

WHO

Shah Faesal,
making a
political turn

On January 9, Shah Faesal stunned the nation with his announcement that he was quitting as managing director of the Jammu and Kashmir State Power Development Corporation. The 35-year-old had topped the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) examination in 2010.

Why did he take such a step?

He termed his decision a "small defiance and protest against unabated killings in Kashmir, lack of reach-out and marginalisation of around 200 million Indian Muslims at the hands of Hindutva forces by reducing them to second-class citizens."

Did he court controversies?

Mr. Faesal's frequent brushes with controversy has constantly pushed him to the centre of discourse. As Deputy Commissioner, Bandipora, he ordered a magisterial inquiry into the killing of a civilian, Farhat Ahmad Dar, in firing by security forces on protesters within his jurisdiction in 2014. He followed up the

inquiry by writing to the General Administration Department, seeking an amendment to the rules to bring appraisals of officers of the rank of superintendent of police under a Deputy Commissioner's purview "to reduce human rights violations." His letter attracted a reprimand from the Chief Secretary, who called it "crossing of the red line." Subsequently, his tweets and write-ups on the Kashmir problem landed him in a major row. Many BJP leaders, including Union Minister Jitendra Singh, were critical of his views. In July 2018, the Department of Personnel and Training pointed to a tweet of Mr. Faesal and said its contents were "prima facie in contravention of the provision of the All India Service (Conduct Rules), 1968, and All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969." An inquiry is pending against him for his tweets.

Where did he grow up?

Mr. Faesal hails from the flung village of Sogam in

north Kashmir's Kupwara district, where militancy raged in the 1990s since the area is close to the Line of Control (LoC) and was a major route for youth ex-filtrating the Valley into Pakis-



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

tan-occupied Kashmir for arms training. His father, a teacher, was killed by militants in 2002 in the village. The decision of Mr. Faesal, an MBBS with a Masters degree in Urdu, came nine years after he topped the IAS examination. In 2010, he described his feat as "breaking of the myth" of discrimination. In fact, he did motivate hundreds of local aspirants to compete in the Union Public Service Commission examinations, an effort that resulted in a quantum jump in the number of students appearing from the Kashmir valley. With his speeches and interviews, widely televised on Doordarshan, he emerged as a poster boy from the troubled Valley. Mr. Faesal's story of success became a counter-narrative to the discourse of alienation that was driving youth to militancy and street protests.

What next?

Mr. Faesal, who

returned to the State recently from Harvard University after completing a course in public policy, has since announced that he is going to join politics. However, he remained non-committal on joining any ideological platform. He described his stint in politics as "an addition and not an alternative" and made it clear that "he has no aim to divide the J&K electorate further," a hint that he may join some regional party. In the face of an unprecedented feedback, especially from the youth on social media platforms, Mr. Faesal was swayed against joining a current mainstream party immediately. He said his politics would be "a politics of disruption." The mainstream parties, which had failed to represent the sentiments of the people, should reinvent themselves and find a new vocabulary, Mr. Faesal said. He has decided to go back to the grassroots and meet people for the next six months before taking a call.

PEERZADA ASHIQ

WHAT

The goings-on
in the top
probe agency

WHAT IS IT? Alok Verma, an IPS officer of the 1979 batch, was removed as Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for a second time on January 10, barely 48 hours after the Supreme Court had restored his position. His rival and the number 2, Rakesh Asthana, a 1984-batch officer of the Gujarat cadre, too was transferred a week after Mr. Verma. The government is hoping that it brings the unprecedent-

ed internecine war in the country's premier investigation agency to an end. Both hand-picked officers of the Narendra Modi government, they took personal rivalry to a new low, finally reaching the Supreme Court. On October 23, 2018, when the government divested Mr. Verma of his powers and forced him to go on 'compulsory leave,' he challenged the decision in the Supreme Court. He contended that since he was appointed for a two-year tenure by a high-power selection committee, comprising the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, only the committee could remove him. He also challenged the order of the Chief Vigilance Commissioner to remove him for not "co-operating in an inquiry and not submitting required submissions." On January 8, the court restored Mr. Verma to his post but did not go into the merits of corruption allegations against him.

