



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Main nahin chowkidar

BJP slogan gets it so wrong. No self-respecting chowkidar would like to be in that job in India



KANCHA ILAIAH SHEPHERD

MISSING WORKERS

Government needs to acknowledge that the situation on the jobs front is serious

WHEN I GO to Delhi, from the airport to the inner city, the cabs take me via Munirka. Almost no house in Munirka that I pass by has a chowkidar at the gate. The semi-slum looks like a place that supplies chowkidars to the rich people of Delhi. As one reaches the Greater Kailash area, however, every house has a chowkidar at the gate, even in hot summer or in the bitter cold, standing in a small box.

In Hyderabad, the city where I live, nearly every house in Jubilee Hills has a chowkidar but all the poor bastis supply the chowkidar labour so cheap that not a single chowkidar can be seen with a pot belly. Two meals a day, just enough to help the family survive, seems to be difficult for them. It is a similar situation all over urban India, particularly in the metropolitan cities. The smart city concept, under the BJP regime, enhances the economic gap between chowkidars and sahumars (well-heeled). Now, Prime Minister Narendra Modi claiming that he is a chowkidar and the PM and BJP president, Amit Shah, starting a party campaign "Main Bhi Chowkidar", gives us scope to look at the chowkidar system of India and its caste-class character.

The new malls and shops that sell gold and posh clothes all over the country have chowkidars at the gates. When we travel across the country, no farmer's house has a chowkidar at the gate. But you go to any industrial complex, and every industrial house has several chowkidars. If you look at the industrial and big business houses, they employ several chowkidars at home, in the factories, in the business houses and so on.

The chowkidar is a protector of the rich man/woman's wealth and life but the rich never allow any chowkidar to become rich. Did Modi, in any way, transform this system and ensure that some rich industrialists became chowkidars and some chowkidars became industrialists, over a few years, after he became "Chowkidar PM"? The evidence shows that many farmers in India have become chowkidars of the urban rich but no industrialist has become a chowkidar.

In the last election, Modi claimed he was a chawiwalla. When a chawiwalla becomes a prime

minister, all chawiwallas expect that their economic and educational status would change. At least a few chawiwallas of the street should have become restaurant owners over a period of time. On the contrary, their lives became even more miserable after demonetisation.

However, when he claimed in the last election that he was a chawiwalla, and that too an Other Backward Class (OBC) chawiwalla, one would think that that designation has had a transformative effect on the Indian political discourse. After all, when Congress intellectuals like Mani Shankar Aiyar publicly insulted Modi with that jibe, he became a hero.

The difference between the title of "chawiwalla" and "chowkidar" is that the chawiwalla has self-respect even on the street. But the chowkidar has no respect, no dignity. The rich who employ him not only do not pay well but do not even treat him as a human being.

Did the Indian economy show any signs of change during the last five years? In what way did the OBC-chawiwalla's status change after Modi became the prime minister? How many sons and daughters of chawiwallas and chowkidars could get dignified higher status employment in Indian industries during Modi's regime?

When YS Rajasekhara Reddy, as the chief minister of united Andhra Pradesh, introduced the total college and university fee reimbursement scheme in 2004, hundreds of children of chowkidars and chawiwallas became engineers and got high-end jobs in industries. Where are such schemes for the poor in the Modi government? In fact, many of those youth are losing jobs because of retrenchment by those industries? No government jobs have been created by the Central government. Instead, both Modi and Shah are telling the educated youth from the chowkidar and chawiwalla families that they should do "pakoda selling" jobs.

What is significant in the chowkidar economy is that a large number of chowkidars come from the lower castes — mostly Dalit, OBC, Adivasi and gurkha or Nepalis, who are again from the lower castes in that country. No upper caste person would like to serve as a chowkidar in India. During the Modi-Shah rule, the chowkidar economy suffered so much that quality school and college education, particularly in the English medium, has become a distant commodity for them. Quality education has moved into air-conditioned private schools, colleges and universities owned by the masters of the chowkidars.

a chowkidar in India. During the Modi-Shah rule, the chowkidar economy suffered so much that quality school and college education, particularly in the English medium, has become a distant commodity for them. Quality education has moved into air-conditioned private schools, colleges and universities owned by the masters of the chowkidars.

Children of chowkidars, who are hoping to avail of higher education, are being robbed of that hope. Hindi or other regional language school education in dilapidated schools to the chowkidars' children and air-conditioned English-medium school education to the sons and daughters of the sahumars, has become the new normal of Arun Jaitley's economy.

