

**The Indian EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## DISGRACE

How offensive does Governor Tathagata Roy need to be to incur the displeasure of the President? The wait continues

**M**EGHALAYA GOVERNOR TATHAGATA Roy has endorsed a call for a boycott of Kashmir and Kashmiris in the wake of the Pulwama tragedy. Roy's tweet of an appeal from a "retired colonel" to boycott Kashmir and "everything Kashmiri" with the comment that "I am inclined to agree" comes when Kashmiri students, professionals, traders etc. are increasingly being targeted by Hindutva groups in many parts of India. While most of the political establishment — barring exceptions like West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, the Left and, of course, leaders of the political parties in Jammu and Kashmir — has been ambivalent in its response to this campaign, Roy has walked the extra mile to condone it.

Maybe he needs reminding but Roy holds a Constitutional office. The Governor is the representative of the President and is expected to act as the custodian of the Constitution. In fact, he is meant to advise and caution the government if and when it transgresses Constitutional morality. What happens if he is accused of doing this? Well, nothing so far. It is tempting, of course, to dismiss this former president of BJP's West Bengal unit as a headline-hunting loudmouth. Social media thrives on his type, left, right and centre. Hasn't he said similar things in the past? He has, indeed. A couple of years ago, as Tripura Governor, he approvingly quoted Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee in a tweet to suggest that "Hindu-Muslim problem" could be resolved only through a "civil war". Later, he clarified that he wasn't advocating one but only quoting Mookerjee. To be fair to Roy, he has been consistent in his bigotry and it is possible that he believes it fetched him office. A year before being appointed as Tripura governor, he emphasised that "overwhelming Hindu majority is essential to maintain a multi-religious society and secular state" with the caveat that "West Bengal is slipping" on this count. Soon after taking oath as governor, Roy tweeted that Hindus in Bangladesh and West Bengal were attacked by Muslims and wondered "what awaits us Bengali Hindus?"

Roy, whose Twitter profile describes him as "right-wing Hindu socio-political thinker, writer, ideologue," is surely entitled to his views. It's all too good that authorities, who are quick to book university students for social media posts and charge them with sedition, firmly stand by Roy's right to free speech. It is worth a thought, however, how much further Governor Roy needs to stoop for the government and the Rashtrapati to wake up. Meanwhile, with each hateful tweet, he undermines his Constitutional position. Not that it bothers him one bit.

## INTERIM SOLUTION

A framework agreement on capital, surplus transfers from RBI to government will smoothen ties between the two

**F**OR THE SECOND year running, the RBI has agreed to transfer an interim dividend or surplus profits to the government, with the pay out — at Rs 28,000 crore this time, more than double the Rs 10,000 it transferred to the exchequer last year. The early payout by the central bank and the mounting pressure on the RBI to transfer a much higher surplus is a reflection on fiscal management and government finances in an election year, with extra spending commitments and fiscal slippages. As the owner or controlling shareholder, it is natural, and justifiably so, for any government to seek a reasonable or fair return on the capital deployed by the sovereign, especially in the commercial enterprises promoted by it. But a distinction needs to be made when it comes to the central bank, even if the government is the sole owner, considering that the state of the bank's balance sheet is intrinsic to delivering on its objectives of monetary and financial stability and also to boost credibility, not just in the financial markets but also among credit rating agencies.

As the experience of the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent events show, there has been a dramatic change in the risk environment under which central banks operate. There is a recognition that these banks should be equipped to provide huge liquidity commitments and also build strong capital buffers as a cushion against unforeseen risks and potential losses. Notably, this has led to the Bank of England and the UK Treasury (the equivalent of the finance ministry in India) signing an MoU last year on the financial relationship between the two, which clearly lays down the capital principles and purpose and the ceiling above which net profits will be paid to the treasury as dividend. It helps that the Bank of England Act provides for 50 per cent of the bank's profits or such other sum to be paid to the treasury twice a year, including one as interim payment.

A committee headed by former governor Bimal Jalan is now reviewing the RBI's economic capital framework. As the monetary policy committee agreement has shown, a similar legislative framework agreement on capital and rules on surplus transfer can help narrow differences and smoothen ties between two critical arms of the government. But even that will be defeated if there is an escape clause for governments which are not fiscally prudent.

## WELCOME, ROBOCOP

Kerala police has inducted an android into its ranks. Perhaps machines have lessons for more traditional law enforcement

**R**OBOCOP, PEOPLE TEND to forget, was not a robot. The eponymous character in the 1987 cyberpunk classic was a cyborg, and it's the hybrid's humanity that really moves the movie along. *The Terminator* (1984), on the other hand, terminated. KP-Bot, India's first robo-cop, has little similarity with her fictional counterpart from three decades ago — like the terminator, she's all robot. Modelled after women police personnel, the Kerala police's newest asset is an android developed by the Kochi-based start-up, Asimov Robotics, and Cyberdome, a technology development centre of the Kerala police. To begin with, KP-Bot will welcome visitors, pass out information and guide them through the services available at the police headquarters. So far, so innocuous. But, in the future, she will detect explosives and issue identity cards to visitors.

For the paranoid, those waiting for the inevitable robocalypse, Kerala's robocop is just another step towards the end of people as we know them. Between AI and machines with an understanding of armaments, does humanity stand a chance? Likely, this paranoia belongs where it began, in the realm of science fiction. And given that the company that helped create KP-Bot is named after Isaac Asimov, it is likely that any iterations on the android will keep in mind the Three Laws of Robotics: A robot may not harm a human being; it must follow orders; and it must protect itself, so long as such protection does not conflict with the first two laws.

The logical loop of the Three Laws, of course, is airtight. In fact, they are just about ethical enough to form guidelines for human police persons in India and beyond. Essentially, they boil down to being decent (no "third-degree"), disciplined (chain of command) and without pointless bravado. Sadly, even fictional robots and robocops have not been able to follow the Three Laws. And organic law enforcement is, for now, merely human.



RAMACHANDRA GUHA

# Shaming ourselves

Our political response to the barbarous Pulwama attack has played into the hands of Lashkar, Jaish, and the ISI.

**I WAS BORN** and raised in Dehradun, a town which has been on the front pages of this newspaper in recent days, for reasons that do its history and reputation no credit at all. A series of chilling reports have appeared on the harassment of Kashmiri students studying in that town. They were forced to flee back to their home state, while the administrators of their colleges have been made to pledge that they will admit no Kashmiris in future. In at least one case, a senior faculty member of Kashmiri origin has been dismissed from his post.

