

## A security breach that must lead to sweeping changes

**A**t first glance, the incident, on December 13, of two young men jumping into the chamber of the Lok Sabha from the visitors' gallery, shouting slogans against dictatorship and releasing canisters that emitted yellow smoke, strikes you as yet another form of democratic dissent. But, this breach of security, on the same day, in 2001, when nine personnel of Parliament – of the Delhi Police, Parliament security personnel and a gardener – lost their lives defending the same citadel of democracy from terrorists – has a much wider impact and ramifications.

It is unimaginable that there has been an incident like this in what is now a security fortress especially after the beefing up of security in Parliament House following the attack in 2001. There are spike barriers, bollards, drop gates with the latest technology, scanners, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) devices, anti-explosive checks, and additional manpower that form the layers of security. A phalanx of men and women from the central police forces are deployed in the outer precincts, while plainclothes men from the Parliament Duty Group, and the Delhi police manning the various stations and checkpoints in the inner environs.

So, how did the security lapse occur? The breach happened all along the various layers of security set up for the personal screening of visitors to Parliament. The door frame and handheld metal detectors check for metals in one's possession. There is personal frisking – a body search for hidden items. But neither door frame metal detectors nor handheld metal detectors can check for plastic or rubber, especially when hidden in one's shoes (as it was in this case). In fact, shoes are never checked in Parliament. The men who did the screening were following the usual standard operating procedure, which failed. Later, in the visitor's gallery, the security personnel were not watchful enough, and the marshals down below in the House, only used to carrying out named Members of Parliament (MP) out of the House, failed to nab the two men hopping across the benches. It was some of the MPs present who were able to nab the intruders.

### The importance of technology

Where does the responsibility lie? Certainly not alone with the men at the screening stations. They were only following the standard protocol. Were they briefed on the significance of the date which called for more intensive checks and innovative measures? Were watchers deployed to observe visitors? Is the new Parliament House equipped with the latest technology to screen visitors? A backscatter scanner can detect substances such as plastic and is being used in airports abroad. In fact, the United States and Europe have moved to using millimeter wave scanners. Those who are watchful move ahead with the technology of the times. There was an



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announcement recently by the Director General, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, that Delhi airport is to get full body scanners and computer tomography x-ray (CTX) machines to ensure more thorough but also faster screening.

### The issue of responsibility

So, whose responsibility is the security of Parliament and the induction of new technology? The head of Parliament security is the Joint Secretary, Security – a post that is vacant at present. The posts of the two chiefs of the Central Reserve Police Force and the Central Industrial Security Force involved with Sansad security are vacant too. The inquiry into the breach has been entrusted with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) chief whose force is involved in the security set-up of Parliament. In the absence of the Joint Secretary, Security, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha each have a 'Director Security' to direct security operations. Are they expected to look around the world for the latest technology and have this introduced in Parliament? It is not like the Special Protection Group (SPG) manned by the best Indian Police Service officers, who are always engaged in daily operations, monitor them for improvements as also scout for the latest technology to induct.

It is the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) that Parliament turns to for all its security needs. After 2001, it was the MHA which refurbished the security set-up at Parliament House. Even now, at the request of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, it is the MHA that is conducting the inquiry through the ITBP chief. The Joint Secretary, Security, is in overall operational control within the Sansad precincts, but is fully dependent on the MHA when it concerns the latest technology on access control or anti-explosive checks.

The question to ask is whether the MHA ever suggested the need to improve access control and personal screening measures. Whose responsibility was it to introduce the latest technology? It was incumbent upon the MHA to strongly advise the Secretariat on the induction of advanced technology into the set up. But it appears that the critical area of technology upgradation fell between the two stools of administration.

The political sluffest in the aftermath of the breach is helping no one's cause. Neither is the debate on the jurisdiction of the Speaker of the House or the Deputy leader. The issue is about access control failure in Parliament that resulted in intruders getting right into the heart of Lok Sabha in close proximity to Ministers and Members of Parliament. Had the Prime Minister been there in Parliament that Wednesday, the SPG would have had to follow their drill and neutralise the threat by using their weapons while evacuating the Prime Minister from the venue. It was thus a matter of national security and incumbent upon the Home Minister to make a preliminary statement in the House, admitting the graveness of the breach and announcing a

high-level inquiry. More so, as the intruders have been arraigned under Sections 16 and 18 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act relating to terrorism. And now that an inquiry has been instituted, the Opposition should also wait to have a meaningful discussion on the issue.

The targeting of the MP who recommended the issuance of passes to the intruders may be unfair. Right from 1982, MPs across the parties have been liberal in recommending the names of people eager to witness Lok Sabha proceedings. The visitors' and Speaker's galleries would often be full when the titans Ram Manohar Lohia, Prakash Vir Shastri, Mahavir Tyagi, Pilo Mody, A.B. Vajpayee or Madhu Limaye were present in debates. Though the MPs give an undertaking of knowing who the visitors are, it is impossible to carry out background checks in a day or a few hours. In some cases, passes are issued in just two hours. The real issue is not who the visitor is, but whether he is "clean" from a security angle, when he enters Parliament. While the pass issue should be streamlined, one should not lose focus of the real lapse – the failure of access control.

The youngsters involved in the incident on December 13 caused no harm, but they inflicted the gravest damage by revealing the gaps in Parliament security to all and sundry. Though the charge of terrorism may not stick, they must be proceeded against for unauthorised entry in a well-guarded place after conspiring to carry out the incident for well over a year.

