

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Article 35A, in fact

It became law through a constitutional process.
Its repeal will be a blow to federal India



HASEEB A DRABU

MIND THE GAP

Outsized presence of national security in prime minister's LS campaign threatens to diminish or exclude other pressing issues

ON THURSDAY, IN Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first three campaign speeches for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the issue of national security seemed to hold centre-stage. In Akhnoor in Jammu, the PM was eloquent on the Balakot strikes: "Those running terror mills across the border are scared". At another rally in Meerut in UP, he accused the Opposition of belittling Wednesday's anti-satellite missile test. Social welfare schemes did find a mention in these speeches and the PM also talked about "freedom from corruption and ill-health". But "a government that acts decisively to ensure the safety and security of the nation," was the recurring theme. It's too early to say if these speeches have set the tone for the BJP's election campaign. But it would be unfortunate if national security overwhelms and overtakes all other issues — including and especially those that have to do with the state of the economy.

Recent reports and surveys have underscored why the election campaign of 2019 needs to give the economy its due. In January, a Reserve Bank of India study pointed out that investments by the private corporate sector have declined for the seventh year in a row. The growth in industrial output dropped to 1.7 per cent in January compared to 2.6 per cent in December last year. This has given rise to fears that the fourth quarter of this fiscal would be as slow as the last quarter which saw the Indian economy grow year-on-year at 6.6 per cent — a six quarter low. Growth in consumer spending, which accounts for about 60 per cent of the economy, slowed to 8.4 per cent during the period as compared to a 9.9 per cent increase in the year earlier. These are not mere statistics. They signal that the economic slowdown is hurting people. Sluggish consumption is a sign of falling real incomes; it's also evidence that a section of the country is not gainfully employed.

The slowdown in the non-farm economy has come on the back of a serious crisis in the farm sector. Agriculture has grown at about 3 per cent per annum during the NDA government's stint in office. However, what is more worrying is that farmers are incurring losses even though their outputs may be higher. And agriculturists have not been able to turn to the non-farm sector for jobs. Creating enabling conditions for private investment to revive thus holds the key to arresting rural distress. An election campaign bereft of ideas to arrest the economic slowdown will not augur well for the next five years.

AN OWN GOAL

A controversy over Article 35 A, stoked ahead of polls, would only boomerang on the Centre, deepen turmoil in the Valley

THE TIMING OF Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's "thoughts" on Article 35 A, as articulated in a blog post, just as the country is gearing for the Lok Sabha polls, is fraught. Article 35 A of the Indian Constitution empowers the Jammu & Kashmir legislature to define the state's permanent residents and their rights and privileges. Jaitley has written that 35 A "came as a Presidential Notification and is a surreptitious executive insertion in the Constitution", and that it is discriminatory. The ideological position of the BJP and RSS for the abrogation of Article 370, and its derivative, Article 35 A, is well-known. However, it has been hoped that as a party in government, the BJP views the issue with more pragmatism and responsibility. A challenge to Article 35 A is before the Supreme Court, where the government has yet not made its stand clear. For this reason, if for no other, as a senior government functionary, Jaitley should have exercised restraint.

At its heart, the opposition to 35 A stems out of the desire to play with the demography of Jammu & Kashmir, particularly, the Muslim majority Valley. There seems to be an impression in the Sangh parivar that by doing this, the Kashmir problem will be "solved" immediately. Nothing can be further from the truth. There has been enough turmoil in Kashmir over the last four years, and a strong revival of militancy. More people have been killed since 2016, civilians, militants and security forces personnel in the Valley, than at any time in the last two decades. Meddling with constitutional provisions that guarantee J&K's autonomy will only heighten this turmoil. For Delhi, it would be akin to scoring an own goal.

Article 370 — from which Article 35 A came — is the constitutional provision that governs India's relationship with J&K, and safeguards its autonomy, while strengthening its accession to India. Almost from the beginning, though, the autonomy guaranteed by Article 370 has been undermined by the Centre through a series of presidential orders — one of the main reasons there has been a breakdown of trust between the Centre and Kashmir. Those arguing for doing away with Article 35 A should keep in mind that such a step could bring into question every presidential order passed to extend provisions of the Indian Constitution to J&K.