Those persecuting innocent Kashmiris in Dehradun were led by activists of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad. Radical students of both the left and right are not prone to reason at the best of times, and in this case the ABVP has, at it were, a visible external stimulus for their anger — the horrific attack by terrorists on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama. The attack was coordinated by a jihadi group based in Pakistan, a group aided by the Pakistani Army and the Pakistani State. But why attack young citizens of the Republic for a crime committed by someone else, and orchestrated from across the border? And particularly the Kashmiris, who have come to seek a decent education outside their own state, hoping thereby to equip themselves for a job in the modern economy? How will attacking these students help in the war against terror and in the shaming of Pakistan?

The leaders of the ABVP are not known for careful or logical thinking. It may be hard for them to comprehend that the Kashmiris who come outside their home state to study are, in effect, India's best hope for stemming the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism in the Valley. If these Kashmiris can go to college safely and with self-respect in Dehradun, and then go on to work safely and with self-respect in places like the town I now call home, Bengaluru, then other Kashmiris will come to recognise what the jihadis seek to obscure — namely, that for a better future for themselves and their families, a country like India offers far better

prospects than a country like Pakistan.

The ABVP is unwilling or unable to understand that knowledge-seeking Kashmiri students can be an indispensable aid in India's battle against jihad. But surely the president of the BJP can. He is an exceptionally intelligent and well-informed man. However, he has an election to fight, and surveys suggest that his party will be hard put to achieve anything close to a majority in the Lok Sabha. So he chooses to go down the path of communal bigotry. Thus, in a recent speech in Guwahati, Amit Shah said that if the BJP returned to power in New Delhi, it "won't allow Assam to become another Kashmir". It is very clear what he means by this; that the BJP will not allow Muslims to settle in that state. The President of the BJP is willing to stigmatise citizens of Kashmir on the basis of their religion, in order to win more seats in Assam (where the majority religion is more compatible with the ideology of his party).

What the ABVP did to Kashmiris in Dehradun and what the BJP president said about Kashmir in Assam was awful enough. Even worse, from the point of view of constitutional propriety, were the tweets of the Governor of Meghalaya, endorsing the boycott of Kashmiris and of their products by the rest of India. These tweets were brought to the attention of the President's Office soon after they were issued. But they have not been retracted; indeed, no doubt in the knowledge that he is protected by those he reports to, the governor has defended his despicable statements in an interview to this newspaper.

The prime minister has been silent on the subject — as is his wont, when it comes to matters disturbing or controversial. One word by him would have stopped the goons of the ABVP in their tracks. Expectedly, it has not come. Notably, though, the president of the Congress party has said nothing either about the demonisation of ordinary Kashmiris in the streets of Northern India, on social media, and by powerful people in office. He, too, has an election to fight; and so

cowardice has prevailed over courage, political expediency over plain human decency. While the BJP seeks to demonise Kashmiris to win seats elsewhere in India, the Congress will act as if Kashmiris do not exist at all.

Kashmir, says the political class in one voice, is an integral part of India. Kashmiris are another matter altogether. So, instead of identifying, isolating, and weakening those elements in the Valley who promote Islamic fundamentalism, the ruling party now wants us to think of all residents of the Valley as traitorous. And the leading Opposition party is happy to go along with this. This is not just morally wrong, but politically suicidal — that is, if one's conception of politics goes beyond winning a particular election to assuring a secure and prosperous future for our Republic.

The threats and intimidation issued by the ABVP, the dog-whistles issued by Amit Shah and by the Meghalaya governor, the silence of the prime minister and of the Congress president — not one of these will make our jawans any safer. On the other hand, they will please and comfort our enemies, and embolden them further. If young Kashmiris are told that colleges in the mainland have no place for them, who does that help but the jihadis? If the governor of one state asks us to boycott citizens of another state, who does that help but the jihadis? If the president of India's ruling party insinuates that all Muslims are untrustworthy, who does that help but the jihadis? And if all these statements go uncontested by the prime minister and by the Congress president, who does that help but the jihadis?

The political response within India to the barbarous attack in Pulwama has played absolutely into the hands of the Lashkar, the Jaish, and the ISI. When we should have been proactive in shaming and stigmatising the Government of Pakistan for its sponsorship of terror, we have instead been proactive in shaming and stigmatising ourselves.

The writer is a Bengaluru-based historian



APOORVANAND

## THE AGE OF CRITICISM

For over 50 years, Namvar Singh defined the contours of Hindi literary culture

**THE MOST BRILLIANT** mind of our literary world is no more. The death of Hindi literary critic Namvar Singh truly marks the end of an era. What was this era? It was defined by the excitement of creation and an eagerness to sincerely engage with it. It can, therefore, be called a true age of criticism. Namvar Singh was shaped by the Gandhi-Nehru era, which has been the only period of criticism in modern India. For, criticism exists only with creation. But the task of criticism is not to validate creation or be its propagandist. Criticism is not secondary to creation. Since creation is, in itself, a response, a critical one to the existing reality, it must submit itself to criticism, which examines it by the standards it has set autonomously.

Namvar Singh epitomised this spirit of criticism. Hindi has seen great critics like Ram Chandra Shukla and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi or Ram Vilas Sharma, but Namvar Singh strode like a colossus. It is seldom that a critic remains at the centre of literary discussion for more than half a century. Namvar Singh, trained in the classical literary traditions, was equally conversant with modern literary canons. He called himself a humble disciple of Dwivedi, who in turn was influenced by the cosmic and cosmopolitan vision of Rabindranath Tagore.

Nothing is beyond criticism, was the motto of the guru and the shishya. No tradition, no canon was sacred or holy enough to not be tested by the fire of criticism. Namvar Singh had tradition in his bones and could, therefore, question its lofty claims — he knew

when tradition was a source of nourishment and when it turned into a deadening disease. He was the last authoritative voice on the Aapabhramsha literature in Hindi and knew his Sanskrit so well that the Sanskrit scholars never tried to dispute his judgement. Namvar Singh held that tradition can never be seen as singular, it had to be plural. His book, which is also a tribute to his guru, is titled *Doosri Parampara Ki Khoj*. There was no one single high tradition to which all "little" traditions must submit. He loved new voices. Young writers remember with gratitude and fondness the phone calls and postcards from Namvar Singh. He preferred to err on the side of New. Only Ashok Vajpeyi comes close to him in this respect.

The range of Namvar Singh's scholarship was mind-boggling. He was inarguably the first and the only Hindi scholar and intellectual who commanded the respectful attention of luminaries from the world of social sciences and politics. He remained a voracious reader till the last and, like Bipan Chandra, fought his weakening eyesight to keep reading. It can be said that reading ate into his writing time. He remained a reluctant writer. People often treated this as laziness, but those who knew him well understood that it was his humility, the result of his companionship with the greats of the world of letters, that made him a reluctant writer.