HOW DID IT
COME ABOUT?

It all started in the middle of 2017 when the government refused to appoint IPS officers recommended by Mr. Verma to the CBI. In October 2017, when the government was about to consider a promotion for Mr. Asthana to the rank of Special Director, Mr. Verma submitted a note to the CVC, alleging that the blue-eyed officer of the Modi regime had taken a bribe in the Sterling Biotech case that the agency was investigating for default of over ₹5,000 crore in loans. He alleged that a diary found on the premises of Sterling had mentioned that Mr. Asthana had received a bribe of ₹3.8 crore. Yet, the government promoted Mr. Asthana. This worsened relations between the two. In June 2018, the former CBI chief wrote to the CVC again that Mr. Asthana could not represent the Director at official meetings. In a tit-for-tat allegation, Mr. Asthana wrote to the Cabinet Secretary in August 2018, accusing Mr. Verma of

meddling in a probe and preventing a raid against former Railway Minister Lulu Prasad in the IRCTC scam. Mr. Verma hit back, and on October 15, the CBI registered a case of bribery against Mr. Asthana, alleging that the agency's number two officer had received a bribe of ₹2 crore in the Moin Qureshi money laundering case. Mr. Asthana moved the Delhi High Court to quash the FIR. On October 23, the CBI's internal tussle peaked. Mr. Verma ordered Mr. Asthana to be stripped of all his powers since he was "under investigation for extortion and bribery." The CVC, who performs a supervisory role of monitoring the CBI under the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, stepped in by divesting Mr. Verma of all powers. The government, which had been a silent spectator until then, too intervened. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), under which the CBI functions, divested Mr. Verma of all functions and responsibilities. On learning about his midnight

removal, Mr. Verma moved the Supreme Court.

WHY DOES IT MATTER? The entire episode not only dented the CBI's image but the rivalry between two top officers split the agency into camps where subordinate officers went by personal loyalties rather than upholding the rule of law. Experts said the CBI, which has often been described as being a "caged parrot," was now witnessing a "gang war."

WHAT LIES AHEAD? The selection committee is meeting this Thursday to decide on a new full-time Director as Mr. Verma's original two-year tenure would have ended on January 31. The biggest task before the government is to restore the credibility of the agency by appointing an officer of impeccable record.

SANDEEP PHUKAN

WHY

Team India
needs to
consolidate

How important is the Test win?

Cricketing jousts against Australia in its own backyard have always been a difficult proposition. India first sailed the seas, then gradually acquired air-miles but the results were eerily similar. Most games were lost, the odd triumph or draw was wrested and a Test series was never won Down Under until Virat Kohli's men altered the script. Right from the days when Lala Amarnath led his outfit on its maiden sojourn to Australia in 1947-48, India seemed fated to wilt. Seen through that historical prism, what Kohli's men have achieved during the course of the four-match Test series, is hugely significant. India won the series at 2-1. But for the rains during the final clash at Sydney, the visitors may have walked away with a 3-1 verdict.

What helped India achieve this?

India sauntered in with its number one Test ranking. But the surround-sound grated on the ears. It ranged from those stray whispers of being 'tigers at

home, lambs abroad' to the gigantic bag of expectations centred around Kohli's men inevitably winning against an anaemic Australia, which missed Steve Smith and David Warner. The duo was banned for a year, following the ball-tampering crisis in South Africa. Yet, there is many a slip between 'strengths on paper' and what transpires on the field. India needed a clutch of enforcers to register its supremacy and it found those men. But none were bigger than Cheteshwar Pujara (521 runs) and speedster Jasprit Bumrah (21 wickets). The duo's astounding performance and the vital contributions of Kohli, Rishabh Pant and Mohammed Shami, to name a few, ensured that despite suffering a blip at Perth, India stayed on top.