### Form a committee

A mere inquiry to look into the lapse and corrective measures may not be enough. This should be an opportunity to make sweeping changes in the security set-up using out-of-the-box thinking. The Secretary, Security, in the Cabinet Secretariat who supervises the SPG should also supervise Parliament security. Thus, the latest technology changes for access control and checks can be shared with Parliament too. A committee comprising five MPs from across parties should be formed. The committee could induct specialists from outside and within the security set-up to monitor arrangements regularly. Looking into the array of various forces guarding the Parliament, having its security set-up under the rank of a Director General for better coordination and with full responsibility and accountability on him would be ideal. Finally, MPs themselves should offer their complete cooperation with the enhanced security arrangements in place.

Newer times spawn new technology but also give rise to newer threats. The incidents of December 13, 2001 and December 13, 2023, are a grim reminder that any security arrangement can be breached. To protect the hallowed portals of our democracy, it is imperative that the security infrastructure is constantly monitored and upgraded with resolve.

The views expressed are personal

The incidents of December 13, 2001 and December 13, 2023 are a grim reminder that the monitoring and upgradation of Parliament's security infrastructure need attention

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## India's defence budgeting and the point of deterrence

The Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) programme of the Indian Air Force (IAF) earned the sobriquet of being the 'mother of all procurements' due to its cost, pegged at around \$10 billion in 2007. A decade later, the purchase of 36 Rafale jets was of limited value because the requirement was for 126 aircraft. Consequently, many IAF chiefs have spoken of the depleting squadron strength in the IAF, which is now an abysmal 32. It would take another 10 years before it reaches 35 squadrons, as stated by the current IAF chief. The Indian Army and the Indian Navy fare no better either with the media reporting major deficiencies with them too. With India in election mode and sops being showered on the electorate (even more certain before the general election in 2024), the allocation for defence in Budget 2024-25, which starts getting planned now, could take a hit. This could impact India's deterrence posture, which defence preparedness is all about.

### Need for judicious assessment

The question is whether 'affordable defence' – due to the perennial guns versus butter dilemma – will be the driving factor. Or, will 'affordable effectiveness' drive the defence Budget allocation? This is best illustrated by the IAF going in for 97 more Tejas MkIA fighters to overcome the deficit in squadron strength, though this was to be achieved by the I4 multi role fighter aircraft project that the IAF has been pushing for. So, to rephrase the question, should Budget (allocation) be allowed to determine defence potency (remember General V.P. Malik's quip during the Kargil conflict: "We will fight with what we have")? Or, should the required potency drive allocations for defence?

The threat on the northern borders is a live one, and it would be unprofessional to dismiss our western neighbour's present benign stance as indicative of a lessening of risk. India needs to be prepared for both. The imperativeness of a



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To have India's defence Budget and national security goals examined through the prism of electoral imperatives would be unprofessional

judicious assessment of how India plans to prosecute the next war could not be more pressing in these days of electoral one-upmanship.

Enough has been written on the inescapable necessity of accretion in sea power to deter China in the environs of the Malacca Strait and further east, as also in the Indian Ocean. The Army needs to modernise too and, considering its size, the Budget requirement would be considerable. The planning and budgeting in the Indian military before the Russia-Ukraine war was for a short sharp conflict. The logistics design was to stock up on 10i (10 days intense) war, and build up to a 40i scenario. The refrain has changed, with the leadership of the armed forces now visualising an extended war scenario, as seen in Ukraine. It is here that a recent prescient article in the authoritative website, War on the Rocks, titled 'You go to war with the industrial base you have, not the industrial base you want', weighs-in on the debate with its clairvoyant deductions, and needs to be studied given the publicity around the Atmanirbhar Bharat drive.

### The indigenous drive, R&D

It needs no reiteration that the armed forces should be technologically modern at any given time. However, developing a local defence industry takes decades, necessitating a smart balance to be maintained between imports and indigenous accretions to ensure the required potency. The Atmanirbhar Bharat public relations drive notwithstanding, a hard clinical view is required on the realities of the armament supply chain that would be in place in the near to mid-term.

India's defence Budget, in real terms, has been more or less stagnant. Defence expenditure (revenue and capital), as a percentage of central government expenditure, has been declining – from around 16.4% in 2012-13 to 13.3% in 2022-23. The Ministry of Defence had asked for ₹1,76,346

crore in 2023-24 for capital acquisitions but only ₹1,62,600 crore was allotted, creating a deficit of ₹13,746 crore.

In the sphere of research and development, the picture is not rosy either. The Global Innovation Index 2022 pegs India's research and development expenditure at just 0.7% of its GDP which places it 53rd globally. China, incidentally, spent \$421 billion in 2022, which is 2.54% of its GDP. Though the research and development allocation needs a substantial jump, it is good that 25% of the allocation was for the private sector

The government's emphasis on indigenisation through the Innovations For Defence Excellence (IDEX) scheme and service-specific projects such as the Baba Mehar Singh competition for unmanned aerial vehicles by the IAF, and similar ones in the other two services, are laudable.

Similarly, the restructuring of the Ordnance Factory Board and promulgation of negative lists for imports instil confidence in the private sector for assured contracts. While all these are welcome, and the increase in defence exports heartening, it must be accepted that this drive still has a long gestation period. The momentum should be sustained with a continuum in policy making and adequate defence budgeting by making them election-proof in our boisterous democracy – bipartisan statesmanship would be key in this endeavour.

Costs are important and one must not spend scarce monies to face a 10 feet tall adversary when a pygmy exists on the other side. But what if there are two of them, both militarily adept, and not pygmies? And, India is not 10 ft tall either. China's belligerence has resulted in the doubling of Japan's defence budget, the increased arming of Taiwan by the United States, a reshaping of regional alliances and a historic U.S.-South Korea-Japan summit. It would be naive, nay unprofessional, if our defence Budget is not given its due and national security imperatives overridden by electoral imperatives.

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