POSITIVE NEWS

A transplant at Johns Hopkins shows that with new therapy, HIV-positive people no longer need to be treated as high-risk

HIV, READ IN the Eighties as an immediate sentence to a lingering death, has now been controlled to the extent that a living HIV-positive woman has donated a kidney to an HIV-positive recipient. Living-to-living donation is commonplace among people without serious conditions, but was hitherto unknown in the HIV-positive community, where even the possibility of receiving a kidney is limited by the condition that the patient must have a zero viral load. Besides, there were concerns that HIV or antiretroviral treatment for it would compromise the donor's surviving kidney. But now, Dorry Segev of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine has helped 35-year-old Nina Martinez, a public health consultant, to give her kidney to an unnamed HIV-positive recipient. This is a milestone, indicating that HIV-positive people are now at no more risk than others.

Earlier this month, a report on the iEngage trial for viral load reduction was presented at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Seattle. Subjects of the study, under a new regimen of therapy, had achieved full suppression in 63 days, and 83 per cent had not back-slided after the study concluded. The result suggests that it is possible for the majority of HIV-infected people to lead normal lives, without suffering the cataclysmic health effects of immune deficiency, and without running the risk of transmitting the virus to others.

Back in the Eighties and Nineties, the global battle against HIV/AIDS had sought to eliminate transmission and disrupt the life cycle of the virus. Later, it sought the less formidable target of letting people live full lives with the infection. With the transplant at Johns Hopkins, the achievement of this goal has been demonstrated. And it is also clear that despite stringent transplant rules, no HIV-positive patient needs to die for want of an organ.

WHEN THE MINIONS of the BJP promise abolition of Article 370 or Article 35A, especially prior to the elections, it is not to be taken seriously. In fact, the response, if any, should be to dare them to do it. Indeed, I had done so in 2014 in response to a rant by Jitendra Singh, a minister in the PMO, when he spoke out of turn ("Dare them to do it!", *Kashmir Life*, June 2, 2014). It has been almost five years since and Article 370 and 35A stand where they are even as Singh is sitting in the same chair!

But when an erudite political leader with the genteel and gravitas of Arun Jaitley goes public on it, it needs to be taken very seriously. In a blog, Jaitley has said that "Article 35 A was 'surreptitiously' included in the Indian Constitution, terming it as a 'historical blunder' committed by Jawaharlal Nehru.

One cannot pick a bone with Jaitley on his calling it a "historical blunder". That is an opinion based not only on an ideology but a certain understanding of Indian history and a vision for Indian polity. But, the same cannot be said about besmirching Article 35A as a deceitful entry in the Constitution of India. Besides political, it has serious constitutional implications. It also makes the Constitution of India appear as if it were contaminated.

Article 35A empowers the government of Jammu and Kashmir to do two things: First, to define a class of persons as constituting "permanent residents" of the state and second, to allow the government to confer on these persons special rights and privileges with respect to matters of public employment and acquisition of immovable property in the state. In addition, it grants immunity to such special rights and privileges legislation from being annulled on the ground that they infringe one or the other of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Article 35A was included into the Constitution of India in 1954 by a presidential order made under Article 370 of the Constitution of India. The process followed in getting Article 35A is as constitutional and transparent as it can get.

The basic principles committee of the J&K Constituent Assembly, which was set up in

For Kashmir and Kashmiris, Article 370, in its present emasculated form, or 35A is not an existential issue. But for India as a federation it is. If Article 35A is expended it will impinge on basic tenets of constitutional interpretation, and will damage the most solemn promises, vis a vis other states, that lie at the heart of the Indian federation. It may well be the beginning of the end of federal India.

1951, presented its report to the Constituent Assembly in February 1954. As a part of the report, an annexure which listed out the provisions of the Constitution of India, besides Articles 1 and 370, that should be made applicable to J&K. This annexure included, among other Articles, Article 35A.