Which are the areas for improvement?

The middle-order's relatively superior health and the incisive nature of the fast bowlers, who fared better than their local counterparts, masked a few inadequacies. These weak spots could hurt.



The opening pair remains a work in progress. Regulars Murali Vijay and K.L. Rahul seem to have lost their touch, the last-named was a walking-wicket. Newcomer Mayank Agarwal (195 runs) did well and perhaps in future Tests he could pad up with Prithvi Shaw. Ajinkya Rahane's inability to convert starts into the odd century remains a worry but he has been an able deputy to Kohli.

Are there issues about discipline?

Morale is high but the squad's self-

team could border on the delusional. The constant posturing by coach Ravi Shastri that this unit is India's finest ever and even alluding that the latest milestone is bigger than the 1983 World Cup win seems to be stretching the limits of hyperbole. Kohli and some players have caught on to this 'we-are-the-best' anthem. The bubble they have built has its perils. The sense of immunity that seeped in has come back to haunt, especially after Hardik Pandya and Rahul's misogynist remarks on 'Koffee with Ka-

ran.' It would help if the players remember that they have stepped into the massive shoes of men like Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar, Anil Kumble and Rahul Dravid.

What's in store?

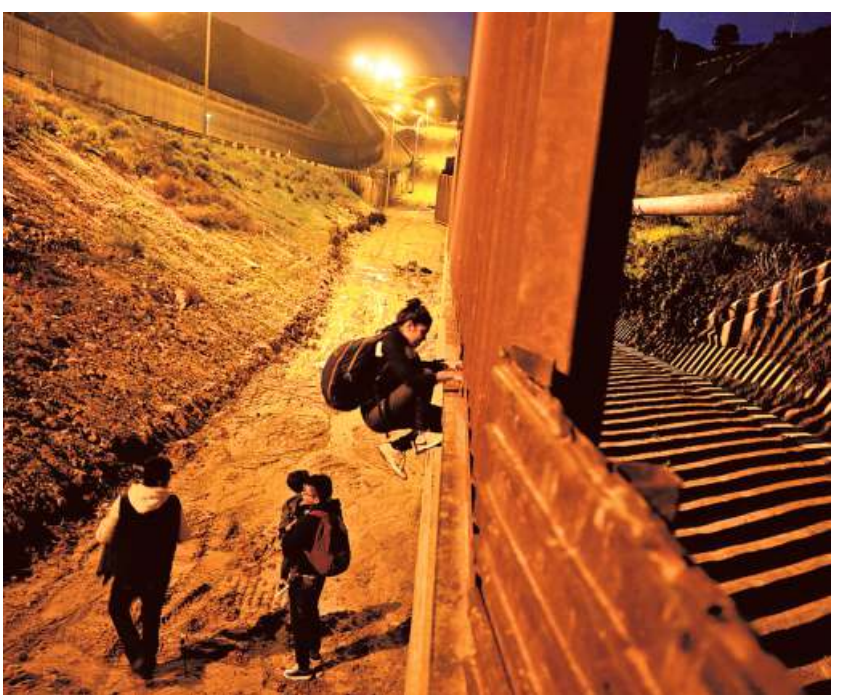
Sporting history is replete with tales of triumphs against a pedigreed team, eventually causing upheavals in the hierarchy. India defeated the West Indies in an ODI at Berbice during the 1983 tour and perhaps it sowed the seeds of the subsequent World Cup high at Lord's. India has already slipped into the ODI mode and just won the latest series against Australia 2-1 on Friday. Next, New Zealand awaits. After that, Australia will arrive in India for a set of ODIs. All this is a prelude to the World Cup in England from May 30 to July 14. Confidence is a mighty ally to have. Meanwhile, it would help if the players mind their language on television.

