

DANGEROUS DRIFT: ON ENCOUNTER WITH TERRORISTS NEAR HANDWARA

Encounters In Kashmir Are On The Rise, Taking A Disproportionate Toll On Security Personnel

The deaths last Saturday of four soldiers and a police officer in an encounter with terrorists near Handwara town in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, call attention to, among other things, a difficult summer ahead. It is unusual and disproportionate for just a couple of terrorists to take down five highly skilled and motivated soldiers — a Commanding Officer of a battalion in the rank of a colonel, a major, two other ranks and a special operations group policeman in the rank of a sub inspector — in a firefight. The details on offer are sketchy, yet provide compelling evidence of an operation that went horribly wrong. On Saturday afternoon, receiving intelligence that terrorists were present in a house in Changimulla village, Colonel Ashutosh Sharma of 21 Rashtriya Rifles, Major Anuj Sood, Naik Rajesh Kumar, Lance Naik Dinesh Singh and J&K Police Sub Inspector Shakeel Qazi, and possibly others reached the site which had a building and a cowshed adjoining it, and an intense firefight commenced. All the enemy fire came from the cowshed, not the building. Then there was a lull for more than an hour during which the team apparently decided to approach the house and use the vantage of the upper floor to fire at the terrorists in the cowshed. They entered the house and there was a fresh firefight but no communication from the Colonel and his team. Then it was noticed that their communication instrument was being used by the terrorists. That is when realisation came all was not well, and firing ensued all over again. This time when it was over, there were seven bodies. The way this operation ended will have ramifications, on both morale and operating procedures, on future operations of this kind that go on all the time in this shadowy theatre of proxy war. It is certainly a coincidence that has not gone unnoticed that though the encounter ended tragically, news or details of it did not percolate, till well after Sunday's fly past and show of solidarity.

It should be evident by now to most that changing the nomenclature and status of J&K has not addressed any of the underlying causes of unrest and angst. Neither has it deterred Pakistan from its steadfast goals. Since the beginning of the year, in 127 days, as many as 55 terrorists have been killed in the region, roughly one encounter every two days. In the unhealthy vacuum that New Delhi has created since August 5 last year, such encounters have done nothing other than aid the impulse of the disaffected to embrace arms. As the dangerous drift in J&K continues, New Delhi must realise it has reached the point of diminishing returns and should look for ways to arrest this trend.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **drift** (noun) – an unwelcome movement or development.
2. **encounter** (noun) – fight, clash, conflict, battle.
3. **on the rise** (phrase) – increasing (in number).
4. **disproportionate** (adjective) – inordinate, unreasonable, excessive; out of proportion, relatively too large.
5. **take a toll** (phrase) – damage (someone or something) disproportionately.
6. **personnel** (noun) – staff, employees, workforce.
7. **call attention to** (phrase) – give notice of, announce (publicly), make known, proclaim.
8. **take down** (phrasal verb) – kill.
9. **battalion** (noun) – a military unit.
10. **firefight** (noun) – gun fight; a battle/clash involving gunfire.
11. **on offer** (phrase) – available.
12. **sketchy** (adjective) – incomplete, inadequate, limited.