Namvar Singh is described as a Marxist critic. But the adjective is redundant when applied to his work. Criticism is not a colony

of social sciences. In fact, its autonomy from ideological labels makes it a worthwhile activity. He also did not fall into the trap of theory, which became a fashion in the West and marginalised the discipline of criticism for a long time. For Namvar Singh, practical criticism was essential to keep the act of criticism relevant, not only to literature but to life itself. He was the first Marxist to challenge the official Marxian aesthetic canons and introduce revisionists or unofficial Marxists such as Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno and Antonio Gramsci to the Hindi reading public.

Namvar Singh developed a unique writing style. He wore his scholarship lightly and his writing was accessible even to those uninitiated into literary discourses. He was also popular as an orator, who commanded large followings in big and small towns. People from all walks of life thronged to listen to him. Not surprisingly, some called this frugal writer a representative of *vachik* tradition.

Namvar Singh never sacrificed his teaching for the sake of his other vocation, writing. He was faithful to his students, and prepared meticulously for his classes. He enjoyed polemics. There has not been a better master of this art than him. But he yearned for dialogue and understanding. Criticism can remain democratic only by inviting conversation.

In the passing away of Namvar Singh, the art of the word has lost a true lover.

The writer teaches Hindi at Delhi University



## FEBRUARY 21, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

### RAIL BUDGET

**GOODS MOVEMENT** AND suburban travel for commuters will cost more as a result of increases announced by Railway Minister Madhu Dandavate. Presenting the railway budget for 1979-80, Dandavate announced additional levies of Rs 178 crore to enable the railways to end the year with a surplus of Rs 88.49 crore. No increase has been proposed in fares for long distance passenger, mail, express or superfast trains. A supplementary charge of 5 per cent has been imposed on rail goods transported up to 500 kilometres, and 10 per cent for distances beyond 500 kilometres. Exemptions from supplementary charges to certain commodities have been withdrawn.

### CHINA IN VIETNAM

**AFTER A DAY** of conflicting reports about what is happening on the Sino-Vietnamese border, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that its troops were still inside Vietnam, and were not withdrawing to the border. In the first announcement about the situation after almost 48 hours, the Chinese government officially denied earlier reports that the vice foreign minister, Ho Ying, had told the Lebanese ambassador in London that the operation in Vietnam was over, BBC reports. However, the foreign ministry statement did not go into any detail on the state of the fighting or indicate when China is likely to pull out. Later, the official Hsinhua news

agency reported that fighting was still going on in the Kwangsi and Yunnan border areas.

### CONSENSUS WANTED

**THE UTTAR PRADESH** Janata Legislature Party will meet on February 27 to elect a new leader. Madhu Dandavate will conduct the meeting at Lucknow as central observer. The party's central parliamentary board at its meeting reviewed the developments in UP in the wake of the chief minister, Ram Naresh Yadav, losing the confidence of the party on February 15. There was general agreement among the board members belonging to different Janata constituents that the successor to Yadav should be selected by consensus.



WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"India must see the writing on the wall and acknowledge that — just as the US has realised in Afghanistan — there is no military solution to Kashmir." —DAWN

Love of labour

The interim budget has kept in mind the interests of workers. This is the first time in recent history a government has done that



SAJI NARAYANAN C K

FOR THE FIRST time in a long while, a Union budget has tried to care for workers. In recent times, we have witnessed mere sermons on the social sector in the previous budgets. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) had termed last year's budget as totally disappointing. Expectations similar to the one created by this budget were engendered in the budget presented by Yashwant Sinha during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, even though Sinha later shifted to the capitalist camp. In the current interim budget, the finance minister has affirmed that 50 per cent of the GDP comes from the sweat and toil of 42 crore workers in the unorganised sector. This is a recognition of the role labour plays in the country's economic progress. Let us hope that the pro-worker vision initiated this year will form a part of the future roadmap of India's development.

ity, Employee Provident Fund (EPF) cover age and more. Minimum wages have been revised from Rs 246 to Rs 333/350 per day. This was done at a time when the CPM ruled Tripura state fixed the country's lowest minimum wages at Rs75 per day. Employee's State Insurance (ESI) eligibility ceiling, new ESI benefits, EPF minimum pension, honorarium for scheme workers were raised besides enhancing many insurance benefits. The long-pending demand of the neglected Gramin Dak Sevaks in the postal service to implement the Kamlesh Chandra Report was met by the central government. Besides, child labour was prohibited upto 14 years and wage payment through banks was made compulsory.

One demand of the trade unions, jointly, was that the labour departments, both at the Centre and in the states, must cease the delay in registering trade unions. The central government has, through a notification, decided that registration shall be deemed to have taken place after 45 days of application.