The chowkidar everyday watches the difference between his children's lives and those of his master's children, as he stands at the gate of the master's house. This is not just heart burning, it is burning his belly as well.

The best government institutions are slowly being killed and private schools, colleges and universities which charge high fee for under-graduate arts courses are coming up all over the country. All the masters' children are studying in those institutions whereas the chowkidars' children are being shown the pakoda selling market. Where does this economy take India?

It is in this background that I find the "Main Bhi Chowkidar" campaign of the prime minister reprehensible. No self-respecting chowkidar would like to be in that job in India. If the RSS wants this campaign to continue, it should first employ its members as chowkidars at the gates of industrialists and businessmen. Otherwise it has no right to give moral speeches to chowkidars.

I do not want to be a chowkidar as it does not allow any scope for human dignity and self-respect. It is a job that needs to be abolished, as it is spiritually, socially, morally and economically antithetical to humane employment. Let us all shout "We do not want to be chowkidars".

The writer is a political theorist, social activist and author

A NEW RED LINE

Success of Code of Ethics for social media outfits during LS polls will depend on how they own it, and how EC keeps watch

EVER SINCE THE 2014 Lok Sabha elections, new media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, have become political battlegrounds. These spaces of electioneering have, however, remained unregulated because the Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951, does not cover social media. On Wednesday, the Election Commission (EC) and Internet and Mobile Association of India — the body that represents social media firms — took a decisive step towards plugging this gap. The two agencies agreed on a Code of Ethics, which social media outfits will follow during the Lok Sabha elections. The Code that came into effect on March 20 ticks several boxes — it emphasises transparency and stresses on measures to "prevent abuse of social media platforms". However, as Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora put it, "the document should be seen as a work in progress". Since adherence to the Code is voluntary, much will depend on the measures taken by individual social media outfits to put the document's guidelines into practice.

Section 126 of the RPA prohibits political parties and candidates from campaigning in the two days before voting. In January, an EC panel suggested bringing social media platforms under the Act's ambit so that voters are "afforded a period of reflection". The panel suggested that these new media platforms should abide by the EC's guidelines about taking down "objectionable content". Social media outfits, however, did not agree with the recommendation that such content "be taken down within three hours of a notice". It's reassuring that the Code, put in place on Wednesday, addresses the EC's concerns: "Valid legal orders will be acknowledged and/or processed within three hours for violations reported under Section 126". Also welcome is the Code's insistence on "transparency in paid political advertisements". Any political advertisement posted without the EC's certification and notified as such by the EC will be acted upon expeditiously, the Code says.

The Code asks social media firms to train the EC's nodal officers on how their "platforms work and on mechanisms for sending requests on dealing with offensive material". These companies will also develop a "reporting mechanism" through which the poll watchdog can inform the platforms about "potential violations of Section 126". The Code's success will depend, in large measure, on how these channels of communication work. In the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, the conduct of the social media firms — and the EC — will be watched.

DOING HER MATH

Abel Prize winner Karen Keskulla Uhlenbeck becomes a role model, builds bridges between disciplines

WERE TOLD that we couldn't do math because we were women," Karen Keskulla Uhlenbeck wrote in a 1996 article in which she described her life as a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Early in her professional career, in the 1970s, she was told that "women were supposed to go home and have babies". Undeterred, Keskulla Uhlenbeck went on to conduct what the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters described as "pioneering research" that has "had a fundamental impact on analysis, geometry and mathematical physics". On Tuesday, when the Academy awarded her the Abel Prize, it also praised her as a "strong advocate of gender equality in science and mathematics". She is the first woman recipient of the prize seen as the Nobel Prize in Mathematics.

"I liked doing what I wasn't supposed to do, it was a sort of legitimate rebellion," Keskulla Uhlenbeck wrote in the 1996 article. Her work involved building bridges between physics and mathematics. Her contribution to the gauge theory laid the foundation for one of the major achievements of 20th century physics that involves the unification of two fundamental forces of nature — electromagnetism and the weak nuclear force. Her other influential research shows how small changes in one quantity can help find the minimum or maximum value of another.

However, on several occasions, Keskulla Uhlenbeck has acknowledged that it is her educational work — not mathematical theorems — which gives her the most satisfaction. The "momentous task", she has said, is changing a culture that doesn't encourage girls and women to pursue careers in mathematics.

