sukma have never witnessed such an unprecedented "war" against the Maoists. Combing operations by more than 10000 security personnel, drawn from various forces, including the dedicated Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), have gone hammer and tongs at Naxal dwellings and explosives by working day in and day out at unfamiliar terrains.

Plenty of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) have been diffused. Amidst the ongoing operations against the Naxals, Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma has proposed a dialogue with the Maoists. Quickly acting on the proposal, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) has, instead,

letterstotheeditor

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asked for a month long ceasefire in anti-Naxal operations to come to the negotiating table.

It has to be noted that plenty of Naxals have laid down arms and surrendered before the government. Therefore, the ceasefire request of the Naxals have to be taken with a pinch of salt by the Chhattisgarh government. In a serious war against any kind of terror, aimed at the state, the government cannot let its guard down by agreeing to a truce.

The dangerous Naxals may seize the ceasefire period to recoup. Caution should be the buzz word for both the Centre and the State.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Time for India to expose Pakistan

India should not be satisfied with the initial steps taken after the Pahalgam attack but should systematically expose Pakistan's terror network globally. India should leverage new allies like Saudi Arabia to further isolate Pakistan, and pressure China not to obstruct the listing and sanctions of Pakistani-backed terrorists. If China changes its stance, it will be a major setback for Pakistan's terror networks.

The unprecedented public anger in Kashmir after the Pahalgam attack is severely damaging Pakistan's narrative.

Now is the time for India to vigorously expose Islamabad's support for terrorism globally and not just respond to it but also campaign to uproot all the structures that fuel terrorism.

Mohammad Asad, Mumbai

Broader outlook on language needed

Learning an additional language is people's priority. German authorities are rather tough and to get a visa extended, you need to talk in German. Despite knowing fluent English, they refused to communicate in it. Don't sway away from knowing a language. When given clear expectations, many Indians are willing to learn German or French to adapt and survive abroad. However, when it comes to embracing and respecting local languages within India, there seems to be significant resistance.

Tamil should realise this sooner or later. To those from northern parts of India living in Bengaluru: please make an effort to learn Kannada and integrate with the local culture and traditions. Resorting

to arguments, threats, or disrespectful behavior only harms the social fabric. Today, every street has CCTV surveillance, and incidents can easily be recorded and shared widely. Learning a new language doesn't make you any less connected to your mother tongue. On the contrary, it enhances cognitive flexibility and helps prevent unnecessary conflicts over language, a divisive issue we should move beyond in this era. It is a timely reminder for Tamils as well.

CK Subramaniam, Navi Mumbai

Kudos to a braveheart

Hats off to Syed Adil Hussain Shah, a 30-year-old pony operator, who gave his life while desperately trying to save the lives of the tourists from terrorist attacks in the Pahalgam on Tuesday. The braveheart went on to snatch a weapon from one of the terrorists in an attempt to protect the tourists he had ferried from the parking area to Baisaran Meadow. He died after being hit thrice with bullets in the chest. People like Adil show that there are angels in every religion and also among atheists. On the other hand, a religious bigot's idea of our-god-versus-their-god actually ridicules the concept of god. It is rightly said that a terrorist has no religion.

Sujit De, Kolkata