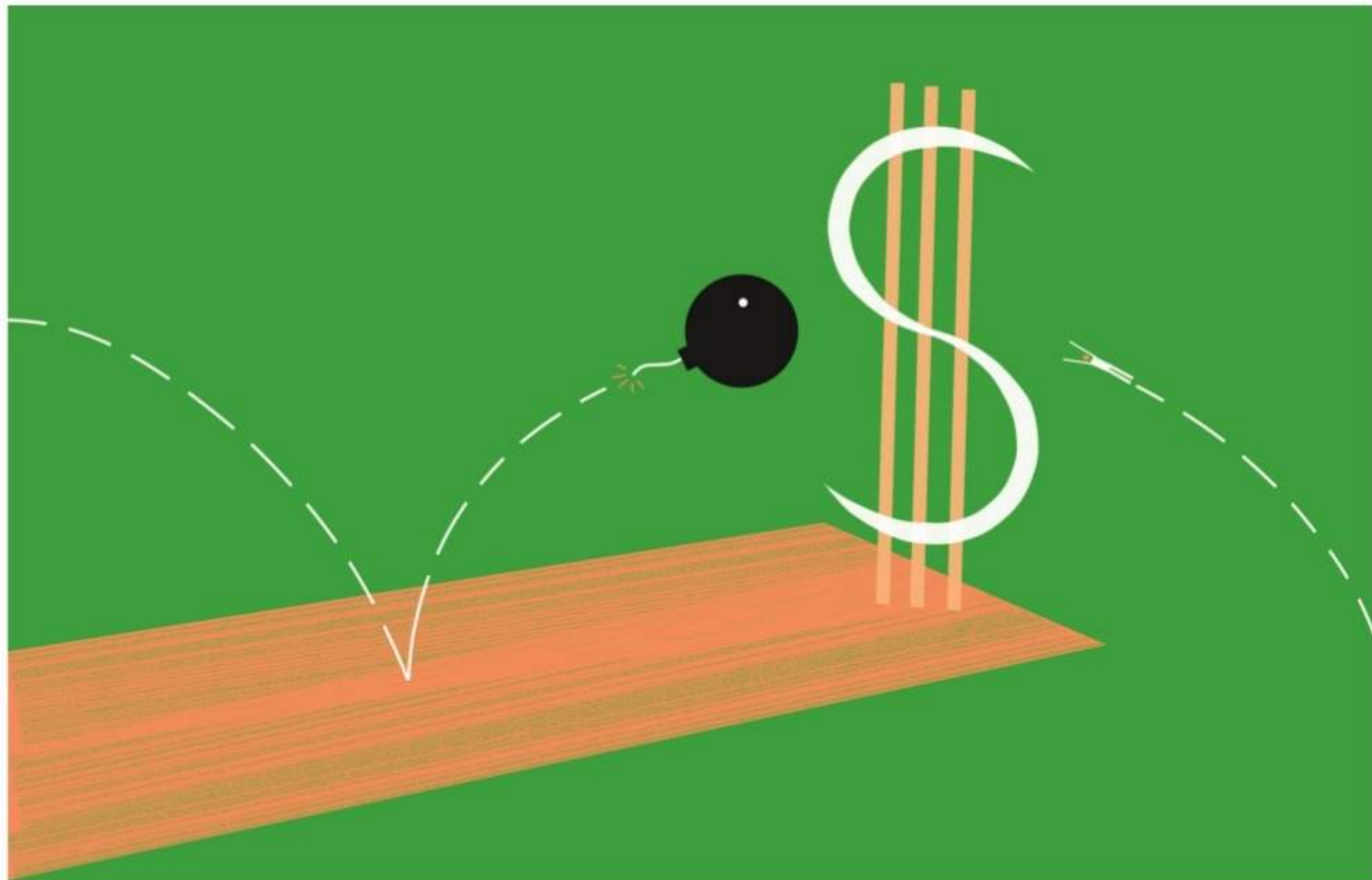
The trade unions and policy makers in the country were concerned by the fact that, at present, only about 7 per cent of the total 50 crore working population receives the benefits of the Minimum Wages Act. The new Labour Code on Wages presented in Parliament is historic and revolutionary. This law, if properly implemented, will not only change the face of Indian labour, but will also bring a sizeable proportion of the population above the poverty line. Similarly, the Labour Code on Social Security, which ensures about 14 benefits to the last worker, will also create history. There are certain provisions in it which need pruning. This golden chance of creating another milestone was delayed because it needs a better equipped policy and legislative machinery that can move faster.

Such a basket of pro-labour reforms is unique in recent history of labour, probably after Ambedkar's efforts in the direction. The BMS considers that that this was achieved due to the success of its approach of "sangharsh and samvad" towards the government.

At the same time, the CPM-led Kerala government has legislated the anti-worker Head-load Worker amendment Act, brought in the Shop Act Amendment through the ordinance route without the mandatory consultation with trade unions, which increased the working hours of women and continues to implement Fixed Term Employment without any beneficial protection. The communist trade unions are helplessly supporting such moves.

There are great expectations from the present Modi government since it has outdone its predecessors in showering benefits to the world of work. But this is not the end of history, and many things are yet to be achieved.

The writer is president, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh



CR Sasikumar

The cost of Pulwama

Any alleged terror attack traceable to Pakistan severely undercuts its economic stability, IMF deal



RANI D MULLEN AND DUVVURI SUBBARAO

IS IT POSSIBLE that Pakistan has scored a self-goal by allegedly sponsoring last week's terrorist attack on Indian security forces in Pulwama, Jammu & Kashmir which took over 40 lives? Since the Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) has claimed responsibility for the attack, India has vowed to work on isolating Pakistan economically and diplomatically as a state sponsor of terrorism. This comes at a time when Pakistan is facing an external payments crisis, with only \$7 billion in reserves, less than two months of import cover, and is in desperate need of a bailout by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Yet, if India succeeds in convincing major shareholders of the IMF — the US, European countries, Japan and China — and international organisations like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) of the Pakistan state's involvement in these attacks, an IMF bailout of Pakistan, which looked like a distinct possibility just last week after the meeting between Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan and IMF managing director Christine Lagarde, could be in jeopardy. And Pakistan risks going over the precipice as a result.

Outwardly, Pakistan is putting up a brave face and appears to have got a reprieve with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman promising investments up to \$20 billion during his recent visit there in what has widely been interpreted as help for the country's crumbling economy. However, these are just pledges of potential future investment,

and even if they materialise, funds will flow slowly as projects get grounded. Despite the fanfare of Prime Minister Khan and the crown prince cheerily driving through the streets of Islamabad in a horse-drawn carriage, the promised Saudi assistance will do little to rescue Pakistan from its rapidly deepening balance of payments crisis.

The need to access IMF assistance is a sharp brush with reality for Prime Minister Khan who, as is typical across South Asia, won office on the promise of huge handouts. Early in his tenure, Khan exuded confidence that friendly countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and China would come to his aid, thereby helping him avoid going to the IMF and escape the harsh conditionalities that will accompany an IMF package, including stringent expenditure cuts. Evidently, those hopes have not materialised to the extent expected, leaving the prime minister — who once said he would rather commit suicide than approach the IMF — with little choice but to negotiate with the IMF for Pakistan's 12th bailout package since the 1980s.

Even before the Pulwama attacks, there were difficult issues that Pakistan needed to settle with the Fund. One of the main issues is providing the IMF with concrete assurance that its assistance will not be used to repay Chinese loans. The IMF is likely also demanding a meaningful float of the exchange rate, which Pakistan will find difficult to yield on, in part out of fear of financial instability. Pakistan has already raised gas and electricity prices, but the Fund will likely go beyond just utility prices and seek a comprehensive fiscal responsibility package from the government to ensure that its assistance will pave the way for restoring credibility to public finances.

In Pakistan, as across emerging and developing economies, the IMF is seen as a necessary evil — to be approached as a last resort when all other avenues of resurrecting a sinking economy fail. Despite the fear of do-

The US is currently focused on a peace deal with the Taliban in order to leave Afghanistan, and Pakistan's support is crucial for concluding the deal. In return for that support, the US, as the dominant shareholder in the IMF, would have put its formidable weight behind a Fund bailout package for Pakistan. In the wake of the Pulwama attack, Pakistan may have forfeited that support.

domestic political backlash to IMF loan conditionalities, Pakistan's recent experience demonstrates the critical importance of an arrangement with the IMF for an economy in crisis. It is only an IMF package that sends the signals that can restore investor and market confidence in a failing economy and enable a sustainable adjustment. But the reverse is also true: If institutions such as FATF continue to keep Pakistan on the grey list or even blacklist it, and the IMF imposes more stringent conditionalities or even significantly delays its loan agreement, global investor confidence in Pakistan could nosedive, deepening the economic crisis.

