

Natural farming impetus

It is a resilience imperative, requiring holistic push

PVS Suryakumar

The conflict in the Gulf has exposed the vulnerability of global energy and fertilizer markets. Further, the prospect of El Niño-induced climatic stress threatens agricultural production across many regions. These external shocks are likely to transmit into domestic economic vulnerability through rising input costs and supply disruptions.

The Prime Minister's recent appeal for greater resource consciousness, including a shift towards natural farming, was made against precisely such a backdrop of external vulnerability.

Natural farming has become a resilience imperative and not an ideological proposition. India's food systems remain heavily dependent on imported fertilizers, fossil fuels, groundwater extraction and other external inputs, even as climate change compounds these vulnerabilities. Resilience must therefore become a central agricultural objective.

Importantly, the political signalling already exists. The Centre has launched the National Mission on Natural Farming, while PM-PRANAM was conceived to encourage States to reduce their dependence on chemical fertilizers. Several States — from Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat to Kerala and parts of the North-East — have announced NE/Agroecology/Organic-transition policies.

Yet the uncomfortable truth is that policy declarations have outpaced institutional preparation.

Andhra Pradesh's pioneering natural farming programme has demonstrated both the possibilities and complexities of such transitions. Its recent recognition through the Food Planet Prize 2026, one of the world's largest food-system awards, has drawn international attention to the effort. Yet its experience underlines a simple lesson: natural farming requires long-term institution building, sustained handholding and robust support systems before it can be realised at landscape scale.

The Green Revolution succeeded because the state painstakingly built a complete ecosystem around it — seeds, irrigation, fertilizers, extension services, agricultural universities, procurement systems, MSP support, rural credit and markets.



NATURAL FARMING. Sri Lanka's experience is misunderstood

BUILDING ECOSYSTEMS

Natural farming today has no comparable architecture. That is why the debate must move beyond declarations and acreage targets.

The FAO's agroecology framework already provides a broad institutional template. Its principles — diversity, recycling, resilience, local knowledge, farmer participation, circular economies and supportive institutions — underline that sustainable agriculture cannot emerge through isolated interventions alone. States now have to adapt these principles to local conditions and institutionalise them through mission-mode programmes with dedicated staffing, research, extension and market support systems.

A more practical approach would be for each State to identify a few contiguous clusters — a block or perhaps 20-30 villages — and saturate them with institutional support. These "living landscapes" should include trained field facilitators, bio-input resource centres, FPOs, soil-health monitoring, demonstration plots, transition finance and market linkages.

ICAR, SAUs, and KVKs must engage seriously with the science of transition. The food-security objection must also be addressed honestly. Sri Lanka's failed overnight fertilizer ban is often cited as proof that ecological transition itself is flawed. It proves no such thing. The real lesson is that abrupt decree without preparation, sequencing and institutional support can damage agriculture. India needs carefully designed transition pathways. Markets will be as important as agronomy. Farmers cannot be expected to embrace natural farming, if market signals favour input-intensive production systems.

The writer is former Deputy Managing Director, NABARD. Views are personal



**KARTIKEYA BATRA
AVANTIKA PRABHAKAR
NEERAJ PRASAD**

At rare, defining moments, Indian politics is seized by an issue that cuts across vote banks and overwhelms the incumbent's electoral arithmetic. For instance, the anti-corruption movement in 2011 disrupted the UPA's coalition; the backlash against the Emergency led to a similar disruption in the 1977 election.

The recently concluded agitation against paper leaks launched by the Cuckooch Janata Party (CJP), sparked by the NEET and CBSE examination controversies, and supported by Opposition parties (primarily the INDIA bloc), is the latest such moment.

The historic significance of such events lies in their ability to transcend everyday electoral politics. They pose a danger for the incumbent, an opening for the Opposition.

WINNING RIVAL'S VOTERS

Entrenched parties rely heavily on stable electoral coalitions, i.e., vote banks. One strategy for consolidating these coalitions is to focus solely on issues that resonate with the party's core base. This can be effective under certain conditions. First, consolidation can be sufficient for victory when a party enjoys an unassailable lead because of the relative size of its vote bank.

Second, in systems with low turnout, emphasising issues that resonate with the base can mobilise a party's voters more effectively. Tribal rights in Jharkhand are a textbook example — an issue that helps the JMM shore up its support among tribal communities, even as it makes no dent among urban voters or non-tribal communities.

However, as Indian politics becomes increasingly bipolar, parties must tackle issues that transcend their traditional base. Focussing solely on tribal rights in Jharkhand as a core political issue, for instance, is now unlikely to ensure a victory for the JMM. An alternative strategy is to attract voters from rival parties. However, this is neither straightforward nor without risk, especially if courting the opponent's voters comes at the price of destabilising one's own voter coalition.