THE MULLAH BARADAR MYSTERY

Once Pakistan's pawn in Afghanistan, he is now cast in role of interlocutor



KHALED AHMED

ON JANUARY 26, the Afghan Taliban and US officials in Doha, Qatar, agreed on a preliminary draft of a likely peace accord, including US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 18 months. If this is not a false beginning, it denotes the adoption of a "moderate" approach by the Taliban under their negotiator, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

Mullah Baradar was a Taliban leader Pakistan was keeping under lock and key as its winning pawn in the unfolding Great Game in Afghanistan. He was captured from Karachi jointly by the CIA and ISI in February 2010 — triggering speculation that Mullah Umar, too, had been in Karachi — then used as a kind of barometer of US-Pak divergence on Afghanistan. Bilateral relations kept dipping and Pakistan held on to the pawns it thought it had in Afghanistan. Mullah Baradar was one such. Then, in October 2018, getting tired of opposing the Americans and losing out in domestic peace, Pakistan let Mullah Baradar go.

Now the Americans want to quit Afghanistan despite better advice. President Trump has the voting public behind him and he wants to save the \$43 billion America spends in Afghanistan annually getting mauled by the Taliban who control half of Afghanistan and, according to some in Washington and Kabul, are stationed in Pakistan and cross the Durand Line to humiliate the Afghan army. The Americans have changed tack on "hostile Pakistan" and requested another "peace process" with the Taliban with its intercession.

The Taliban are ready, too. They have

appointed Mullah Baradar as chief of their political office in Doha, Qatar, where negotiations on the "withdrawal of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan" will take place. Mullah Baradar is now considered to be a "moderate" whom the Taliban have put forth as representative of their "chastened" view of Afghanistan as a country where interests other than only the Taliban are powerfully represented. He is supposed to strengthen the Taliban's position vis-à-vis the Americans.

The Americans thought Pakistan would let its prisoner in Karachi come out and talk to them in 2013 but Pakistan thought otherwise. It wanted its own interests protected, which diverged from those of the Americans; and since no agreement was reached, Pakistan prevented "moderate" Mullah Baradar from meeting the Americans. Americans were wrong in thinking that the Taliban had become "softened". If Pakistan thought Mullah Baradar would safeguard their stake in the Pashtun border areas of Afghanistan in talks, it was wrong too. Mullah Baradar comes from the "ruling Durrani tribe" represented by the founder-king of Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Durrani. He was from the sub-tribe of the Popalzai-Durrani, close to the Ghilzai tribe, to which Mullah Umar belonged. After 9/11, when the Americans attacked Afghanistan and went after the government of Mullah Umar, it was his minister, Mullah Baradar, who got him out of harm's way.

After the rescue, Mullah Umar came to Pakistan — this has since been challenged as it was revealed that he in fact stayed on in Afghanistan — and set up the Quetta Shura

with Mullah Baradar as his second-in-command. If Pakistan knew the price it would have to pay for the Quetta Shura, it wouldn't have allowed it. One reliable "internal" source published the following in Express-Tribune of June 26, 2013: "When Baradar was captured in 2010 by a joint Pak-US effort, the ISI took him in custody, promising the CIA that he would be handed over to them the next day. To the amazement of the ISI personnel, Baradar disclosed to them that his capture was arranged for him to negotiate a deal with the CIA unbeknownst to Omer and to the ISI."

If the Americans leave, the Taliban will face a different Afghanistan. Pakistan is no longer keen on the Taliban who make it vulnerable to the "jihadi" madrasas which dreaming of an ideal Pakistan close to their medieval dreams. Because of the creeping takeover by the "pious warriors" of the cities in the settled areas, Pakistan has led two operations against these elements.

Afghanistan now has a north which is more organised to fight the Taliban with a little help from the neighbours in the north and Turkey. There is an Indian presence in Afghanistan, building infrastructure and helping the less Islamised generations of Afghans with education, apart from indirect participation from Russia and China. Mullah Baradar, chastened by what happened in 2001, will have much to think about before he gets the Taliban into another jihad.

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MARCH 23, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

JP BATTLES

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN CONTINUED to wage a grim battle for survival. His condition continued to be "critical" after the termination of the six-hour dialysis at Jaslok Hospital, Bombay, where he was admitted on Monday. A hospital bulletin said there has been a "slight improvement" in his condition, which was still critical. Medical tests had shown that the treatment had encouraging results in maintaining the heart beat. His blood pressure was normal and there were a few extra heart beats. A fresh complication reported in his condition was that his body was rejecting the blood being administered to him. JP was put on dialysis amidst the unfortunate

news of his supposed death.