On the political side, before the Pulwama attack, Pakistan's negotiating strength vis-à-vis the IMF seemed to have been improving. The US is currently focused on securing a peace deal with the Taliban in order to leave Afghanistan, and Pakistan's support is crucial for concluding the deal. In return for that support, the US, as the dominant shareholder in the IMF, would have put its formidable weight behind a Fund bailout package for Pakistan. In the wake of the Pulwama attack, Pakistan may have forfeited that support. The US has endorsed India's right to self-defence and, in a clear signal that it is not willing to look the other way from Pakistan-based and possibly-supported terrorist group attacks, it has asserted that Pakistan must crack down on terrorists operating from its territory, as per its obligations under UN resolutions.

Has Pakistan overplayed its hand? Will its worsening economic crisis help it realise that the price to pay for sponsoring terrorism can be exceedingly high? How Pakistan responds to these questions will determine the chances for peace in the Subcontinent.

Mullen is Visiting Senior Research Fellow and Subbarao is Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

Enterprise empowerment

Small businesses can lead to financial self-sufficiency, empower rural women



CLEMENT CHAUVET

IN DHANI SHANKAR village, Bhiwani, Renu makes colourful bangles and cosmetic creams using natural ingredients. Renu was lucky to have received the support of her husband in starting her own enterprise. She was motivated to do this after attending a three-day Start-And-Improve-Your-Business training in Jui village, and, she started her shop with Rs 10,000. Now, Renu tells me, she makes a profit of Rs 8,000 in a month. Renu also motivates other women in her village as a Biz Sakhi and, with her help, 14 women have started their own businesses.

When Renu came to participate in the discussion on promoting entrepreneurship, she told me that rural women often face problems in entering the workforce due to their domestic duties. In fact, on an average, Indian women spend 297 minutes daily on unpaid care work.

The need to improve women's participation in the economy has been a long-standing priority and is also crucial towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, too. In recent years, entrepreneurship has emerged as an ideal way for rural women to contribute, by taking a few hours out of their day they can engage in small businesses and bring home additional income. There are

multiple programmes which offer support to such women such as the Start and Improve Your Business Program (SIYB) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the government's Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD). Our ongoing partnership with Hero MotoCorp Ltd and the Government of Haryana too seeks to positively impact the lives of 14,000 underprivileged women like Renu through training and entrepreneurial skill development.

However, recent data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation shows that women constitute only 14 per cent of the total entrepreneurs in the country. So, what is stopping more rural women from getting involved in entrepreneurship?

Through its pilot programmes with rural women under the Disha Programme, UNDP India has come to realise that one of the reasons for this lack of uptake is the absence of mentorship for women entrepreneurs. Women in rural areas face multiple barriers to pursuing income-generating activities, with patriarchal family and societal norms being the primary hurdle. Renu was of course lucky to have a very supportive husband.

Other issues include lack of awareness about opportunities, difficulty in accessing formal financing and poor customer management skills. It is clear that providing opportunities isn't enough — these women need to be made aware and guided through the process to ensure they are successful.

Trained by Disha Project — a partnership between UNDP India, IKEA Foundation and India Development Foundation, the Biz Sakhis are women from rural communities who guide budding female entrepreneurs through multiple processes and provide both practical and psychological support to them. As a first step, they encourage rural women to start their own businesses by making them aware of entrepreneurship as a realistic opportunity, and, by informing them of the benefits of starting their own small businesses.

However, even after the women are trained, access to finance remains a big hurdle for rural women who often dip into their savings or take loans from their family. Biz Sakhis are instrumental at this point in helping them access formal banking channels for loans, by providing them information about schemes such as the Mudra Yojana Scheme of the government. Again, even with financing, small female-

run businesses often fail due to poor understanding of the market. Biz Sakhis provide inputs to help women access market linkages and introduce them to a variety of business models and ideas to help them scale up. They also work with small business owners to develop their communication skills, and to be able to persuade and negotiate with stakeholders within the ecosystem of their businesses.

However, the most important role that Biz Sakhis play in the lives of rural entrepreneurs, is to be the source of emotional and psychological support. It helps these women to become more confident in their abilities and have the determination to continue with their businesses.

Often, family pressures and societal norms discourage women from engaging in such activities or cause them to abandon their business in the wake of community backlash. Being from the community themselves, Biz Sakhis such as Renu can effectively engage with women and the community at large to counter such barriers and empower rural women to sustain their businesses.

The writer is the chief of skills and business development at UNDP India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE LAW'S RIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Ruse of gender justice' (IE, February 20). As opposed to what the writer has assumed, triple talaq is not an ordinary form of divorce. It exists on the foundation of gender inequality where only a man has the right to invoke this form of separation. Even after the SC judgment declaring triple talaq unconstitutional, men continued the practice. The government decided to bring a law in these circumstances for the benefit of the women. The writer also overlooks the law on child marriage, dowry prohibition, cruelty against women and so on.

Vishalkha Singh Deshwai, Delhi

EMPTY PROMISES

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A promissory note' (IE, February 20). As the general elections approach, it's high time now for voters to understand the hollow promises made by each party. These promises can only be seen as a tool to appease the masses. Hopefully, voters will cast their votes bearing in mind long-term solutions to their problems this time.

Neha Khanna, New Delhi

A TIME FOR FRIENDS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'BJP and friends' (IE, February 20). The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance surprised all of us because of the way the Sena has been criticising Prime Minister Modi in recent times. It is also surprising to see the BJP conceding seats to Sena while it has won more seats and had a better strike rate in the 2014 general election. However, it is better for the BJP to have eaten humble pie and agreed on seat-sharing, rather than refusing an alliance. Since this is going to be an intensely fought election, the BJP would do well to be more ac-

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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commodating of its allies. The BJP should learn from the SP and BSP, who have forgotten their differences to come together.

Bal Govind, Noida

BJP'S QUEST

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'BJP seals Lok Sabha deal with AIADMK' (IE, February 20). The BJP is wary of falling short of its 2014 tally. Many of its erstwhile allies are no longer with it. The SP and BSP alliance in Uttar Pradesh is giving sleepless nights to the party's bosses. Although the BJP has successfully stitched an alliance with its oldest partner, the Shiv Sena, it is an open secret that the Sena has been critical of the Modi government.

