6 YEARS OF PULWAMA

Six years after the Pulwama terror attack in which 44 CRPF personnel lost their lives India has changed its approach in dealing with cross border terrorism. From teaching Pakistan a lesson that it has to pay for its misadventures to tracking down all those involved in planning and executing the terror attack involving 300 kg of RDX, Indian system had set new parameters. Within week India had attacked a Balakote terror training center of the Jaish-e-Muhammad. It's different matter that Pakistan hush hushed the damage but could not hide the truth for long. Its new army doctrine described the changed geo political reality after India's daring attack at Balakote, deep inside Pakistan and not the POK. The Pulwama attack was end of India's threshold of tolerance towards a recalcitrant Pakistan. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made it clear that blood and water can't flow simultaneously. He walked the talk and the result is for everyone to see.

India made sure its soldiers would no longer be sitting ducks for Pakistani terrorists and be ignored by leaders. Sacrifices of CRPF soldiers in the Pulwama attack did not go waste as India rose to launch proactive attacks on the sources of terrorism a process that reached its peak in the recent Operation Sindoor. Besides, anti-terror operations, investigations and prevention of terrorist attacks were strengthened through induction of new technologies and free hands gives to the different organs of the state. Pakistan faces the wrath of the unknown gunmen who are eliminating all the major terror operators across the country. Though India has not owned these attacks, the outcome sends a strong signal to Pakistan's deep state. The authorities and the citizens have jointly planted 44 trees at the site of the blast in Pulwama to reaffirm the nation's gratitude to the martyrs and the sacrifices of their families.

Pulwama — Have We Learnt The Lesson?

Balraj Mehta

"The dangerous clashes of future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance and Sinic assertiveness" - Samuel P Huntington' February 14th, the date, no longer represents just another day for those of us who have worn the uniform; it is a solemn reminder of the cost we bear for ensuring the safety and security of our Nation! Seven years have passed since the smoke cleared on National Highway 44 at Lethpora, yet the echoes of that afternoon remain a defining pivot for India's national security calculus.

The Pulwama attack was not just a tragedy for the martyrs, or even for their unfortunate families alone; it was a glaring audit of our tactical vulnerabilities and a precursor to a strategic shift which was too late in coming for those 40 Bravehearts! As a soldier who has spent decades navigating the complexities of insurgency, I believe anniversaries must be more than rituals of remembrance - they must, instead, be sessions of cold, hard and brutal introspection. The 2019 attack gave us harsh lessons that must never allow us relaxing back into complacency. When we analyse the event through a military lens, we see a failure of collective imagination as much as a failure of intelligence.

Intelligence- Action Gap

I have learnt over the years that though intelligence is rarely "perfect," the ability to act upon specific patterns is important. We tend to get overwhelmed by a surfeit of vague, repetitive and generalised intelligence inputs and something serious gets missed. Before Pulwama, the threat of a suicide car bombing was often relegated to the "low probability" category and a large force was thought the best way to deter a terrorist attack. We learned, to our dismay and horror, that sheer numbers of boots on the ground can sometimes create "target-rich environment." Road opening and convoy movements have to be synchronized with aerial surveillance and localized tech-intel. The lesson here was clear: mass does not equal security; sanitisation, mobility and unpredictability do.

Myth of "Surgical" Finality

Balakot strikes in the aftermath of Pulwama terrorist attack demonstrated a new political will, signalling that India refuses to be restrained by the old concept of "strategic restraint." However, seven years later, we have learned that kinetic responses can only be an immediate punishment, not a permanent cure. We have had many big and small terrorist incidents since; and then we had Pahalgam! Terrorism has turned insidious; a decentralized threat involving 'faceless' attackers, many with no prior police records. This shift proves that while we can destroy launchpads across, the ideological firewalls must be built within!

Logistic Support System

In my days of fighting insurgency it was routine to move on foot for operations due to the ever present threat of an ambush or an IED attack. Of course that involved only a few hours of walk every other night, and it cannot be resorted to for hundreds of kilometres and for thousands of soldiers and heavy logistic requirements!