13. **compelling** (adjective) – convincing, valid, reasonable, effective.
14. **intelligence** (noun) – (military) information.
15. **cowshed** (noun) – a shed (outhouse) where cows are kept.
16. **adjoin** (verb) – be next to, be adjacent to, be connected to (a building).
17. **lull** (noun) – pause, interval, break (during fighting).
18. **apparently** (adverb) – seemingly, evidently, it appears that.
19. **vantage** (noun) – place/position (which provides a good view of something).
20. **ensue** (verb) – happen, occur, take place.
21. **all over again** (phrase) – another time.
22. **ramification** (noun) – consequence, aftermath, outcome, effect/result.
23. **morale** (noun) – self-confidence, (team) spirit, hope, determination, optimism.
24. **go on** (phrasal verb) – continue, carry on, proceed.
25. **all the time** (phrase) – at all times; constantly, continuously, frequently.
26. **shadowy** (adjective) – indistinct/indefinite, lacking definition, unclear.
27. **theatre** (noun) – field of action, place of action, sphere of action, arena.
28. **proxy conflict/war/strike** (noun) – a conflict/ war/ strike between two (countries/groups) instigated by opposing powers (powerful countries) who do not fight against each other directly.
29. **percolate** (verb) – spread gradually, be disseminated, pass/go slowly (through a group of people).
30. **fly (past)** (verb) – (of time) go quickly, fly by, pass swiftly.
31. **solidarity** (noun) – unity, harmony, team spirit.
32. **nomenclature** (noun) – terms, a system of names used in particular field.
33. **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
34. **underlying** (adjective) – fundamental, basic, primary.
35. **unrest** (noun) – disruption, turmoil, chaos, agitation.
36. **angst** (noun) – anxiety, apprehension, distress, disquiet, worry.
37. **deter** (verb) – prevent, stop, put off/discourage.
38. **steadfast** (noun) – steady, relentless, unchanging; firm, determined, resolute.
39. **vacuum** (noun) – empty space, emptiness, nothingness; lacuna.
40. **aid** (verb) – help, assist, support.
41. **impulse** (noun) – (strong & sudden) urge/instinct, compulsion, need.
42. **disaffected** (adjective) – dissatisfied, disgruntled, discontented, frustrated.
43. **embrace** (verb) – accept, adapt, take up.
44. **diminishing returns** (noun) – a point/situation in which smaller returns (benefits) are attained for the extra/more effort put in.
45. **look for** (phrasal verb) – try to find, seek, search for, scout out.
46. **arrest** (verb) – stop, halt, end.

OMINOUS CONTRACTION: ON CORE SECTOR OUTPUT

Steepest Fall In Core Sector Output In At Least 8 Years Portends Protracted Economic Pain

The latest data on core sector output is signalling that considerable economic pain lies ahead in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown that commenced on March 25. The provisional figures released by the Commerce Ministry show that production at all but one of the eight industries comprising the core sector shrank in March from a year earlier, resulting in the

sharpest contraction in the index since the new series began in April 2012. That output contracted by as much as 6.5% in a month when most economic activities ground to a halt only in the last seven days, is a worrying augury. While output at petroleum refineries slid only by a marginal 0.5% as a bulk of the transportation sector was idled only in the last week of March, the 7.2% and 13% contractions in electricity and steel production, respectively, reflect the underlying stress in the economy, most crucially on the demand side. With all non-essential industries and commercial establishments ordered shut as part of the lockdown, demand for electricity declined by more than 9% in March, according to data from the National Load Despatch Centre. While the power sector has been exempt from the lockdown because of its essential nature, the slump in demand from commercial customers is bound to have a significant sector-wide cascading impact as a result of heightened cash flow problems at the already stressed distribution companies that deliver electricity over the last mile to consumers.

Coal, the only sector to post a positive figure in March as output expanded 4%, also presents a far from reassuring picture as growth slowed sharply from February's 11.2% and was less than half the 9.1% pace seen in March 2019. And with demand for coal from user sectors spanning thermal generators and the key process industries of steel and cement unlikely to revive any time soon, production of the crucial commodity is very likely to shrink in April. With the construction sector hit hard by the lockdown and likely to face serious labour supply issues even after the economy gradually reopens, cement may see production shrink in the first month of the new fiscal year by an even greater extent than the 25% drop seen in March. The mayhem in the oil market with global crude prices tumbling is also certain to undermine the industries in the energy sector. Undoubtedly, April's overall core output appears headed for an even sharper contraction. And with the eight major industries having a weight of 40.3% in the broader Index of Industrial Production, it is certain to drag industrial output as a whole into negative territory. The Centre may be left with little option but to massively lift public spending on infrastructure once the lockdown eases in order to revive the reeling economy.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **ominous** (adjective) – threatening, menacing, unfavourable, unpromising.
2. **contraction** (noun) – decline, decrease, reduction.
3. **core sector** (noun) – the eight industries comprising electricity, steel, refinery products, crude oil, coal, cement, natural gas and fertilizers are classified as core sector industries.
4. **steepest** (superlative adjective) of **steep** (adjective) – sharp, sudden, rapid.
5. **portend** (verb) – indicate, signal, foretell, augur.
6. **protracted** (adjective) – prolonged, extended, lengthened/lengthy; lingering.
7. **considerable** (adjective) – much, a lot of; significant, substantial.
8. **lie ahead** (phrasal verb) – be going to happen; to be in the future.
9. **in the wake of** (phrase) – as a result of, in the aftermath of, as a consequence of.
10. **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
11. **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
12. **provisional** (adjective) – interim, transitional, temporary.
13. **all but** (phrase) – nearly, almost (all except).