Veena Shenoy, Thane



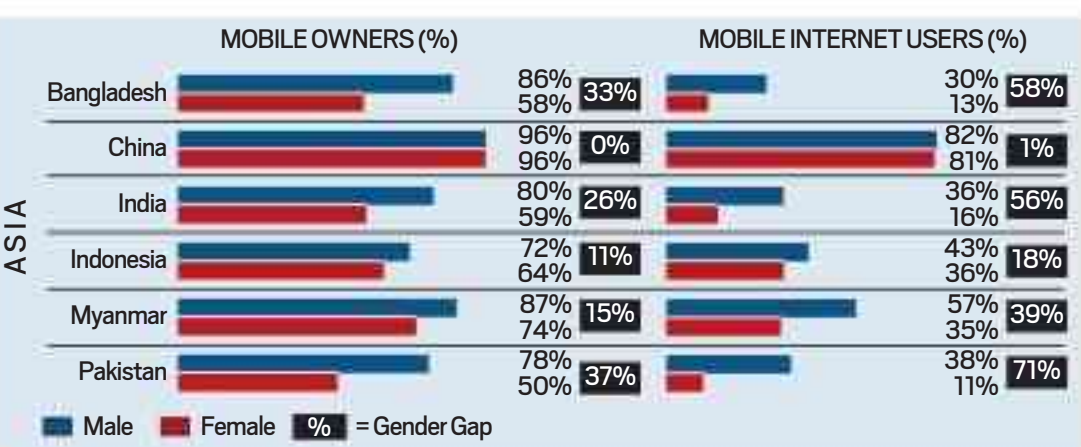


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TELLING NUMBERS

Report flags gap in India mobile usage: 80% men, 59% women



Source: 2019 Mobile Gender Gap Report, GSMA



Unequal access to mobile technology threatens to exacerbate the inequalities women already experience."

The statement said the GSMA found that closing the gender gaps in mobile ownership and usage represents a substantial commercial opportunity for the mobile industry. Over the next five years, low- and middle-income countries could gain an estimated additional \$140 billion in mobile industry revenue if operators could close these gender gaps by 2023. The GSMA also found that closing the mobile gender gap could be an important driver of economic growth. These markets could also add an additional \$700 billion in GDP growth by 2023, it said.

TIP FOR READING LIST

THE RIPPER'S VICTIMS: UNTOLD STORY

BRITISH HISTORIAN Hallie Rubenhold has written some of the most fascinating stories about women in early modern Europe: the history of an 18th-century annual 'guide book' of the names and 'specialties' of London's prostitutes, including "some of (its) funniest, rudest and most surreal entries"; the story of the Worsleys, the most sensational saga of sex, scandal, and divorce in 18th-century England; and the adventures of Henrietta Lightfoot, "a young Englishwoman fleeing from a dishonourable past in London". Later this month, Rubenhold releases her latest: *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper*.



All accounts of perhaps the best known serial killer of all time describe him as a man who murdered "prostitutes". But what if, asks Rubenhold, virtually everything that we have ever known about Polly Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Kate Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly, the so-called canonical five who were killed by the mysterious "Whitechapel Murderer" follows the grimly similar lives of the five women who were "born into hardship, moved from the briefest of childhoods into a cycle of childbearing, alcohol dependence, poverty, emotional despair and homelessness", living and dying in hell — mostly because they were born female, and "their worth was compromised before they had even attempted to prove it".

between August and November 1888, turned out to be largely untrue? The focus of *The Five*, Rubenhold says, "is entirely on the women and not on their murderer". The first "full-length biography to explore and contextualise the lives of the five victims of Jack the Ripper" promises to "completely change", according to the book's publicity material, "the narrative of the Ripper murders". A review of the book in *The Guardian* has described it as a "landmark study", and "an angry and important work of historical detection, calling time on the misogyny that has fed the Ripper myth". Rubenhold follows the grimly similar lives of the five women who were "born into hardship, moved from the briefest of childhoods into a cycle of childbearing, alcohol dependence, poverty, emotional despair and homelessness", living and dying in hell — mostly because they were born female, and "their worth was compromised before they had even attempted to prove it".

Moving forces in J&K: the challenge

Following the terror attack in Pulwama, Centre has said civilian traffic on the key highway would be temporarily halted during movement of security convoys. What are its implications?

SIMPLY PUT

BASHAARAT MASOOD SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 20

THE DAY after a suicide car bomber rammed his explosives-laden car into a paramilitary bus in Pulwama of Jammu & Kashmir, killing 40 CRPF personnel, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said that civilian traffic would be restricted during the movement of convoys of security forces.

"Civilian traffic movement will be restricted for some time during movement of Army and security forces convoys. This may cause inconvenience and I apologise for this but this is necessary for safety of jawans," Singh said after chairing a high-level security review meet.

A look at the importance of the highway as the only road link between Jammu and Kashmir, and the implications of such a move to restrict civilian traffic — for five hours — during movement of security forces' convoys.

How the highway runs

The Jammu-Srinagar-Uri national highway runs 370 km. The length includes 175 km in the Valley, from Qazigund in South Kashmir to Uri North Kashmir, and it is this stretch that is considered to be facing a security threat. The highway passes through Anantnag, Pulwama, Srinagar and Baramulla. An 85.4-km stretch from Qazigund to Narbal, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Srinagar, is a four-lane double road for two-way traffic, 30 feet wide on each side. The stretch from Narbal to Uri, running 90.2 km, is a double-lane single road just 30 feet wide. Traffic from both sides plies on this road.

At Zainakote in Srinagar, a separate road branches out towards Leh. Again a double-lane single road, this runs 112 km to Zojilla. At most places, the highway is surrounded by villages and residential colonies. Subsidiary roads connect to these villages.