K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR

WHEN

15
January, 2019

Wall of people: As a partial U.S. government shutdown reached its 25th day, President Donald Trump on Tuesday invoked a new caravan of migrants, heading to the border, on Twitter to pressure lawmakers. Mr. Trump wants Congress to provide \$5.7 billion for building a wall on the Mexico border but Democrats have resisted. "A big new Caravan is heading up to our Southern Border from Honduras," he tweeted. "Only a Wall, or Steel Barrier, will keep our Country safe! Stop playing political games and end the Shutdown!" Hundreds of mostly Honduran migrants have entered southern Mexico, joining thousands of other people from Central America who are already there. Mexican authorities told Reuters the migrants would be put up in shelters. Pictures show migrants from Honduras walking along a road as others hitch a ride in Guatemala, and a migrant trying to reach the U.S. jumping a fence to cross illegally into San Diego from the border in Tijuana, Mexico. ■REUTERS



WHERE

Confusion over
construction
plan in Bandipur

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has opposed a proposal to construct elevated roads over the Bandipur Tiger Reserve. The proposal had triggered outrage and protests from NGOs. The tiger reserve, spread over nearly 912 sq km, is located in Chamaraanjagar district of Karnataka, constitutes an important component of a forest landscape comprising

Nagarahole (Karnataka), Mudumalai and Sathyamangalam (Tamil Nadu) and Wayanad (Kerala). The tiger reserve is home to nearly 120 to 150 tigers as per the 2014 estimates made by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). Bandipur also supports nearly 1,600 elephants, according to a 2012 count by the Karnataka Forest Department. Conservationists feel any infrastructure project through the forests is bound to impact the wildlife habitat and should be dropped. But there are supporters of the project who want the night traffic ban lifted. The matter is pending before the Supreme Court.

What does the view signify?

In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Environment Mahesh Sharma said the Ministry had not concurred with the proposal for elevated roads, but supported strengthening of the alternative route. While wildlife activists have welcomed the statement, they have underlined the

contradictory stance of the government. Conservation biologist Sanjay Gubbi argued that different Ministries were holding divergent views. While the MoEF&CC was against the project in principle, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways was for it. "In case the Centre was against the elevated road, the MoRTH, which has filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court on September 19, 2018, in support of the project, should be made to withdraw the affidavit and respect the views of the Ministry of Environment on forest issues," he said.

Why was the project proposed?

The ban on traffic through Bandipur, located 80 km from Mysuru in Karnataka, from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. was introduced on the directives of the High Court of Karnataka to reduce disturbance to wildlife and curb road kills. It has been in place since 2009. But the ban evoked opposition from a section of stakeholders, including the Kerala government which

challenged the High Court order in the Supreme Court on the grounds that it was impeding economic growth of the region. The Supreme Court constituted a committee to examine the disputes between Karnataka and Kerala. In an affidavit, the MoRTH, which was part of the committee, proposed construction of elevated highways: five sections of 1 km each (four in Bandipur and one in the Wayanad sanctuary).

Why is it being opposed?

Activists have argued that such projects are prohibited under the final notification of the Eco-Sensitive Zone for Bandipur issued in September 2011 based on the Environment Protection Rules, 1986. The guidelines make it clear that in the areas of threatened taxa, there should not be infrastructure development, and since Bandipur is a source habitat for tigers, flyovers cannot be constructed, said Mr. Gubbi. Wildlife activist Santosh Pavagada pointed out that the Centre had also ignored the Tiger

Conservation Plan (TCP) for Bandipur, which was prepared under Section 38V (3) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and it had recommended night closure of highways passing through the tiger reserve.

What is the State's view?

The Chief Conservator of Forests and Director of Bandipur, Ambadi Madhav, said the State government was consistent in opposing the project and developed an alternative road that bypassed the core forest area. The State has spent over ₹75 crore to develop an alternative road (SH-90) through Hunsur, Gonikoppa, Kutta and Kartikulam and another stretch between Konanur and Makutta and Madikeri and Kutta that links northern Kerala. The detour is 30 km longer. The Board for Wildlife has exempted ambulance and fire-service vehicles from the ban and 16 State transport buses are allowed to pass through at night.

KRISHNA KUMAR