In 2009, the Samajwadi Party inducted Kalyan Singh, a former BJP leader and an alleged architect of the Babri Masjid demolition, hoping to attract this caste group's votes. The move ended up alienating the party's traditional Muslim voters instead. The rarest and most valuable political issues are the kind that sidestep this risky trade-off: genuinely cross-cutting issues, which can attract the other side's voters while posing minimal risk to one's own coalition. Disruptions in examinations conducted by the government appear to be one such issue.

In most Indian States, electoral blocs are organised around social identity —



CRUCIAL WIN. Jan Suraj Party (JSP) founder Prashant Kishor celebrating his victory in the Bankipur assembly bypoll in Bihar

Can Opposition benefit from NEET movement?

POLL BUGLE. With Assembly elections happening in 2027, it is hard to say now whether the angst over education can lead to a vote swing in the Opposition's favour

religion in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, caste in Bihar and Haryana, and tribe in Jharkhand and Manipur. More recently, gender-based issues have emerged as a new dimension of contestation that cuts across these cleavages, as observed in States such as Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. The youth, however, have not been mobilised as a voting bloc in a long time.

In a country as young as India, this is a striking omission. Young voters seeking good-quality education and well-paying jobs exist across caste, religion and regional identities. In a survey we conducted during the 2025 Bihar Assembly election, respondents rated the promise of local jobs that would allow Bihar's youth to find gainful employment without leaving the State as one of the strongest policy positions a party could take. This view drew voters from every caste and religious bloc while antagonising virtually none.

A CVoter survey conducted in May 2026 (N=1,346, margin of error ±5 percentage points) found that in addition to 72 per cent of respondents who voted for the INDIA bloc in 2024, nearly 60 per cent of respondents who voted for the NDA in 2024 believe that the Education Minister should resign in

the wake of the NEET and CBSE controversies. This is clear evidence that the issue cuts across party lines. Just as importantly, the Opposition risks nothing by championing this cause: its own voters are overwhelmingly behind it.

Compare this with CVoter's Mood of the Nation survey of June 2025, where 72 per cent of NDA voters but only 50 per cent of Opposition voters agreed that the Modi government had promoted social harmony — the classic sign of a polarising issue. On paper leaks, that partisan wedge disappears: safe ground for the Opposition, a minefield for the government.

THE WAY FORWARD

In light of the above facts, it seemed rational for the government to show the door to the now former Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan (in addition to conceding to two other demands of the CJP). Of course, by doing so, they risked the perception of them not being in total control, and being susceptible to public pressure when it comes to protecting their own ministers. It is safe to say that the potency of this cross-cutting issue was much higher than the potential damage caused by the impression that the Narendra Modi-led NDA government, now in its third consecutive term, is starting to look weak.

So, what does this mean for the Opposition parties? It will be naive to believe that discrepancies in NEET is the only cross-cutting, youth-centric issue that the Opposition can capitalise upon. If at all, this episode should give hope to the Opposition parties that if the right issues are championed by fresh

leadership are combined with smart communication and mobilisation strategies, there are enough people willing to support mass movements. And yet, the Opposition parties, which work very differently from an organisation like the CJP, will face their own share of challenges going forward.

First, no elections are scheduled in India until early 2027. The parties that will face the mighty BJP directly in the upcoming Assembly elections, especially the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, will have to build on their existing vote base by focusing on similar issues, while adopting smart communication and mobilisation strategies. Of course, this will be a challenging task.

Second, the Indian voter carries a very demanding cognitive burden. The vote is the primary instrument through which an Indian citizen can express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an incumbent. With so many grievances competing for attention, the voter must decide which one should shape their choice. It is, therefore, far from certain that large numbers of otherwise pro-BJP voters will swing the other way because of such issues only.

Third, getting behind an issue and offering an alternative are two different things. Until the Opposition lays out a blueprint on how it would handle pressing issues that impact large sections of society across social identities, swing voters currently committed to the BJP will have little reason to switch their preferences.

Batra is Assistant Professor, Azim Premji University; Prabhakar is Assistant Professor, Ashoka University; and Prasad is Associate Professor, University of Amsterdam

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 6, 2006

Govt may extend ban on pvt carriers flying to Gulf

The ban on private sector Indian carriers flying to the Gulf region could be extended by another two years, that is, till 2010. Official sources told Businessline that there was a thinking in sections of the Government that Indian and Air India and their subsidiaries should be the only designated carriers from India to operate to the Gulf region for some more time.

PLR hike: Banks in a fix

Public sector banks have run into a problem with the latest missive from the Finance Ministry advising them to seek board consultation before hiking their lending rates. Speaking to Businessline on condition of anonymity, leading bankers said they were getting contradictory cues from the Reserve Bank and the Finance Ministry with the former indicating hardening interest rates to curb liquidity while the Ministry was for a benign interest regime to encourage economic growth.

US imposes sanctions on 2 Indian firms

The US has imposed sanctions against seven foreign companies, including two from India, for allegedly passing on technology to Iran that could be used for developing weapons of mass destruction or missile systems, a formal notification said.

RK Raghavan

We live in an era of everyday conflict. Illegal migration has compelled nations to maintain constant vigilance on their societies. Added to this is the youth discontent fuelled by lack of good education and job opportunities. The state's inability to provide decent education and jobs sparks protests that often turn violent putting pressure on the police.