It is an interesting factoid that it was Girdhari Lal Dogra (father-in-law of Jaitley), who proposed that the annexure be sent to the government of India for appropriate action. This was February of 1954 and three months later, the President's order under Article 370 was issued, incorporating, among other provisions, Article 35A in the Constitution.

The Article, through which Article 35A was brought in, ie Article 370, was debated threadbare in the Constituent Assembly of India for more than five months before it was made a part of the Constitution as adopted in 1950.

It is important to note that while this constitutional process was being undertaken and concluded, a political process was running parallel to it. The Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Prime Minister of J&K, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, reached an agreement. Nehru recorded it in a note dated July 20, 1952. The terms of the agreement, where the sharing of sovereignty was detailed, were presented to the Lok Sabha. On his part, Abdullah briefed the J&K Constituent Assembly in what is a famous speech in the history of J&K.

While terming it as "surreptitious", Jaitley probably means that Article 35A could not have been introduced through a process outside the ordinary amending procedure prescribed under Article 368. If this is indeed so, then the issue is a constitutional technicality.

On this, one can do no better than quote A G Noorani, the most authoritative voice on the constitutional relationship between India and J&K: "Article 35-A is not a mere executive order under Article 370 but is itself a constitutional provision, a compact recorded in both constitutions. No court can ignore this. As the Privy Council held, 'parliament could as a matter of abstract law' repeal the statute of

Westminster recognising the independence of the dominions. But that is theory and has no relation to realities."

Be that as it may, assume for a moment that Article 35A is repealed. Will it allow "Indians" to buy land in Kashmir? The answer is no. It will not alter the situation, for, as Noorani points out, the 1927 notification of the government of Jammu and Kashmir, which imposed restrictions on the employment of, and land ownership by "outsiders" (non-state subjects), is a part of the J&K Constitution.

If anything, if Article 35A is expended, it could pave the way for the rolling back of all orders extending India's Constitution to J&K after November 17, 1956, when the state's Constituent Assembly was dissolved. For, as a matter of legal construction, if the presidential order incorporating Article 35A, which was on the recommendation of the state's Constituent Assembly, is without legal authority, then all subsequent presidential orders issued without the consent or concurrence of the Constituent Assembly are a bible of illegality.

This will take J&K back to a quasi-sovereign status, with its own prime minister and president. The state subjects of J&K will cease to be citizens of India and entry of Indian nationals into J&K will be restricted. The goods from India will have to pass through a customs barrier and pay an import duty. And above all, the people of J&K will not be legally obliged to uphold the integrity and sovereignty of India. The comic irony will be that separatists will become mainstream overnight!

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The writer is former finance minister of J&K



PAMELA PHILOPOSE

FROM THE PM, TO THE PEOPLE

Announcement of Mission Shakti highlighted PM's capacity for mass messaging

THE MANNER IN which an announcement from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 27, urging the nation to stand by for an important announcement between 11.45 and 12 noon, reached a wide swathe of the population was remarkable. The almost instant awareness of it across the country, regardless of class or location, gestures to three significant realities.

First, it demonstrated that the sharpness of the memory of that 10.15 pm unscheduled TV broadcast of November 9, 2016, when the PM announced demonetisation, has not been blunted. Second, it showed that ever since the Balakot strikes, anxiety over the escalation of hostilities between India and Pakistan in an election season, has permeated popular consciousness — not perhaps in the triumphalist, muscular register of the BJP, but more in terms of the real negative repercussions war would have on their lives. But there is a third reality — the high level of mediatisation of Indian society. Most important to note in this context is that the PM has been able to consolidate for himself immense media capital and the power it affords, so that he can now effortlessly put out messages in a one-to-many, efficient, intimate and uni-directional way.

Such a capacity for mass messaging allows him to embody and express the aspirations of those who support him, not just voters, but some of the biggest corporates. Institutional oversight over such messaging is almost impossible to achieve, given such a powerful presence and the dilemma facing the Election Commission, on deciding whether Modi had breached the model code, despite going public with the fact that permission was not

sought, would indicate this.