14. **shrank** past of **shrink** (verb) – lessen, reduce, decrease.
15. **index** (noun) – a lead indicator/measure/guide of the (monthly) industrial performance (production and growth).
16. **contract** (verb) – decline, decrease, reduce.
17. **as much as** (phrase) – almost.
18. ground past and past participle of **grind to a halt** (phrase) – (referring to an activity in a situation) becomes inactive slowly and then stops completely.
19. **augury** (noun) – a sign of what will happen in the future; sign/signal, indication.
20. slid past and past participle of **slide** (verb) – fall, drop, plunge/descend (to a lower level).
21. **bulk** (noun) – most, larger part, larger number.
22. **idle** (verb) – not operating, not working, inactive, out of action.
23. **reflect** (verb) – indicate, reveal, exhibit, show, display.
24. **underlying** (adjective) – fundamental, basic, primary.
25. **stress** (noun) – emphasis, importance, weight.
26. **exempt** from (verb) – free from, exclude from, spare (from).
27. **slump** (noun) – decline, downfall, collapse.
28. **bound to** (adjective) – certain/sure, very likely, guaranteed.
29. **cascading** (adjective) – dropping, plummeting, descending/plunging.
30. **cascading** reaction/effect (noun) – an inevitable and sometimes unforeseen chain of events due to an act affecting a system.
31. **heightened** (adjective) – increased, raised, amplified, intensified.
32. **cash flow** (noun) – the amount of cash or cash-equivalent which the company receives or gives out by the way of payment(s) to creditors is known as cash flow.
33. **stressed** (adjective) – strained, overtaxed, pressurized.
34. **the last mile** (noun) – (in electricity/telecommunications) it describes the final part/leg of the electricity distribution/telecommunications network chain that physically reaches the end-user's premises (customer's house).
35. **far from** (phrase) – not at all, nowhere near, a long way from.
36. **span** (verb) – extend/spread over, stretch across.
37. **unlikely** (adjective) – not likely, improbable, doubtful, questionable.
38. **revive** (verb) – re-establish, revitalize, restore, improve.
39. **any time soon** (phrase) – in the near future.
40. **fiscal** (adjective) – financial.
41. **mayhem** (noun) – disorder, turmoil, chaos, disturbance.
42. **tumble** (verb) – fall/drop, plummet, nosedive suddenly & uncontrollably.
43. **undermine** (verb) – reduce, diminish, impede, hinder.
44. **undoubtedly** (adverb) – admittedly, doubtless, beyond question.
45. **be headed** (verb) – move towards, go towards.
46. **weight** (noun) – importance, significance, value.
47. broader comparative adjective of **broad** (adjective) – wide, large.
48. **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** (noun) – a composite (combined/complex) indicator that measures the changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products during a given period with respect to the volume of production in a chosen base period.
49. **as a whole** (phrase) – all together.
50. **leave someone with no option/choice** (phrase) – to make someone to do something (a necessary thing) quickly.
51. **reeling** (adjective) – struggling, staggering, stumbling, faltering, fluctuating/ shaking.