PM'S APOLOGY

PRIME MINISTER MORARJI Desai tendered an unqualified apology to Parliament and the nation for having mistakenly informed the Lok Sabha that Jayaprakash Narayan was dead. The speaker, KS Hegde, also expressed "deep regret" for making the announcement in the morning session of the House, which was flashed by the news media and led the world to believe for an hour that JP was dead. The morning session was adjourned after glowing obituary references to a living man. As the mistake became known, the House was reconvened to rectify the error.

PUBLIC ANGER

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE flocked to Jaslok Hospital as soon as news of Jayaprakash Narayan's death was announced by All India Radio. There was relief when they discovered that there was no truth in the news but the relief soon turned to wrath that such a mistake could be made and the unruly crowd stormed the hospital under the mistaken notion that the hospital authorities were to blame. The Janata Party functionaries in Bombay were visibly upset and anguished. They were unable to explain why even ordinary precautions to get the news confirmed from the hospital were not taken before announcing it in the Lok Sabha.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

The shifting battlefields

Pulwama is part of a larger strategic matrix for Pakistan: Export terror to the neighbourhood to avoid violence in its own backyard



SAJID FARID SHAIPOO

THE ONGOING CRISIS in South Asia is a critical reminder about the alarming ability of Pakistan-supported non-state actors to ignite a conflict between the two nuclear armed adversaries. The risk of conflict escalation in South Asia as a result of terrorist actions such as the one in Pulwama, is perhaps one of the most underappreciated threats to international peace and security.

Though the situation has shown signs of de-escalation, sporadic incidents keep the security environment volatile. The crisis is far from over — which justifies expending all the intellectual capital in either decoding the ongoing military calculus or predicting the likely future. However, it would be worthwhile to step back and try to understand the strategic calculus, if any, behind the Pulwama attacks. What strategic or political benefit would Pakistan's ISI accrue from such an attack, knowing well that such acts can potentially result in a formidable armed reprisal by India, further increasing Pakistan's international isolation? Pakistan, with its fragile economic situation, can hardly afford a full-scale conflict under present circumstances.

Similar questions were asked almost a decade ago when even the CIA and FBI documented that the 2008 Mumbai attacks were supported and funded by serving and retired members of ISI. Steve Coll, in his recent book, *Directorate S*, an authoritative account of the ISI, also poses a similar question: "Why would ISI do it?", knowing well that the threads of Mumbai could directly be linked to Pakistan. Any attack by groups like Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba on Indian soil is, unsurprisingly, understood by the Indian government to have been authorised by the Pakistan spy agency. The ISI must appreciate that in any such conflict, the majority of the world opinion would lean favourably towards the country that has borne the brunt of terrorism. So, why would the ISI risk a confrontation with India by allowing or supporting actions like Pulwama?

The answer may lie in a well-thought out and tested strategic calculus: A risk/risk trade off assessment by the ISI in the event of possible US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The US withdrawal and the end of the Taliban-led war against US forces in Afghanistan may, on the one hand, come as a big shot in the arm for Pakistan's status as a primary player in Afghanistan. But, at the same time, it has the potential to rekindle jihadist violence in Pakistan, reminiscent of the late 2000s. The return of thousands of Pakistani jihadists from Afghanistan poses a disproportionate challenge to Pakistan's internal security scenario.

Hence, the timing of the Pulwama attack may underscore a larger strategic gameplan by the ISI to preempt the danger of terrorist violence returning to Pakistan. The withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan will potentially rob Pakistani jihadist groups of the raison d'etre of fighting jihad in Afghanistan. The Taliban has also promised not to host any foreign terrorist group as a part of the impending deal, a commitment that the Taliban may initially be inclined to keep. There is a real possibility, which the Pakistan's security establishment fully appreciates, that these returning jihadists may re-ignite violence not only in Pakistan's tribal areas but also in the urban centres. Past experience has shown that the ISI



Suvajit Dey

is unambiguous in realising the need to provide an alternative battleground to these returning jihadists. Thus, shifting the theatre of violence away from Pakistan and back into Kashmir may not be considered an imprudent risk trade-off. The ISI has employed a similar strategy with a fair bit of success in the past, too.