Let us then consider some of the media ammunition that lies in the Modi war chest. For one, he has succeeded in suborning the independence of mainstream media through a combination of corporate influence, direct benefit transfers, and the mailed fist. For another, he is recognised today as the world's most social media savvy politician. Even Donald Trump has been left behind, to gauge by his Instagram profile. Image-driven Instagram, let us remember, is the latest, shiniest thing on the social media block. A recent assessment indicates that while Trump has 10 million followers on this platform, Modi has 14.8 million. The numbers of Modi's other social media workhorses are similarly mind-boggling with Facebook followers, at over 43 million, being 20 million more than Trump's.

This is the base on which Modi has built another tier of social media interactivity: Through highly personalised apps. The NaMo app was introduced during the last general election as a platform for "volunteers" to receive messages directly from him. This was rejigged for wider application a year after he came to power and is now even offered as a pre-installed add-on with the Reliance Jio phone. The multiplier effect of this is marked. Content from this app makes its way into all manner of Facebook and WhatsApp accounts, gets tweeted and Instagrammed widely. Yet no fact-checking goes into it. As an assessment noted, the absence of content moderation makes it a fount of communal propaganda and fake news. Another app, this time appearing to be independent, goes by the name of MyGov. Its website claims it has "7,937.08 K"

registered users, to date.

While it exists ostensibly to provide information on the Modi government's initiatives, its propagandist intent is written all over. There are innumerable other interventions. NaMo TV focused only on Modi's speeches, first used in Gujarat, is now a national channel in itself, available on YouTube. Plans are on to beam it directly into homes.

Given this machinery for self-communication at Modi's command, just what did that surgical strike on voters' attention in announcing Mission Shakti seek to achieve? It was clearly an attempt to retrieve the post-Balakot narrative of Modi as a strong, capable and decisive leader, one that tended to get lost in the welter of oppositional signaling. The whole thing was choreographed to perfection, even the delay of about an hour before the telecast helped build up anticipation and thicken the crowds. Mission Shakti was designed to reduce NYAY to a nay and tar all those who criticised the PM as anti-national. If, after Balakot, raising questions about the air strikes was anti-army, critiquing the timing of the announcement was "anti-scientists".

Post the announcement, TV channels built on the narrative — with fantastic backdrops of missiles spinning through space. When the PM began his Meerut election speech a day later, it was headlined: "The PM's first rally after Mission Shakti". The campaign for Election 2019 has only just begun. Indian voters must prepare themselves for the incredible, the implausible — and perhaps even the impossible.

The writer's new book is Media's Shifting Terrain

MARCH 30, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

BHUTTO PETITION

A FULL BENCH of the Sind High Court dismissed two petitions of habeas corpus seeking the release of the condemned former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The same full bench also dismissed another petition challenging the assumption of office as the Chief Justice of Pakistan by Justice Anwar-ul-Haqq. Bhutto had filed his habeas corpus petition from his death cell in the Rawalpindi district jail through his counsel, Abdul Hafeez Peerzada, while his daughter Benazir's petition was filed yesterday.

CHARAN UNDER ATTACK

KALPNATH RAI, THE CONGRESS-I parlia-

mentary party secretary, demanded that the deputy prime minister, Charan Singh, must establish his "innocence" in the UP land deal before a commission of inquiry. In a statement, he said Charan Singh should "quit the government" before the appointment of the commission "in the interest of impartial inquiry". He also demanded that prosecution should start against his son-in-law and nephew under the Prevention of Corruption Act. Rai alleged that the Union finance minister had "full knowledge of the deal" and that "it was done with the consent of his family". He said Singh's statement in the Rajya Sabha on March 28, disclosing the steps he had taken to reverse the land sale, amounted

to destruction of evidence of the offence by his son-in-law and nephew, with the intention of screening them from legal punishment. This was far more serious than the original offence.