Any road passing through populated areas, while a lifeline, is also a jugular vein that requires constant, high-tech monitoring. The transition to increased air movement was a direct, albeit delayed, outcome of Pulwama. Having a strong security capability also means supporting our men on ground by ensuring sound and safe logistics!

Reversing Brainwashing

The law on CAA, abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the state into Union Territories were big political steps aimed at breaking stranglehold of the fundamentalist mindset over the 'System' ruling the State. From a strategic perspective, these moves were intended to dismantle the ecosystem that sustained secessionism. To be fair, there were tangible gains during the Governor's Rule; crackdown on the financial and logistic pipelines of militancy made it significantly harder for terror groups to operate on the scale they did in the previous decades. However, effects of continuous ideological brainwashing over last 40 years are very difficult to erase. This cannot be effected in hurry, and I am afraid may never get fully overcome unless thoughtful, impartial and honest efforts are consistently made. The separatist leadership has to be comprehensively neutralised and their source code shut down lest we keep suffering newer, more insidious and better networked foot soldiers of jihad.

Security of the state has to remain the overriding, prime duty and main focus of the central govt, yet keeping other municipal functions in mind. Holding of elections to the UT Assembly of J&K, in the eagerness to showcase return to normalcy, to my mind, has been rather counterproductive!

Not by Force Alone

A soldier's eye always looks beyond the glossy brochures of development and attractive political blueprint. We must ask: At what cost, and with what level of sustainability?

Pulwama Anniversary should remind us to accept that outside vested interests have long meddled in and it is not only the question of hearts and minds of the locals! Insidious campaigns have since long been initiated for achieving political aims of few families. However, the instrument has gone out of control of their masters, has become a self-sustaining virus and has to be dealt with clinically - with prolonged treatment. As a security professional, far removed from politics, I recommend that we be:

1.Firm on the Border: Zero tolerance for infiltration and a continued high-tech upgrade of our LC defences.

2.Clear in the Interior: Focus must always be maintained on security with adequate efforts to de-radicalise the youth. Systematic dismantling of the extremist propaganda machinery has to be undertaken with a humane approach to make life better for the masses without mindless pampering.

3.Clean in the Execution: I have always had a suspicion which got substantiated during various exposures that the pathetic social and security situation existing in J&K has been greatly facilitated by monumental corruption of the elite, at the grass root level, and in fact at every level in-between! If we want results from our sincere endeavours, the corrupt have to be taken out - a system where power results from pleasing your constituents and allowing your subordinates to skim the cream cannot deliver!

4.Inclusive in the Capital: Democratic process in J&K has been started and a keen vigil has to be maintained to ensure it is not hijacked by the very same 'system' which created the divide in the first place! Ladakh issue has also to be handled with care; statutory protections to ensure the region remains a bastion of Indian sovereignty must be carefully considered.

The Best Tribute

We can honour the martyrs of Pulwama by ensuring a secure India where the people in remote border villages feel as much a stakeholder as the city-dwellers. J&K and Ladakh are not just strategic chessboards or electoral talking points; they are homes to people whose loyalty has been tested by fire. The uniform provides the shield, but only the lawmaker can provide the heart. On this anniversary, let us commit to a strategy that is as compassionate as it is firm, ensuring that the blood soaked soil sprouts a peace that is both just and enduring. While being aware of adverse outside influences, let us listen to the ground before we move the mountains!

FROM RANKING TO READINESS: A NEW VISION FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION

Vani Aggarwal

In the competitive world of global higher education, the race for the top spot in league tables has become an obsession for universities and governments alike. From the global QS and Times Higher Education (THE) rankings to India's National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), these metrics are often seen as the ultimate verdict on an institution's quality. However, a growing chorus of scholars and policymakers is raising a critical question: Do these rankings tell us how good a university is today, or how prepared it is for tomorrow? There is a need to adopt a new framework that could measure the future preparedness of higher educational institutions. A new conceptual framework, titled Performance & Readiness Aligned Vision for Institutional Development (PRAVID), argues that we have been looking at institutional success through a rear-view mirror. While traditional rankings measure "how good institutions are" based on historical data, the PRAVID model seeks to measure "where institutions are headed". This diagnostic policy tool is designed to help governments and leaders distinguish between current delivery and future direction, moving beyond the high-stakes pressure of a single league-table ranking.