Immediately after the end of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, thousands of returning Pakistani fighters posed a formidable challenge to the country's internal security environment. Pakistan, however, had already worked out a plan to prevent these numerous groups from returning. The ISI was successfully able to channelise their jihadist impulses by diverting them to a new battlefield in Kashmir, where ISI-supported Kashmiri groups had started a full-blown insurgent movement since early-1990. This was how groups like Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba made their way into Kashmir in the early nineties.

Similarly, in the mid-2000s, after General Pervez Musharraf joined the US-led global war on terror, the domestic jihadist groups were incensed by what they regarded as Pakistan's betrayal of its jihadi brethren. Moreover, the Red Mosque incident proved to be a watershed in Pakistan's struggle with Islamic militancy. The siege of the mosque in 2007, which housed hundreds of radicals, resulted in the killing of more than 100 militants and civilians by the Pakistan armed forces. The Red Mosque narrative became a rallying cry for jihadists to mobilise thousands of radicalised individuals against what they called the apostate Pakistani state — giving legitimacy to groups like Tehreek e Taliban (TTP) to wage jihad against the Pakistani state. The insurgency in Pakistan's tribal and urban areas took a heavy toll, both in terms of civilian and military casualties. Between 2007 and 2009, more than 5,500 people were killed in Pakistan in terrorist violence alone.

It was under these circumstances that the ISI started planning a spectacular strike at multiple targets in Mumbai in an attempt to shift the focus of violence away from its own territory. Coll suggests that the ISI may have sought a perverse sort of credibility from the Mumbai assault to prove to its own

restive clients that it was not going soft. David Coleman Headley, a key planner of the Mumbai attacks, in his testimony before a US federal court, revealed that the attacks essentially served two critical purposes: First, it re-legitimised the ISI as an honest supporter of jihad in the eyes of domestic jihadi groups. Second, and the most salient, it helped shift the theatre of violence away from the domestic soil of Pakistan, into India. In Headley's words, "ISI seemed convinced that after Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) something needed to be done".

As a peace deal between the Taliban and the US looks more likely on the horizon, Pakistan can foresee the spectre of violence returning to its homeland. Even more than a decade after, the Red Mosque episode continues to haunt Pakistan's security establishment and inspires jihadi movements in Pakistan. Al Qaeda and other militant groups, even today, continue to use the storming of the mosque as a rallying cry to fight the Pakistani government and its military. The returning jihadists from Afghanistan can potentially respond to such calls and re-ignite jihadist violence inside Pakistan.

The recent attack by JeM on Indian soldiers in Kashmir may very well, therefore, be seen as a part of this strategic manoeuvre to escalate jihadist violence in Kashmir and prepare a future battlefield for returning Pakistani fighters from Afghanistan. Such an outcome, the ISI can fully appreciate, comes with considerable risk: serious foreign policy implications for Pakistan.

The writer, an MP cadre IPS officer, is a PhD scholar in security studies, Princeton University

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"America deserves a leader as good as Jacinda Ardern." —NEW YORK TIMES

Let the ball be in the court

Withdrawal of judiciary from adjudication of religious matters will allow patriarchal clergy to take over



A FAIZUR RAHMAN

IT WAS surprising to see seasoned legal commentator, Faizan Mustafa, make the argument that a recent Supreme Court judgment, overemphasising constitutional morality, tried to curtail the "freedom of irrational beliefs" that citizens enjoy as a fundamental right under Part III of the Constitution ('Faith and gender justice', IE, February 8). In his view, the Sabarimala protests proved that courts are ill-equipped to "initiate" reforms in faiths.

The fact, however, is that our courts are not in the business of initiating religious reforms. They adjudicate on contentious religious practices only when their intervention is sought under Articles 32 and 226 of the Constitution. Without going into the merits of the triple talaq and Sabarimala rulings cited by Mustafa, it may be pointed out that in both these cases certain religious practices were subjected to the essentiality test because those traditions, apart from not being essential to their faith, were found to violate the Constitution in the view of the apex court.

For instance, in the triple talaq case, Justices Nariman and U U Lalit (two of the three judges who delivered the majority judgment) showed us how it is possible to harmonise the concepts of constitutional justice and Islamic egalitarianism without undermining the religious freedom guaranteed in Article 25 (1). On the one hand, they pronounced talaq-e-biddat to be "manifestly arbitrary" and violative of Article 14 because it allowed a Muslim man to break his marriage "capriciously and whimsically" without attempting to save it through reconciliation. On the other, the judges endorsed the comprehensive Quranic procedure of divorce — already upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Shamim Ara case* (2002), which gives the Muslim husband no room to arbitrarily exercise his right to divorce.