POLLS CALLED IN UK

QUEEN ELIZABETH II called a general election for May 3, following the ouster of the prime minister James Callaghan's minority Labour government. Callaghan's office said the monarch set April 7 for the dissolution of the current Parliament and May 9 for the first session of the new Parliament. The monarch normally calls an election on a date recommended by the outgoing prime minister.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Lost in the din on jobs

The true meaning of being a worker is shifting — towards stable, productive, remunerative employment. This must be captured in collection of labour data, and while interpreting and analysing it for policy-making



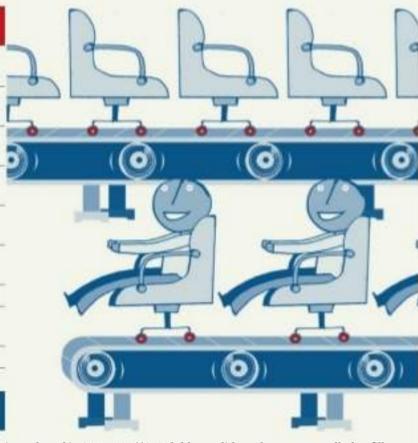
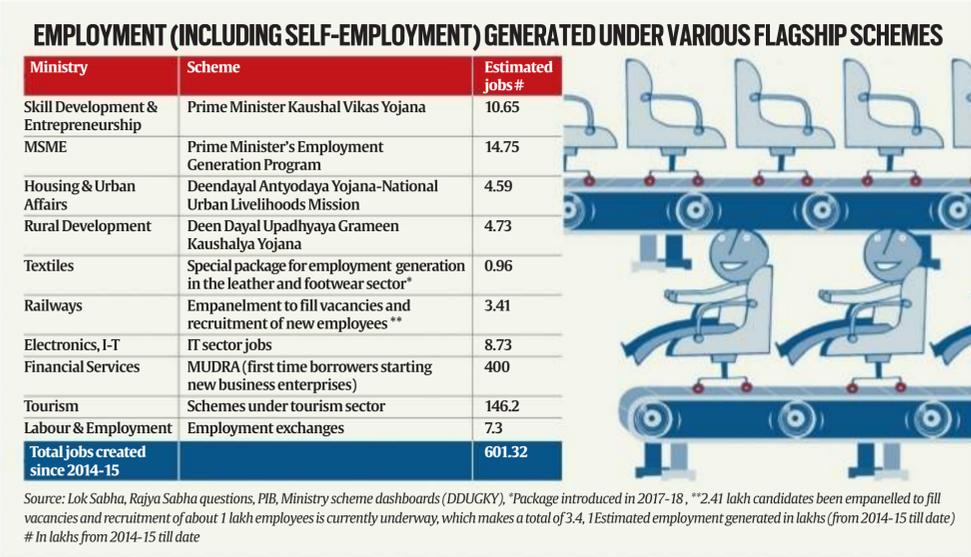
KRISHNAMURTHY SUBRAMANIAN

INDIA IS CURRENTLY witnessing an intensive debate over the question of jobs created in the economy, both in terms of quantity and quality. In the past five years, India has experienced a high level of GDP growth. In this backdrop, it is only befitting to ask the question if this growth has been accompanied by the creation of meaningful jobs. This question cannot be examined without current and reliable data on labour indicators. Despite the existence of multiple sources of employment data such as the Employment Unemployment Survey (EUS) of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and Labour Bureau's Quarterly Employment Survey, etc., Indian employment data has been available only at long-term intervals, often over five years.

As the domestic labour market is becoming increasingly sensitive to national and global economic factors, policymakers felt the need to construct labour statistics at more frequent intervals. To fulfil this objective, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) was initiated following the PLFS beginning April 2017. This initiative followed the recommendations of the Task Force on Improving Employment Data. The PLFS is a continuous survey for generating estimates of labour force indicators on a quarterly basis for urban areas and on an annual basis for both rural and urban areas.

However, some concerns raised in the media following the PLFS have led to misguided interpretations of the jobs debate. The leaked PLFS estimates show a large jump in India's unemployment compared to the last quinquennial EUS conducted by NSSO in 2011-12 (68th Round). In the debate on jobs, four key points need to be highlighted.