The Trap of Historical Success

The literature suggests that existing evaluation frameworks-including national rankings, quality assurance systems like NAAC, and accreditation standards-primarily reward legacy strength rather than adaptive potential. These instruments often privilege historical performance, reputational capital, and quantifiable outputs such as research counts and graduate employment rates.

The problem with this approach is that rankings are inherently retrospective. They capture what an institution has already achieved, often at the expense of its long-term strategic capacity or mission diversity. As a result, many "top-tier" universities may be coasting on their historical reputation while failing to adapt to the seismic shifts of digital transformation, changing labor markets, and the need for lifelong learning.

The PRAVID Matrix

To solve this "conceptual blind spot," the PRAVID framework proposes a two-axis diagnostic matrix. Rather than collapsing all data into a single score, it separates Institutional Performance and Outcomes (the Y-axis) from Future Readiness and Educational Vision (the X-axis).

The Institutional Performance axis measures actualised outcomes such as teaching quality, student retention, and research impact. This reflects how well an institution is functioning under current conditions. Conversely, the Future Readiness axis captures latent capabilities-the institution's strategic intent and its ability to adapt. This includes curriculum agility, digital pedagogical innovation, and engagement with industry and global ecosystems. By analysing these two dimensions together, the framework identifies four distinct institutional archetypes, each requiring a different policy approach.

The Four Archetypes of Higher Education

The PRAVID framework categorises institutions into quadrants that offer a more nuanced look at their health and trajectory:

1. Future Leaders (High Performance/ High Readiness): These are the "system anchors". They demonstrate strong current outcomes while proactively innovating for the future. They balance stability with agility, making them prime candidates for innovation scaling.

2. Established Strengths (High Performance/ Low Readiness): These institutions are often the "darlings" of traditional rankings but face a significant "legacy trap". While they currently produce solid results, they may be risk-averse or slow to modernize their curricula. For these schools, the PRAVID framework serves as a warning, prompting them to invest in renewal.

3. Emerging Transformers (Low Performance / High Readiness): Often newer or reform-oriented institutions, these schools have a clear vision and high digital capacity but have not yet seen these efforts translate into traditional outcome metrics.

4. Foundational Focus (Low Performance / Low Readiness): These institutions struggle with both current delivery and future planning, often due to resource scarcity or governance challenges.

Why This Matters for Public Policy

For years, policymakers have relied on "one-size-fits-all" evaluation tools to inform funding and reform initiatives. However, when performance and readiness are conflated, the resulting policy interventions are often ill-suited to an institution's actual needs. The PRAVID framework offers a more diagnostic and non-punitive logic. By treating future readiness as a distinct and measurable dimension, the PRAVID framework may finally provide the lens we need to see not just where our universities have been, but where they are going.

Malnutrition: Need for a comprehensive policy for the next decade

Payal Seth| Richa Kothari

Progress on paper, but a deeper nutritional crisis that India can no longer afford to overlook. India ranks 102 out of 123 countries in the 2025 Global Hunger Index-a stark reminder that the world's fastest-growing major economy still battles a silent epidemic: child malnutrition. Behind GDP headlines lie millions of children who remain stunted, wasted, or underweight. These are not just health statistics; they signal lost potential, lost productivity, and deepening inequality.

The first 1,000 days: Where the future is won or lost

The first 1,000 days of life-from conception to age two-determine brain development, immunity, and lifelong earning potential. Malnutrition in this window causes irreversible harm. Undernourished children fall sick more often, learn less, earn less, and are more likely to remain trapped in poverty.

The World Bank estimates that every rupee invested in child nutrition yields up to Rs 15 in returns through better education and lifetime earnings. Yet India loses roughly 4 per cent of GDP annually to malnutrition-linked productivity losses. While globally about 22 per cent of children under five are stunted and 6.7 per cent wasted, India's burden is far higher-especially among the poor and marginalised.

Progress is real-but too slow and too uneven

Between NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-21), India recorded modest gains in stunting, wasting, and underweight, reflecting improvements through ICDS, Poshan Abhiyaan, and Swachh Bharat. Public spending on children rose from Rs 69,242 crore in 2017-18 to ₹1,09,921 crore in 2024-25, while child-health schemes nearly doubled.

