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When luck meets the road

Resolve, risk taking - and luck - define Imran. His resolve may have shades of obstinacy but for a quarter of a century he has wanted to be the PM and there he is. His risk taking may have a hint of bravado but in cricket as well as private and public life he has always come out on top.

Resolve and risk taking, as any war hero will tell you, assume their brilliance only when the stars are aligned. Lady luck has been particularly fond of Imran, as his cousins will surely vouchsafe. The stolid Burki brothers advised him to scale down his ambitions, to be left now with finger between their teeth. Majid, a hugely more talented cricketer, saw his career flounder as his cousin's soared.

Now Modi has thrown down the gauntlet. He has put to test all three of Imran's defining characteristics. Will lady luck come dancing down once again – as it did in the downing of the Indian plane following Indian misadventure in Balakot?

Imran has led a charmed life. Let's also accept Im is no dim. Elected or selected, he is in the chair, and whether we like him or not he is the one who has to steer us through these troubling times. Will his redoubtable luck help us weather the gathering storms?

Evil as his designs are for Kashmir's demography, from his point of view Modi couldn't have timed it better. In revoking IOK's special status, constitutionally questionable but sanctified by the Lok Sabha by an overwhelming majority, Modi also stuck his tongue out at Pakistan.

The rod of Brahma (interesting how full Hindu mythology is of weapons of mass destruction bestowed upon their gods!) has long been in the making. Modi waited to find Pakistan at its most vulnerable and did: a teetering economy, a divided polity, and wavering friends.

FATF has been the weapon of choice. It was, quite literally, a case of call a dog a bad name and hang him. It is not that there are things that we need to do in our own self-interest; but it went far beyond. It demanded of us actions that many non-documented developing countries, India included, were not asked to.

It was a reputational loss that we could ill afford. Our economic impoverishment left little room for defiance. The black-listing threat forced us to make stark foreign policy choices, arguably compromising some of our strategic options.

We were ecstatic when Trump talked of mediation, blessing him with the prayers of a billion people, and the PM felt his reception back home was like he had brought back another World Cup. Well, with one stroke Modi decimated all that, hoping Trump got the message loud and clear.

What are our options? That is the unanswered question that we are struggling with. The PM asks "do you want me to attack India". The pundits pontificate internationalization of the issue, a diplomatic blitzkrieg. The hawks wistfully promote the idea of 'infiltration' and leveraging dissent within the Valley.

Our response limitations must surely have been a part of Modi calculus.

Internationally, Modi is betting on the fatigue factor. At the worst, there will be a bout of high frequency noise – before indifference sets in, as it always does.

The world has moved on, towards greater insularity. The liberal West, long the standard bearer of humanitarianism, is too preoccupied with its domestic issues – rise of populism and nationalism, economic concerns and growing inequalities, environment and quality of life – to offer more than tokenism for issues of ethnic cleansing and freedom struggles in distant lands.

The ultimate hope, the Security Council, rarely weighs the merits of the case before it; it is the weight of the country that merits consideration, and how it coincides with the interests of the five principals. Even otherwise, its strongest deterrent is sanctions. Does anyone seriously contemplate sanctions against India?

Those who think August 5 represents an opportunity – to reignite the spark that had gone out of cause of Kashmir – rest their case on appealing to the World conscience and not letting the embers turn to ashes. Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan argues with great limpidity that we should be relentless in our advocacy notwithstanding the odds.

Of course, we have to raise a voice: to tell the world appeasement should not kill righteousness; that there is little point in having a human rights watchdog if it is fangless; to give hope to people of IOK that they have not been left stranded. The kind of voice that Arundhati Roy is raising – single-handedly doing the job of all our embassies put together.