First, the PLFS and EUS cannot be compared as their objectives and sampling techniques differ significantly. Under the PLFS, households are selected in both rural and urban areas by providing 75 per cent weightage to households where at least one member has secondary education (Class 10) or above. In the EUS, households in rural areas are selected based on relative affluence and income earned from non-agricultural activities while households in urban areas are selected based on monthly household expenditure category for urban areas. The 68th round of NSSO data collected in 2011-12 revealed that 66.42 per cent of households (75.61 per cent rural and 46.20 per cent urban) have no family members who are educated above secondary level. The PLFS survey, which is designed to focus primarily on measuring formal employment, underrepresents workers engaged in informal employment as the weight placed on such households is only 25 per cent. Several studies have observed a U-shaped relationship between the level of education and labour force participation. Thus, both highly educated individuals and minimally educated ones are most likely to participate in the labour force. In fact, as per the Labour Bureau's EUS 2015, unemployment rates in India are substantially higher for individuals with secondary education or above (7.4 per cent to 16.3 per cent) when compared to less edu-



CR Sasikumar

cated individuals (1.8 per cent to 4.2 per cent). So, when the PLS places 25 per cent weightage on individuals where unemployment rate is below 4.2 per cent and places 75 per cent weightage on individuals where unemployment rate ranges from 7.4 per cent to 16.3 per cent, it is only logical that the unemployment rate obtained in the PLFS would be higher. Clearly, it is erroneous to use this statistic to claim that the unemployment rate has increased.

Second, we must understand the state of labour force activity amongst individuals with secondary and higher levels of education. As stated above, unemployment rate among persons with higher secondary education and above ranges between 7.4 per cent and 16.3 per cent. This clearly suggests that the problem of unemployment among educated youth cannot be ignored. However, the real issue at hand is not solely of job creation but also of the creation of quality jobs. In the din generated by the PLFS survey, this critical issue has escaped attention.

The problem can be assessed from a demand and supply side perspective. On the one hand, higher growth has raised the youth's aspirations for more meaningful jobs, thereby leading to a mismatch between jobs offered and jobs that educated youth are looking for. On the other hand, in today's era of the fourth Industrial Revolution, young people need to be equipped with necessary skills to work with new technologies. As we have a larger than ever population of educated unemployed, India does not need jobs *per se* but meaningful, remunerative jobs that align with the aspirations of the youth and skills demanded by the industry. The problem is not unique to India. As per an IMF report, youth inactivity rate for India, at 30 per cent is similar to 25-30 per cent youth inactivity rates in other emerging and developing countries.

Third, according to the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data and NSS enterprise surveys, real wages and jobs grew respectively by 5.5 per cent and 3.7 per cent during 2014-16. As factory productivity has not changed much during this period and the supply of educated youth has increased significantly, only an increase in the demand for labour outstripping the increase in labour supply can explain the increase in real wages. As far as the num-

ber of jobs is concerned, however, the rise in demand for labour reinforces the effect of increases in supply. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that job creation has been robust. Finally, let us examine administrative data as indicators, albeit imperfect, of employment performance. As per January 2019 EPFO Payroll Data Report, around 76.48 lakh new subscribers were brought under the EPFO net from September 2017 to January 2019. Note that the EPFO data only captures firms with 20 employees or more and employees whose monthly income is under Rs 15,000. Thus, the EPFO data underrepresents formalisation of jobs and creation of new jobs. Nevertheless, the effect mentioned above implies significant transition from informal to formal jobs. As formal jobs pay significantly more than informal sector jobs, this can explain the increases in real wages. Also, there is concrete evidence of employment creation under various flagship employment generation initiatives of the government, some of which are represented in the accompanying table.

The above table summarises that about 6 crore jobs have been created since 2014-15, which translates into a 12 per cent increase in the aggregate number of jobs (using approximately 50 crore as the number of individuals in the labour force). This 12 per cent increase in four years squares up well with the 3.7 per cent increase per year observed in the ASI data. However, obtaining a reliable estimate of informal employment, which constitutes about 80 per cent of our labour force, remains a challenge. The unemployment story will never be complete until we are able to accurately capture performances across all segments of the labour market for meaningful inference. At the same time, we must recognise that perceptions about earnings and jobs are changing fast in the wake of rapid technological advances. The true meaning of being a worker is shifting towards having stable, productive and remunerative employment. This aspect must be captured both at the stage of collection of labour data, and while interpreting and analysing the same for evidence-driven policy-making.