As is evident, the Supreme Court was not trying to reform Islam but only verifying if a certain controversial legal custom was really a part of Islam and if so was it compatible with the provisions of the Constitution. Talaq-e-biddat was set aside because it failed this test, and the Quranic procedure of talaq was upheld because it was in consonance with constitutional values.

Put differently, even an essential religious practice cannot violate the Constitution if it is to be recognised as a fundamental right. Otherwise the clause, "sub-

ject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part [Part III]", in Article 25, will cease to be of any meaning. Hence the question of the Constitution giving us "the right to have a certain amount of irrationality and blind belief" does not arise if such a belief, irrational or logical, falls afoul of the aforementioned clause.

Besides, the higher judiciary being the final arbiter of disputes under Articles 32 and 226, it would be wrong to ask it to refrain from intervening in questions of faith because the withdrawal of the courts from the adjudication of religious matters is fraught with grave consequences. It will leave the field wide open for the patriarchal clergy to take over.

Justice D Y Chandrachud grappled with this question in the *Sabarimala* case. After citing legal scholars opposed to the idea of courts donning a reformatory role through the essential religious practices doctrine, he homed in on the anti-exclusion principle which limits the autonomy of religious groups "in situations where these groups are blocking access to basic goods". Agreeing with this precept, the judge held that "where a religious practice causes the exclusion of individuals in a manner which impairs their dignity, the freedom of religion must give way to the over-arching values of a liberal constitution".

In this context, Mustafa's article causes conceptual confusion by invoking the notion of "substantial equality" to suggest that rather than giving men and women the "same treatment", differences between them must be recognised even while advocating just treatment for women.

It would be oxymoronic to assert that gender justice can be achieved by not treating women on a par with men insofar as the "sameness" of rights is concerned. In 2008, a landmark Canadian Supreme Court ruling (*R. v. Kapp*, [2008] 2 S.C.R. 483, 2008 SCC 41) showed us the right application of substantive equality by liberally interpreting Sections 15 (1) & (2) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It declared that any remedial activity that ameliorates conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups is constitutional even if it does not result in the same opportunities being given to privileged individuals or groups. Put simply, substantive equality cannot be invoked to whittle down women's rights in the name of rejecting the "sameness doctrine". It can be used only as a tool for positive discrimination.

Nonetheless, Mustafa is certainly right in saying that religious institutions must appreciate the constitutional vision of gender justice and must reform themselves internally. But can the courts wait forever?

The writer is an independent researcher and secretary general, Islamic Forum for the Promotion of Moderate Thought

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EFFECTIVE LOKPAL

THIS REFERS TO the report, "Know the Lokpal team" (IE, March 20). It is noteworthy that the only persons other than judges in the Lokpal team are two IAS officers, one IPS officer and one from the IRS cadre. Lokpal is an ombudsman for all categories of public servants. It is well-known that all-India cadre officers harbour affinity towards their cadre colleagues. It is difficult to believe, therefore, that the functioning of the Lokpal will be effective. For a nation of 1.3 billion population, it should not be difficult to find people of impeccable integrity from outside the organised cadre officers.

Gangadhar Karalay, Nagpur

WATCHDOGS TOO

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'On their watch' (IE, March 19). The word chowkidar has lost its currency. People generally refers to watchmen as security guards or simply guard. The BJP's reference to this profession is another jumla. Most such security guards are not committed to their profession for their lifetime. They are on the lookout for better avenues. All political parties have undermined the real chowkidars of the state such as ED, CVC, and CBI

Deepak Singhal, Noida

DATA GAPS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Economic data: Fact vs fiction' (IE, March 20). I agree with the writer's remarks that the Lok Sabha elections have something to do with the dissenting remarks of the economists. The labour force employment data suffers from gaps. The definition of unemployment is itself not correct. Census data also suffers from several gaps.

A1 Agarwal, New Delhi

LETTER OF THE WEEK

WOMEN IN POLLS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'In equal measure' (IE, March 18). The higher allocation of tickets to women by the BJD and TMC should be welcomed. It could push mainstream parties to field more women candidates. However, there is a difference between fielding their being elected. Reservation is a more effective way of representation. There has been a high turnout of women voters in recent years. Political parties should take note of that. These parties often use the winnability factor as an excuse for not fielding women candidates. But this argument is not backed by studies.

