



## Party and symbol

Delhi HC order on 'Two Leaves' deepens  
T.T.V. Dhinakaran's political dilemma

The Delhi High Court verdict upholding the allotment of the 'Two Leaves' symbol to the AIADMK jointly led by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy CM O. Panneerselvam has come as no surprise. The Election Commission's November 23, 2017 order had ruled in its favour based on the group's majority in its organisational and legislative wings. The claim of the faction headed by V.K. Sasikala, a confidante of the late Jayalalithaa, and her nephew, T.T.V. Dhinakaran, to the party's name and symbol weakened after Mr. Palaniswami and Mr. Panneerselvam, who were in rival factions earlier, decided to come together in August 2017. Since then, they have consolidated their position by getting Mr. Dhinakaran's loyalists among MLAs disqualified and outmanoeuvring him in both the party structure and in court cases. Their unity was forged with the common aim of keeping out Ms. Sasikala, who was briefly elected interim general secretary of the AIADMK after Jayalalithaa's death in December 2016, and her nephew. The court has ruled that the EC was well within its powers to apply the majority test and allot the symbol to the faction that had more members in the general council and in its complement of MLAs and MPs. The court did not entertain arguments that the Commission should have ruled against the Panneerselvam-Palaniswami faction because it had changed the party's basic structure by abolishing the post of general secretary; and the contention that the Commission's order was vitiated by malice because it granted additional opportunities for filing affidavits, after which many reneged on their earlier statements on which group they belonged to.

The Dhinakaran faction has decided to appeal in the Supreme Court against the order that has set back his political fortunes. At the same time, it wants a common symbol to contest elections. Mr. Dhinakaran himself won a by-election to the Assembly from the RK Nagar constituency as an independent with the 'pressure cooker' symbol. He may have to register his party, the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK), with the EC to get a common symbol. Ever since he began running a faction in the absence of Sasikala, who is serving a four-year prison term, he has been trying to make the best of bad situations. He spent months in a Delhi prison himself on an allegation that he attempted to bribe an unknown EC official to get the party symbol. His political survival has so far hinged on tactically preserving a dual identity: running a party on the one hand, and keeping his group's claim to the AIADMK's identity alive through court cases. It is clear he is seeking to preserve his claim until the mainstream leadership is defeated in an election, in the hope that a majority of the party's primary members will rally behind him. The coming general elections and as many as 21 Assembly by-elections will be an acid test of his political survival.

## Alarming spread

With H1N1 now a seasonal flu strain, care workers and others at risk must be vaccinated

In a short span of 55 days (till February 24) this year, the number of influenza A (H1N1) cases and deaths reported from India reached an alarming 14,803 and 448, respectively. The highest numbers were from Rajasthan (3,964), Delhi (2,738) and Gujarat (2,726). Uttar Pradesh was next, with 905. While Rajasthan and Gujarat had the highest number of deaths, at 137 and 88, respectively, Delhi recorded seven deaths despite recording around the same number of cases as Gujarat. There appears to be no let-up, with the number of cases and deaths steadily rising. What is more disturbing is that the number of cases reported till February 24 is nearly the same as that recorded in the whole of 2018 (14,992). At about 450, the number of deaths till February 24 is nearly half the total reported in 2018 (1,103). The actual number of cases and deaths this year is likely to be higher as West Bengal has not reported the data to the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme. Moreover, the IDSP data are based only on laboratory confirmed cases and deaths. The H1N1 virus, which caused a pandemic in 2009, has since become a seasonal flu strain globally, including in India, and causes fewer deaths. According to the WHO, in 2009 the number of laboratory confirmed deaths caused by the pandemic strain was at least 18,500. But a 2012 paper in *Lancet Infectious Diseases* mentioned 2,84,000 deaths, which was 15 times more than the number of laboratory confirmed deaths.