The writer is chief economic advisor, Government of India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Christchurch attack marks a grim new age of social media-fueled terrorism." —NEW YORK TIMES

No one tames Taliban

Pakistan has no influence, only cause to fear Taliban and its patron, al Qaeda



KHALED AHMED

AMERICAN COMMENTATOR MICHAEL Kugelman recently wrote: "The US government appears to be acknowledging that Pakistan, given its influence over the Taliban, is an important and potentially helpful player in the peace process in Afghanistan." A Pakistani will ask: What influence? Pakistan's main unacknowledged threat comes from the Taliban and their patron, al-Qaeda.

Mehr Tarar, in her wonderfully evocative book *Do we not bleed?* (Aleph, 2018), has talked to Ali Haider Gilani, son of ex-prime minister of Pakistan, Yousaf Raza Gilani, about his kidnapping in Lahore in 2013; and, his return home in 2016 after an American rescue. She collates the following "journey" of the kidnapped Gilani: May 9, 2013: Abducted in Multan and taken to Faisalabad the same way Shahbaz Taseer was abducted in Lahore and taken to Faisalabad.

July 22, 2013: Taken to Waziristan the same way Taseer was.

November 2013: Shifted to another place in Waziristan.

February 2014: Shifted again just before Zarb-e-Azb to an Al Qaeda group of two Afghans, one Arab and one Kashmiri.

May 9, 2015: Two years after the kidnapping, Gilani handed over to the Pakistani Taliban, TTP, accompanied by one Al Qaeda operative who had been with Haider from the start.

February 29, 2016: Taken to Afghanistan.

May 9-11, 2016: Rescued in an operation by US Special Forces in the Gayan district of the Pakitka province of Afghanistan. Was flown back to Pakistan from Bagram Air Base.

Haider was picked up easily in Multan in the midst of his supporters, as he says: "I was driving a black Toyota Land Cruiser; there were ten vehicles in my motorcade. I had fifty people with me. In my SUV, there were four of my party members and my secretary; there was one guard sitting behind me." After killing two of his guards, the kidnappers popped the question: "Are you a Shia or a Sunni?" Presumably, that decided the way the way they were to treat Haider, who was used to regular prayers and had done his hajj too.

Yet he was grabbed and taken to Faisalabad by half a dozen men speaking in Central Punjabi accent and no one stopped them to check what they were up to. Haider was shoved into a small room: "In that

room Brigadier [Retd] Tahir Masood [a former ISI media wing official] had been held captive, and some Italian and German men they had kidnapped. Two were rescued and two were killed. The ameer of the kidnappers came from Gujranwala. He used to be in Lashkar-e-Taiba [of Hafiz Saeed] before joining Al Qaeda. He behaved nicely with me."

Haider was kept solitary in a small room, his hands chained to a concrete slab, and he stayed like that for three years — and survived. It turns out later as you read Tarar's account that al-Qaeda needed funding and had to kidnap well-heeled men for ransom. If Pakistan was a "host", they didn't care much for it. It was a one-way street of devotion to senseless jihad — both victim and the tormentor equally unshaken in their common faith. Consider this: Haider talked about the local chief of the Taliban saying, "Khalid was the head of the Taliban in that area and he was very good to me. He used to give me 10,000 rupees once a month, or once in two months, an act to which I responded with, 'Khalid bhai, what will I do with the money?' I used that money to get chicken, buy other things or do a sadaqa [charity]. This was one person who was very nice to me in that place." He didn't know then that Khalid was in touch with the Gilani family in Multan asking for 20 million dollars for him.

There were other demands too, related to the "sexual" needs of the foreign guests, linked to the "religious" sanction of "comforts" for the holy warrior. Wherever they went, Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, serially picked up local women and married them, sired children on them, while the host population cringed in gratitude. This has to be seen as a benign act, now that we know that the UK boys who ran away to Syria for jihad under the banner of Islamic State simply wanted to rape the Yezidi women permitted under the doctrine of holy war. Al Zawahiri married many tribal women from among the Pakhtun of the tribal areas. He would cross the Afghan border into Bajaur and meet his sexual needs. Abu Musab al-Zerqawi, the warrior who killed Shias in Iraq, was sent from Peshawar by him through Pakistan's tribal areas — where he married twice "for the night" — before crossing Afghanistan and Iran to reach Iraq.