In this context, police methods of crowd control comes under scrutiny. But any assessment of police behaviour must also keep this combustible context in mind.

Recent happenings in Jantar Mantar, New Delhi can no longer be seen as an

aberration. The youth will continue to hit the streets to espouse their cause, whether or not they have the resources to fight the powerful state apparatus. In such a setting, the executive does not always provide a clear direction that the police need, giving way to police excesses. Weak political leadership is fertile ground for police excesses. But an objective framework is necessary to judge police action. The apex court's intervention in the recent CJP protests will provide a balm to hurt sentiments.

But any instance of peaceful demonstrators being targeted by police needs to be reviewed.

The police also sometimes finds it hard to follow standard operating procedure (SOP), in letter and spirit, when



POLICE ACTION. Tough questions
SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

confronted with a violent mob.

Modern technology has given us a few tools such as facial recognition to deal with mobs indulging in violence. But these are post facto tools rather than

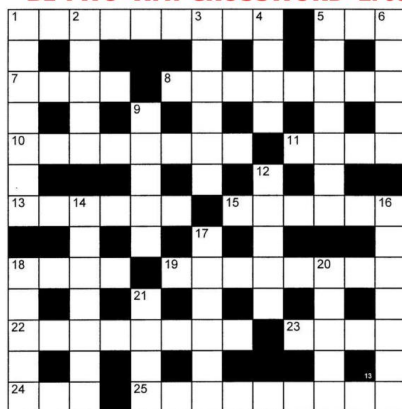
one of prevention. It is for political parties to arrive at a consensus on how to discipline their members from resorting to wanton violence. But this is easier said than done.

The frequency of mob attacks on the police heightens the need for sharpening police responses. There are existing programmes at training institutions in this area. Police can use the recent CJP protests to learn important lessons on crowd control, especially in police training institutions.

Transparency is the need of the hour. Sweeping important issues under the carpet will cause great harm to police credibility.

The writer is a former CBI Director

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2708 EASY



ACROSS

01. An angel of the highest order (9)
02. Body of salt water (3)
07. A species of crow (4)
08. Mechanism for transport of materials (8)
10. Having been spread (bread) (8)
11. Pack away (4)
13. Ecclesiastical scarf (6)
15. Young of vixen (3-3)
18. Artifice, stratagem (4)
19. Body's defence against infection (8)
22. Becoming in demeanour, affable (8)
23. Bank, post office money order (4)
24. Owing (3)
25. Most common, widespread (9)

DOWN

01. Tumbler, rope-dancer (7)
02. To cuff (5)
03. Producer of crops (6)
04. Subst. get a living (4)
05. Checking bleeding, astringent (7)
06. A pointer (5)
09. A bar control (5)
12. Leaf (two pages) of book (5)
14. Cost of stamps (7)
16. Refuse to deal with, handle in trade (7)
17. To tolerate, bear (6)
18. Stiff, unbending (5)
20. Oil tree (5)
21. Flaccid (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. One such as Gabriel, found in a Russian port (9)
05. It's a tallness pinned, in the main (3)
07. How to fleece one for a castle (4)
08. It can transport cone, very awkwardly (8)
10. Was flattered to find one's toast had been spread (8)
11. Put it away, or he'll get away without having bought a ticket (4)
13. Gratuity given to a favourite for a fur cape (6)
15. When small Reynard might box and endlessly cuff him (3-3)
18. A right to employ a piece of trickery (4)
19. Being against one's frame, it will fight infection (8)
22. Affable way cigars are handed out around the Open University (8)
23. Money order that will disappear when one is right inside (4)
24. It is expected to be what one is owed (3)
25. Plant, ever-changing, is widespread (9)

DOWN

01. Tumbler from the bar, and coat provided for one (7)
02. A nail that's not to be cast till May is out (5)
03. He produces plants in a long row ergonomically (6)
04. It is vivid, not being recorded (4)
05. Checking bleeding in City street, using phosphorus (7)
06. It points the way coming from Bow perhaps (5)
09. Control of the pound always follows it (5)
12. One might fool with a large-format book (5)
14. What it costs to mail a postal order gets complicated (7)
16. Refuse to deal with a land agent in Ireland (7)
17. Put up with the rude topless men who move around (6)
18. I'd followed the well-boring plant without bending (5)
20. Oil one used when in love maybe (5)
21. Drag leg out of the meal I'm preparing (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2707

ACROSS 1. Invade 4. Croux 9. Cartoon 10. Lodge 11. Iris 12. Sing 13. Rod 15. Neon 16. Stop 19. Arc 21. Vane 22. Belt 24. Oriel 25. Collude 26. Yelled 27. Cares

DOWN 1. Incriminatory 2. Version 3. Drop 5. Relegate 6. Cider 7. Steadfastness 8. Snail 14. Convulse 17. Presume 18. Snack 20. Chill 23. Flea