On February 6, the Union Health Ministry had reviewed the preparedness and action taken by States to deal with influenza cases when the number of H1N1 cases and deaths stood at 6,701 and 226, respectively. Despite the number of cases and deaths more than doubling in less than 20 days since the review, the Ministry has made no additional effort to contain the spread. It has issued a guidance "recommending" vaccines for health-care workers, and deeming them "desirable" for those above 65 years of age and children between six months and eight years. Surprisingly, people with pre-existing chronic diseases, who are most susceptible to H1N1 complications according to the WHO, have been ignored – though its own statement released on February 6 had said more deaths were seen in people with diabetes and hypertension. With H1N1 becoming a seasonal flu virus strain in India even during summer, it is advisable that health-care workers and others at risk get themselves vaccinated. Despite the sharp increase in cases and deaths, the vaccine uptake has been low. Besides vaccination, there needs to be greater awareness so that people adopt precautionary measures such as frequent handwashing, and cough etiquette.

# The language of Pakistan

India must guard against the type of politics that shaped, and continues to ruin, Pakistan



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

"Our fight is for Kashmir, not against Kashmiris," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at a Bharatiya Janata Party rally at Tonk in Rajasthan on February 23, which it now turns out was setting the scene for the military strike inside Pakistan three days later. The Indian strikes followed a suicide terrorist attack that killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel on February 14 in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir. The Jaish-e-Mohammad, a jihadi group that operates from Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Mr. Modi spoke in some detail to explain how violence against Kashmiris that erupted in other parts of India could strengthen divisive forces, but the same speech had another statement that showed where the edge of his politics is. "I regret how some people who live in India continue to speak the language of Pakistan," he said. It is this pronouncement of the Prime Minister that has caught on following the Indian air strikes. On Sunday in Patna, he accused all Opposition parties and professionals who have raised questions regarding India's Pakistan and Kashmir policy of helping Pakistan.

### A fifth column?

"People who live in India but are loyal to Pakistan", a fifth column that threatens the nation, has been a recurring allusion in Sangh Parivar politics. Mr. Modi has, like he has done with several components of Hindutva politics, raised this to

a higher pitch. In October 2017, Congress leader P. Chidambaram said in response to the appointment of a new Government of India interlocutor for Jammu and Kashmir, Dineshwar Sharma: "The demand in Kashmir Valley is to respect in letter and spirit Article 370. And that means that they want greater autonomy... Therefore, I think we should seriously examine that question and consider on what areas we can give autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir." Mr. Modi responded: "Why are Congress leaders lending their voice to those who want azadi in Kashmir? Congress is shamelessly using the language that is used by separatists in Kashmir and is spoken in Pakistan." Mr. Modi's statement ended Mr. Sharma's mission as soon as it was announced and the former chief of the Intelligence Bureau is now cooling his heels.

"If the BJP loses in Bihar by mistake, then victory-defeat will be in Bihar but crackers will be burst in Pakistan," BJP president Amit Shah had said during the 2015 Assembly election campaign in the State. If that insinuation is not self-explanatory, Mr. Modi went a step ahead in the 2017 Gujarat campaign: "Pakistan's former army director general Arshad Rafiq said that in Gujarat, Ahmed Patel [political secretary to then-Congress president Sonia Gandhi] should be made the Chief Minister." He went on to accuse his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, and the Opposition Congress party of being in collusion with Pakistan to make an Indian Muslim the State's Chief Minister.

According to the notion of citizenship and territory in what may be called the Hindutva Strategic Doctrine, Indian Muslims are often understood as an appendage of Pakistan. This is not a thought



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that comes out only in campaign rhetoric. Jaswant Singh writes of the India-Pakistan rivalry that Partition "compartmentalised and then tightly sealed the Hindu-Muslim animosities; cementing festering grudges into near permanent hostilities; what was domestic (Hindu-Muslim) became international (India-Pakistan)."