H Upadhyay via e-mail

OF POLITICAL WILL

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Islamophobia, theirs and ours' (IE, March 21). The writer points out that leaders in New Zealand, Australia and other countries are trying to overcome the inherent "otherness" in their society with an emphatic attitude and asserting that the political will of their country is to "accept the very other". India lacks such political will. Due to the bifurcation in society between an elite polity and a civil society where, now, the fringe has made inroads, it is very difficult to think of a scenario devoid of the "apathy to others". Accepting that differences bring vibrancy to all aspects of human endeavour is the way forward for India.

Abhijith, Dombivli

THE Urdu PRESS

MEDIATION MATTERS

ON MARCH 9, *Munsif* carried an editorial that was hopeful. Political parties must separate tled; "Is the Court Order a Vain Attempt for their politics from this case. It must now be about those actually party to the case."

garding the Supreme Court decision to appoint a three-member panel of mediators to the title dispute around the Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid complex. It notes, "We are not in a position to resolve matters by bargaining or dialogue, but all sides need to agree to whatever would be decided. But this seems to be a meaningless attempt with no original litigants being involved. The existence of the mosque close to the site."

Hamas Samaj's editorial on March 10 notes that any attempt to "resolve" the dispute must be marked with *kasheeda kalbani* (a large-heartedness and must be well-intentioned). Stubborn attitudes, it opines; "have seldom yielded solutions... a humble and cheerful approach cannot hurt anyone. A dialogue and a fight too often end due to the latter. But what use is it, if after a battle where we lose everything and only then do we waging a struggle for further participation and better representation in politics."

Siasat on March 9 notes that; "all those who are litigants need to now refrain from publicly airing or broadcasting their views or from unnecessary *bayaabaazi* or offering statements. They need to say whatever they have to, before the mediators. Each litigant must be wise, sagacious and pay full attention to ensuring justice." It adds; "till the many problems in the country currently, with so many issues. But third-rate slogans

have clouded the debate. It says voters must take stock of the claim being made by the BJP of being the chowkidar. "Where was the chowkidar when there was notebandi, GST and wrongdoing in defence matters?"

Munsif's editorial on March 15 asks; "Is Mayawati serious about beating BJP?" The paper believes that "if the Sangh Parivar returns to power, it would have a deleterious impact on democracy, Constitution and Secularism. It is not a single party's job to guard secularism and the Constitution. For a bigger cause, parties that call themselves secular must be able to sacrifice their immediate interests." From such a perspective, it examines Mayawati's vacillation on contesting the Lok Sabha elections and concludes that the Bahujan Samaj Party leader "does not appear serious" as she is "not serving the nation's interests by doing this, but just her own."

The mouthpiece of the Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslemeen, *Etemaad* in an editorial on March 12 talks about "social media and the model code of conduct". Praising the Election Commission for understanding the full nature of the impact of social media on voters, it also talks about "the fake videos put out after the attack at Pulwama". Many people believed in these videos, the editor points out.

CHRISTCHURCH ATTACK

THE TERROR ATTACKS on two mosques in New Zealand have drawn ire of sections of

the Urdu press.

The *Urdu Times* on March 17 writes of *Islamophobia ka barhtaa Junoon* (the growing threat of Islamophobia). *Siasat* on the same day writes of *Dahshatgardi par Trump ka dogla rawaiyya* (The double standards of Trump on terror).

Munsif on March 19, writes of *Nafrat ke Saudagar* (the dealers of hatred). The paper notes that "In India after the Babri Masjid was demolished and in the US after the attacks on September 11, a peculiar mentality has sprouted like a poisonous tree with branches everywhere. *Insaniyat* has given way to *Nazariyat* (humanity has yielded to ideology).

Inqilab on March 19 too rues on the rise of Islamophobia and White racism taking root in sections of the West. It notes that Islamophobia will pose grave difficulties to the West, Europe and the US. It says that the time has come to face this challenge unitedly — much in the same way that 'terror' has been countered.

MISSING PAPERS

THERE IS SOME mirth about the missing Rafale papers, after the Attorney General's admission in the Supreme Court that the documents were stolen from the Defence Ministry. *Munsif* on March 8, for instance, mocks the "safe hands" from which they were wrenched away.

Compiled by Seema Chishti