Civilian traffic & convoys

Every day, at least four security convoys



SUKHBIR SIWACH CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 20

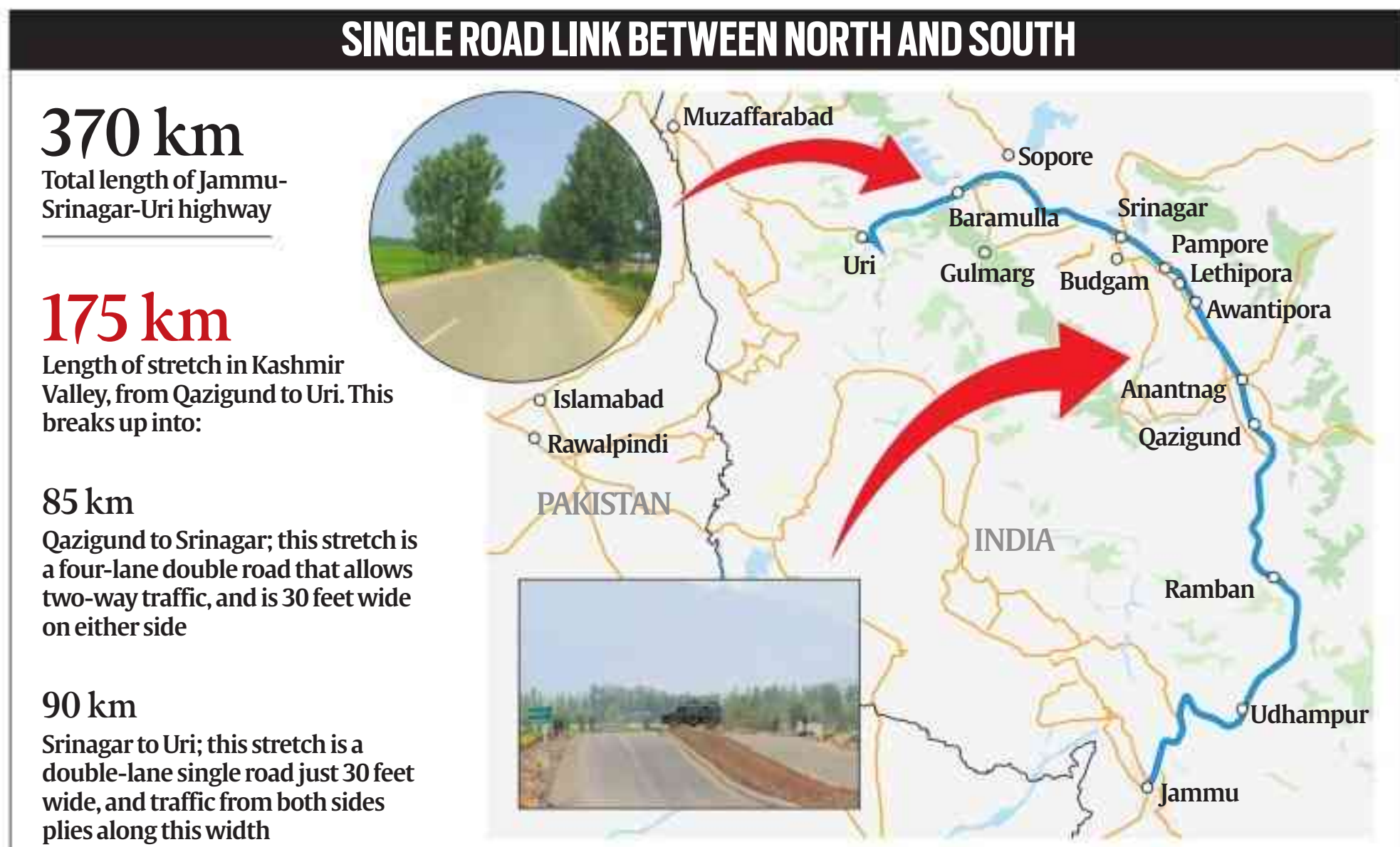
HARYANA VOTES in both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections this year. It is not yet clear, however, whether these will be simultaneous or whether the Assembly elections will follow the Lok Sabha polls as in 2014.

How did Haryana vote in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly polls?

In the May 2014 results for the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won 7 of the state's 10 seats, with a 35% vote share and leads in 52 of 90 Assembly segments. In the Assembly polls of October 2014, the BJP won 47 seats as its vote share dropped to 33%. This has been the broad trend in the last two decades, with the party performing well in Lok Sabha polls going on to win the Haryana Assembly.

What issues are at play now?

The BJP is set to contest in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as project Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar's governance record. The Congress is expected to



move on the highway, two from Jammu to Kashmir and two the other way. Movement of convoys increases during summer, when the road to Ladakh and border areas of the Valley like Gurez and Tangdhar is thrown open. The convoys move only by day because of security concerns around night movement. If movement of civilian traffic were to be halted during convoy movement, it would mean closing each stretch, southern and northern, for at least five hours.

According to official figures, over 9,500 vehicles including around 5,000 LMVs move on both sides on the highway every hour. "It is slightly easier to restrict civilian traffic during convoy movements on the southern stretch. We can secure one lane for convoy movement and let civilian traffic from both sides use the other lane. But on the stretch from Narbal to Uri, vehicles from both sides

use the same 30-foot-wide road," said a senior traffic official. He described the challenge: "If we stop traffic at Baramulla or Narbal for only one hour, it means that over 5,000 vehicles would pile up from each side. It would take us several hours to clear the jam. Also, it would also be very difficult to stop vehicles coming out of different residential areas along the highway."

It is not just convoys; security vehicles move on both stretches throughout the day.

Is there an alternative?

If security forces were to consider airlifting their personnel from Jammu to Kashmir, it would save travel time — from 10 hours to 30 minutes — but would be very costly. Even if that were to happen, the security personnel would still be needed to be sent in convoys from Srinagar to South Kashmir or

North Kashmir.

Another alternative route is the railway. Currently the service is an eight-coach train that connects Banihal in Jammu to Baramulla in Kashmir. A train route would not only reduce travel time from over five hours to two-and-a-half hours, but also be safer according to experts. The challenge is that security forces would have to maintain very tight vigil against any possible sabotage attempts, which could result in higher costs. Officials say the railway line is secured by the Railway Protection Force, while CRPF and Army personnel can possibly be deployed as Road Opening Party and Convoy Protection Force to secure the line for travel of security personnel.

According to officials, 22 companies of CRPF and about as many Army personnel guard the Jammu-Srinagar-Baramulla highway during the day.

What factors are at play in Lok Sabha, Assembly polls in Haryana?

BJP vs divided Cong vs new Chautala

Ruling BJP faces rebellion and new tie-ups, Congress battles familiar infighting. Split casts question mark on INLD prospects, focus shifts to Dushyant.

raise the issues of Rafale deal and farm distress. Congress leader and former Chief Parliamentary Secretary Ran Singh Mann alleged the BJP government has failed to provide the jobs it promised, while BJP leader Sanjay Ahuja claimed the state government has ensured transparency in government recruitment. The INLD has been demanding completion of the SYL canal. In the end, many expect caste politics to upstage national issues.

How have the parties been preparing?

The BJP is trying to reach out to booth-level workers, and has divided the state into four clusters. One meeting will be held in Kurukshetra on February 23, followed two days later by BJP president Amit Shah meeting with party workers in Hisar. Khattar has already held roadshows in many towns.

Congress leaders have held rallies but these are widely seen as aimed at pitching their individual aspirations. Former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda held a *rath yatra* and Haryana state Congress president Ashok Tanwar a cycle *yatra*. AICC communications wing in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala and CLP leader Kiran Choudhry

have held separate rallies.

Do these parties have problems within?

As the separate rallies suggest, infighting continues in the Congress. MLAs in one camp are said to be lobbying for the removal of Tanwar as HPCC chief; at one stage, they even sought removal of Choudhry as CLP chief. In the battle to head the state Congress, the party has failed to form district units. The lack of a coordinated effort is seen as one of the reasons for Surjewala's defeat in the recent Assembly bypoll in Jind.