Yet the share of the Union Budget devoted to children declined from 3.2 per cent to 2.3 per cent. Education receives the largest share, with nutrition second. In short, spending has increased-but not enough, and not strategically enough. The core flaw is conceptual: our metrics themselves understate the crisis.

Why traditional indicators understate the crisis

For decades, stunting, wasting, and underweight have been measured as separate conditions. In reality, they frequently overlap. A child may be stunted and underweight, wasted and stunted-or suffer all three at once. Yet reporting treats these as isolated problems, never as compounded high-risk cases.

This matters. Children with multiple failures face far higher risks of mortality, illness, cognitive delay, and lifelong poverty than those with a single deficit. But siloed indicators hide them in plain sight. Research shows that once overlaps are accounted for, the true burden of malnutrition is 15-20 per cent higher than conventional estimates. India's crisis, therefore, is not just severe-it is systematically under-measured.

CIAF: A clearer, composite picture

The Composite Index of Anthropometric Failure (CIAF) was developed to correct this blind spot. Instead of tracking isolated failures, it asks a more meaningful question: How many children experience any anthropometric failure, and how many suffer multiple failures simultaneously?

CIAF classifies children into groups with single or overlapping deficits, including the most severe category, children experiencing stunting, wasting, and underweight together. Every category except "no failure" contributes to the CIAF score.

Viewed through this lens, NFHS-5 data tell a very different story. While conventional indicators place malnutrition between 19 per cent and 36 per cent, CIAF raises the estimate to 52.4 per cent- a jump of 22-33 percentage points, representing tens of millions of children otherwise invisible to policymakers. CIAF shows a modest national decline since NFHS-4, but also reveals where progress has stalled or reversed-insights siloed indicators fail to capture.

More than a number, CIAF provides a truer map of vulnerability, one India urgently needs for smarter, targeted nutrition policy.

The anatomy of inequality: Who is left behind?

CIAF reveals an uncomfortable truth: malnutrition in India closely tracks inequality. Three patterns stand out in NFHS-5:

1. Rural India shoulders the greatest burden, reflecting weaker service delivery and food insecurity.

2. Risk declines steadily with wealth, with the poorest households facing the highest rates of multiple failures.

3. Maternal education strongly predicts outcomes, with lower schooling linked directly to compounded malnutrition.

CIAF doesn't just tell us how many are suffering, but who they are-granularity essential for an equity-focused response.

A Tale of Two Indias

State-level CIAF trends reveal sharply diverging trajectories. States such as Haryana, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu made notable gains through stronger ICDS delivery, maternal nutrition, and food access.

Meanwhile, Nagaland, Lakshadweep, Tripura, Telangana, and Himachal Pradesh saw steep increases. Even Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, and Kerala experienced reversals, underscoring how fragile progress can be amid economic stress or service disruptions.

A third group, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Meghalaya, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, shows stagnation rather than stability. The message is unmistakable: malnutrition in India is spatial, and CIAF offers the sharpest diagnostic yet of where governance must improve.

Policy Implications

A sharper diagnosis demands a sharper response. India's nutrition strategy must move beyond fragmented indicators to a composite, child-centred lens. This requires governments to:

1. Institutionalise CIAF monitoring at the district level, integrating it into platforms like Poshan Tracker.

2. Prioritise children with multiple failures through intensive packages combining ICDS services, maternal supplementation, and WASH investments.

3. Break intergenerational cycles through fortified school meals, adolescent nutrition programmes, and maternal counselling.

4. Strengthen frontline capacity, training Anganwadi workers to detect and respond to multiple failures early.

5. Develop region-specific nutrition blueprints tailored to poverty, geography, gender, and social marginalisation.

6. Back ambition with resources, aligning fiscal priorities with nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions.

Final Words

Nutrition is not a welfare issue; it is a foundational investment in human capital. A country aspiring to global leadership cannot afford a future where one in three children begins life at a disadvantage. If we act now, guided by a composite, equity-focused lens, we can reverse the trajectory of malnutrition and unlock the full potential of an entire generation. Seeing the whole child is the first step. Designing policy around the whole child must be the next.