The Congress's Pakistan policy "in effect was only an extension of Congress's Muslim appeasement policy," wrote A.B. Vajpayee in 1973, only two years after the Bangladesh war. When India's Pakistan policy is understood only as "appeasement" of Indian Muslims, one Hindutva leader thought the best way to reach out to Indian Muslims was to appease Pakistan. That led to L.K. Advani travelling all the way to Karachi and praising Mohammad Ali Jinnah in 2005. That move, however, boomeranged, set him on the downside and paved the way for the launch of his loyalist, Mr. Modi, who would displace him as the more authentic bearer of the Hindutva mantle.

Mr. Modi made Pakistan a leitmotif for Hindutva mobilisation in which the idea of an external enemy and an internal alien fuses into a convenient ensemble. He perfected this tool in the 2002 Gujarat campaign, which was almost entirely on 'Mian Musharraf', a fe-

rence to the then military dictator of Pakistan. "Speak to Pakistan in the language Pakistan understands," Mr. Modi said in 2013, when asked what he would have done if he were the Prime Minister during the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

### Post-Pulwama air strikes

Last week's military strike inside Pakistan has been characterised by many as a clean break from the past. The real break from the past came in 2014 itself when Mr. Modi called off a scheduled bilateral meeting with Pakistan citing its High Commissioner's meeting with Kashmiri separatists, a routine affair. Mr. Modi overturned Vajpayee's Kashmir policy which had three components: empower regional mainstream parties, engage the separatists, and involve Pakistan. Mr. Modi shut Pakistan out of the equation; disengaged with the separatist groups; and has constantly undermined the mainstream parties in the State, namely the Peoples Democratic Party and the National Conference, in the last five years. A principle that the current government has followed in faith and the practice is that there is nothing to be negotiated with anyone in Kashmir or about Kashmir with anyone, least of all Pakistan. Anyone suggesting anything out of line with this is accused of talking the language of Pakistan.

If Pakistan is projected as representing the internal and external threats to the nation, Kashmir becomes the location of Hindu victimhood, an essential component of Hindutva mobilisation. The massive violence and dispossession faced by the Hindus in the Valley at the hands of jihadis validates the Hindutva notion that the community is a victim of appease-

ment of Muslims, which is otherwise impossible to establish. Conversely, Kashmir also becomes the site for the demonstration of the resolve of the 'New India' where 'appeasement' is replaced with brute show of strength.

### 'Internal enemies'

The cries for revenge against 'internal enemies' is getting louder and shriller, pushing the entire country to the edge. "India's biggest threat comes from its own invisible internal enemies," a Hindi film director posted on Twitter along with a video clip of National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, in which he makes the case that India never lost to a foreign power unless betrayed by internal enemies. A Delhi lawmaker, formerly of the Aam Aadmi Party and now a Modi supporter, circulated a video last week, in which he asks Mr. Modi to deal with the enemies across the border while offering that people would meanwhile deal with the traitors inside. YouTube has since removed the video, but the lawmaker has found support on social media. "Deal with them right now, the mood in the country is suitable," a 'spiritual guru' told a prime time anchor who helpfully asked what is to be done with those who are against India.

This level of intolerance and call for mindless violence, fuelled by religious majoritarianism, and calls to cleanse the nation of internal enemies are indeed the language that first shaped but continues to ruin Pakistan. Prime Minister Modi is right – it is a matter of grave concern; a lynch mob might just succeed where the suicide bomber has repeatedly failed. To turn India into a cauldron of strife like Pakistan.

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# A pivotal election in Thailand

The system is configured to the military's advantage, but Thaksin Shinawatra may hold the key



PINAK RANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

After repeated postponements by the military government in Thailand, the country's general elections are now scheduled to be held on March 24. Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Barnavadi, 67, the daughter of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and eldest of four siblings, created a political tsunami recently by announcing her candidature for prime ministership. Ms. Ubolratana's political bid – she had renounced her royal status and privileges after her past marriage to an American national – was rejected by her brother, the current King, Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkorn, who said that such a high-ranking member of the royal family entering the political fray was against the country's royal customs, tradition and culture.