Haider tells us that his captors were pushing for an "exchange of prisoners" to get "Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri's two daughters, their nine children and Sheikh Juma al Shukri". His leader, Osama bin Laden, had a much bigger appetite for marriages. Later he was detected by the American living in Abbottabad "with 28 residents" including his three wives, eight children and five grandchildren.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POVERTY OF IDEAS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Our silence on poverty' (IE, March 28). Until our parties stop treating poverty as a handy excuse for promoting their political interests and more importantly commit themselves to walk the bridge path to tackle it, it cannot be wished away. Schemes like the Congress's MGNREGA and its latest announcement, the minimum guarantee scheme, do not address the core issues. Our silence on the deep-rooted poverty in the country only indicates our poverty of ideas to deal with it.

Tarsem Singh, Mahlipur

TALKING RIGHTS

THIS REFERS TO article, 'Their right to the city' (IE, March 28). Justice S Muralidhar introduced his verdict on the rights of a slum dwellers with a quote of Nelson Mandela which says, "A simple vote, without food, shelter and health care is to use first generation rights as a smokescreen to obscure the deep underlying forces which dehumanise people." This landmark verdict could not have come at a better time. Ensuring slum residents the right to the city is a freedom associated with democratic society. This should be taken as an opportunity by the leaders who are contesting the Lok Sabha election. A third of Delhi's population lives in slums. How can this issue not find space in the manifestoes?

Aiman Chishti, Delhi

MILITARY AND SPACE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Passing ASAT' (IE, March 28). India has become the fourth country to test an ASAT weapon. This is a brilliant strategic development, given that the Indian military relies heavily on its space assets and

LETTER OF THE WEEK

WHAT'S IN A TERM

THIS REFERS TO your editorial, 'Much ado' (IE, March 28). There was nothing ungentlemanly about R Ashwin knocking off the bats when Jos Buttler was clearly a yard away of his crease. Buttler showed his "disgust" and controlled his aggression because anything more could have led to disciplinary action. I have serious objections with the term 'Mankaded' though. It was used by the Australian Press in 1947 when Vinoo Mankad dismissed Bill Brown twice for leaving the crease before the ball was delivered. The Australian Press castigated Mankad but Don Bradman found nothing wrong in the Indian allrounder's actions. This method of dismissal should be renamed.

Bholey Bhardwaj, Mumbai

US, Russia and China have already developed ASAT weapons. In 2018, President Trump asked the Pentagon to create an exclusive space force. Despite an agreement against militarisation of space between the US and USSR in the 1980s, the space warfare infrastructure of both parties are forces to be reckoned with. China's cooperation with Russia in this regard has helped it greatly. India should keep in mind these developments, develop a military space doctrine with the help of the military, DRDO, ISRO and the private sector and look forward to combat threats in space.

Sauro Dasgupta, Kolkata



SAYANDEB CHOWDHURY AND ANIRBAN BISWAS

No saffron on the plate

It would be wrong to say that the BJP is taking the Left's place in Bengal

JAYANTA GHOSAL'S ARTICLE 'Among the believers in Bengal' (IE, March 26) is so full of cocky generalisations and mistaken observations that it needs a riposte. To begin with, the notion in Bengali cultural life. Moreover, argument bestows a monolithic identity on Bengal's long tradition of arrogant Hindu the "Bengali", while using *bhadrolok* and "Bengali" as interchangeable nomenclature. To remind that within the overarching umbrella of the linguistic denomination, there are differing class, caste, religious and regional identifiers which converge and diverge throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. To state the obvious, the *bhadrolok* is a small part of this convocation. Second, Ghosal draws a simplistic line of progression from the Bengali as once-communist to the now a would-be communal. As if, the ment the Bengali *bhadrolok* gives up his patriarchal and anti-modernity have, over a cialist "pretences", he automatically covering himself in a saffron cloak. 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