The BJP could face a potential problem in rebellion, including from senior leaders. Rebel BJP MP Raj Kumar Saini has formed the Loktantra Suraksha Party, which has forged an alliance with the BSP. Many feel the alliance may dent the non-Jat vote-bank of the BJP.

Is the INLD still a major player?

Haryana's main Opposition party, the INLD has split between factions led by patriarch Om Prakash Chautala's son Abhay Chautala and Abhay's nephew Dushyant Chautala. Its candidate lost his security deposit in the Jind bypoll and its alliance partner

BSP snapped ties after the result. Om Prakash Chautala is in jail and, even when he was out on furlough, his illness forced the party to cancel some of his programmes aimed at motivating INLD workers. Dushyant Chautala's new party, JJP, finished second in Jind and is said to be exploring an alliance with AAP.

What caste equations are play?

Traditionally, it has been Jat vs non-Jat. When supporters of Hooda want him to project as chief ministerial candidate, their argument is that a chunk of the 25% Jat vote could go otherwise to Dushyant Chautala's party. Those against this idea, meanwhile, argue that polarisation of Jats and non-Jats could end up helping the BJP. The Congress too is banking on non-Jat votes, with former Chief Minister Bhajan Lal's son Kuldeep Bishnoi and Kuldeep's wife Renuka, both MLAs, having returned to the party.

NEXT #20 How significant is alliance with Apna Dal for BJP in UP?

Why new plan to 'unlock' Farakka for hilsa recalls old debate on fish passes

KAUSHIK DAS GUPTA NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

AMONG THE longstanding gastronomy debates in the subcontinent is the one on the relative merits of the hilsa that comes from the Padma river in Bangladesh versus the variety that is found in the Ganga in India. The advocates of both varieties underline the distinctive sweet-salty flavour of the silver-scaled fish. While those in the east vouch for its fleshy texture, aficionados in the west rest their claims on what the fish does to the taste buds — that sweet-salty flavour is apparently more pronounced in the Ganga hilsa.

Like many other debates in gastronomy, the one on the hilsa, too, is about the seamlessness of legend and myth, ecology, history, and culture.

However, records do attest to certain facts. Among them are the ones that per-

tain to the annual journey of the fish.

The hilsa's journey

In scientific parlance, the hilsa is an anadromous fish. It lives most of its life in the ocean, but during the rainy season, when it is time to spawn, the hilsa moves towards the estuary, where the rivers of India and Bangladesh meet the Bay of Bengal. A large part of the shoal travels upstream in the Padma and the Ganga — some are known to move towards the Godavari, and there are records of hilsa migration to the Cauvery. Culinary lore has it that the fish that travel the farthest upstream have the best combination of the flavours of the sea and the river.

Historical records also show that until the 1970s, the hilsa would swim the Ganga upstream to Allahabad — and even to Agra. The Farakka Barrage, which became operational on the Ganga in 1975, disrupted the westward movement of the hilsa. The barrage had a navigation lock that stopped the fish from swim-

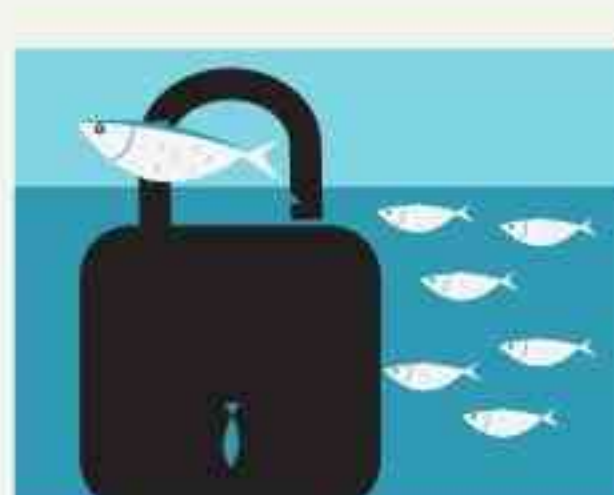


Illustration: CR Sasikumar

ming upstream beyond Farakka. In Buxar on the border of Bihar and UP, the last recorded catch of the hilsa was made 32 years ago.

Fishway experiments

Earlier this month, the government unveiled a project to facilitate the movement of the hilsa to its spawning grounds of yore. The navigation lock at Farakka will be redesigned at a cost of Rs 360 crore to create

a fish pass for the hilsa.

Fish passes — also known as fish ladders or fishways — aim to assist fish in crossing obstacles presented by dams and barrages. They usually consist of small steps that allow the fish to climb over the obstacles and enable them to reach the open waters on the other side. It requires controlling the water running over these ladders — they must be adequate to catch the attention of the fish, but not too strong to deter them from swimming against it.

The most rudimentary first fish ladders are said to have been forged out of bundles of tree branches that helped fish cross difficult channels in Western Europe. In 1837, Canadian lumber mill owner Richard McFarlan patented a fish ladder designed to help fish bypass dam at his water-powered mill. By the late 19th century, fish passes had become common in the US and Canada.

About the same time, Francis Day, the pioneering fish scientist of colonial India, ex-

perimented with fish ladders to enable unhindered movement of the hilsa across anicuts in the Cauvery's northern distributary, the Kollidam. The experiment was tried for about 40 years before being given up. Fish passes also proved ineffective in North India.

By the middle of the 20th century, the utility and effectiveness of fishways was being seriously debated in the US. A paper in the May 1940 issue of *The Stanford Ichthyological Bulletin* put the question in perspective: "The devising of a fish pass is fraught with uncertainty, because it is almost impossible to prophesy the behaviour of fish and quite impossible to anticipate the vagaries of water. The subject involves a working knowledge of hydraulics, and while hydraulic engineers conversant with the habits and requirements of fish are rarely to be found, the rules and assumptions of hydraulics themselves are apt to be disconcertingly upset when applied to the functioning of a fish pass. The subject is by

no means within sight of finality."

No clear path yet

More than 75 years later, the predicament endures. A 2013 study led by the American ecologist J Jed Brown noted that "state-of-the-art fish passage facilities have been unsuccessful. Some migratory species, such as sturgeons, do not pass through at all. But even the species that do make it through do so in numbers far less than stated targets". Brown's research found that about 2% of American shad, a species closely related to the hilsa, passed through the dams on the Merrimack, Connecticut and Susquehanna rivers in the US.

The new fish pass on the Ganga will cover only 8 metres, a tiny fraction of the Ganga's width at Farakka. A small number of the hilsa might well sneak through, but it is doubtful if the new fishway will allow large shoals of the fish to return to their former spawning grounds further upstream.