### Electoral realities

Ms. Ubolratana challenged the Election Commission guidelines which prohibit parties involving members of the royal family in politics and elections, by claiming that her status is that of a commoner. The King objected to this argument, asserting that she remains a member of the royal family despite her renouncing her

royal status. Ms. Ubolratana's announcement and the King's public statement opposing her candidature left no wiggle room for the Election Commission, which has since announced the list of official candidates for prime ministership without her name on it.

A colourful personality, Ms. Ubolratana, who is very well educated, has been active in social welfare projects in Thailand. She established a close rapport with former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who is currently in exile. She registered as the prime ministerial candidate for the Thai Raksa Chart Party, which is allied with the Pheu Thai Party he had established. His sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, was Prime Minister too, till she was overthrown in 2014 by the current military junta, headed by the former Army Chief, General Prayuth Chan-ocha. Ms. Shinawatra too is in exile after the military junta managed to convict her in a case of rice subsidies for farmers.

The Pheu Thai Party remains the most popular political party in Thailand, with a largely rural vote base in the relatively more populated rice growing north-east of the country. Mr. Shinawatra, a telecom tycoon, retains his popularity among Thailand's rural voters and urban sections of the working class, primarily because of his efforts to institutionalise cheap health care and subsidies for agriculture. His supporters appear to have glossed over his financial malpractices.

Ms. Ubolratana is the first royal



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family member to throw her hat into the ring of politics since Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932. Pitched against a royal opponent, Gen. Prayuth would have run into the realm of the unknown, given the respect and adulation that Thais extend to the royal family.

A staunch royalist, Gen. Prayuth may possibly be receiving a helping hand from the King who may want to avoid any political upheavals before his formal coronation in May. Gen. Prayuth has already announced his candidature for Prime Minister representing the Palang Pracharath Party, which is pro-military. Gen. Prayuth's main opposition will come from the Pheu Thai Party.

The electoral outcome will dictate the shape of the next government. Will there be a national unity government with participation by the major parties? This question has arisen because the King may want a show of unity, with him being the rallying point. It is no secret that the King had close ties to Mr. Shinawatra.

The pro-royalist Democratic

Party, led by former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, is holding its cards close to its chest; his public stance is that his party will not join any coalition with the Pheu Thai or any party which is seen as a front for the military.

The Pheu Thai Party is tipped to win a free and fair election in Thailand. Hence the military government has worked assiduously to scuttle this prospect. One such threat is a possible ban on the party by the Election Commission if Mr. Shinawatra is found to be involved in the party's decision-making. Mr. Shinawatra meanwhile has been refusing to kowtow to military diktats and uses social media to broadcast his views, some of them critical of the ruling military junta. The Pheu Thai Party in turn strictly avoids any mention of Mr. Shinawatra in its campaign and public pronouncements.

### The military's gameplan

The Thai military junta has consistently tried to re-engineer politics, first by promulgating a new Constitution in 2017, prohibiting political meetings and campaigning by political parties. In this it has found a ready pool of political opportunists, hankering for power. Gen. Prayuth has used the opportunity to campaign in the countryside under the cover of roving cabinet meetings. The 2017 Constitution was crafted to prevent the Pheu Thai Party from forming a government again, and a proportional representation system designed to deprive it of parliamentary seats,

even if it won the majority of constituencies. The Pheu Thai has, therefore, created a front of several political parties, so that all get a few seats under the proportional representation system. This network will also help it function in the extreme event of any ban being imposed on the party.

Thai politics, long dominated by the royal family and the Thai military, with the support of the Bangkok-based business elite, remains in eternal search of an orderly democratic transition. Elected civilian governments are routinely ousted by the army, earning Thailand the dubious distinction for among the highest number of coups d'état. The cat-and-mouse game between the army and political parties has persisted for decades.

