

## EDITORIAL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

As India mourns the death of 40 CRPF personnel in Thursday's [terrorist strike in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district](#), it is clear that the attack was meant to provoke. The [Jaish-e-Mohammed](#), the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation which has orchestrated numerous strikes in the Kashmir Valley, has taken responsibility for what is now the highest toll of security forces in any attack in the State. Investigations should yield a better picture, but it is a matter of extreme concern that a suicide bomber could time his attack to hit a security convoy. There is no question that Pakistan bears the onus to explain why Masood Azhar, the leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammed, enjoys such freedoms on its territory, if not outright support from the establishment. Certainly, diplomatic backing by Pakistan and China has been crucial in defeating efforts at the United Nations to put Azhar on the list of banned terrorists. Early details indicate that a sports utility vehicle laden with a huge quantity of explosives targeted the convoy of 78 buses carrying about 2,500 soldiers from Jammu to Kashmir. The video of the presumed suicide bomber too hints at an altered standard operating procedure meant to provoke and escalate tensions. Forensics teams have already begun work and answers to the disturbing questions the attack has raised on intelligence gathering, dissemination and coordination in the Valley must be pieced together.

However, if the terrorists have acted from an updated playbook, New Delhi's response must not play into their plans with reflexive and precipitate official action. India has withdrawn the Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan in a signal that it will not wait for preliminaries in the effort to isolate Pakistan. Coercive diplomacy is likely to continue, but to be effective the effort needs a wider net, especially at a time when the U.S. is seeking Pakistan's help in firming up a deal with the Afghan Taliban. Beijing too must not, and cannot, evade questions about its previous blocking of action at the UN, specifically against Azhar. Post-Uri, after terrorist attacks the air is always thick with calls for retributive cross-border strikes. The past history of limited, if any, returns from such precipitate action must serve as a cautionary check. Instead, the effort must be to isolate Pakistan for its support to the Jaish and seek substantive action, to effectively upgrade intelligence and plug security gaps, and to win the confidence of the local population in the Valley. Thursday's attack was meant to provoke and polarise the country. New Delhi's response must, instead, be to isolate the perpetrators and keep the peace on Indian territory.

The Meghalaya government must urgently ensure that all illegal mines are shut down

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