Thailand's military is loathe to part with power and has skewed the polity to prevent a strong and vibrant democracy from taking root. Yet the democratic urge of the Thai people cannot be suppressed. The outcome of the forthcoming election – under a flawed Constitution – may not truly reflect the people's mandate, though the restoration of the democratic process will redeem in some measure the people's democratic aspirations.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Behind restraint

The writer (Editorial page, "Lines being crossed", March 4) says that all countries including the U.S. have been reluctant to cross the Rubicon and enter into an open confrontation with Russia. But the fact is the U.S. did cross into Pakistan by air to get Osama bin Laden. That was not construed as an act of war. Our government too did not cross the Rubicon and tried diplomatic means to get Pakistan to wipe out terrorism on its soil. That didn't work. Hence we crossed into Pakistan to kill the terrorists who have been targeting our citizens in Jammu and Kashmir. Why is this any different? Let the people in power today do their jobs as they deem fit. The media should

also recognise this.

SURESH GOPALAKRISHNAN,  
Hyderabad

With due respect to former and top officials under the United Progressive Alliance, I have to say this. During their innings they did their best to counter Pakistan. But, unfortunately, it was not effective as Pakistan still continues with its successful policy of bleeding India. Times are changing and we also have to change our tactics. Earlier methods are past their expiry date.

M.S. MANI,  
Chennai

The writer's justification for inaction post the 26/11 attacks is most unconvincing. The attacks struck at the vitals of our national interest. Yet the

writer appears concerned over the inappropriateness of crossing international boundaries even when the U.S., Russia, Israel and Turkey have done so with impunity when their national interests were threatened and challenged. The government was duty bound to protect its citizens, which it failed to do, despite international approval. To say that "India's finest years were during the period 2009-2012" is strange. This was a period when governance began unravelling with corruption, inflation and a deteriorating situation in Kashmir.

P. VAIDYANATHAN,  
Chennai

The incident of an Indian pilot being captured and later released may have

postponed war between the sworn enemies. But it will be naive to think that this air strike will deter Pakistan from carrying out anti-India activity. The only plausible remedy is to co-opt the local populace in Kashmir; otherwise India will be fighting a war not only with Pakistan but also with its own citizens.

DEEPAK SINGHAL  
Noida

### Economy watch

There is no denying the fact that the government resorted to demonetisation without fully comprehending the basics of the Indian economy. Added to that was a hurriedly imposed GST, which contributed to sluggish economic growth (Editorial, "Deepening slowdown", March 4).

Demonetisation hurt the informal sector, leading to an employment crisis. The stance of the government that the move was initiated mainly to root out black money was changed to one about achieving digitisation. On the agricultural front, there was a lack of focus on improving methods of cultivation. Instead, populist measures such as writing off loans and compensatory allowance are being attempted to garner votes. These ad hoc measures are not going to bring in a lasting solution.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

### Note for the media

In order to be ahead in the scoop news supply to the public, it is indisputable that many TV channels in India

are in a competitive mode and they are becoming opinion makers instead of being news providers. The print media is smug that a dexterous heading will be indistinguishable to readers but should be aware that the common man can discern biased reportage. On TV channels, panel discussions are noisy and often test the patience of viewers. There are numerous burning social issues in the country that remain untouched by the visual media and the larger focus is only on politics. The media's social responsibility is found wanting (OpEd page, "From the Readers' Editor", March 4).

R. SRIDHARAN,  
Chennai

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# The loss of intellectual autonomy

To define one's identity or community in terms of an exclusive religion is a vexed European notion



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

No person in today's world likes to be told what to do or what to think. The young are particularly keen to have the freedom to decide which beliefs to form. Intellectual autonomy is widely considered to be an important value. This was probably not true in the past when large numbers of people were illiterate, knowledge was produced and stored by a few, and there was wider social legitimacy for submission to those with power and authority.

However, even then, poets and philosophers routinely felt that intellectual autonomy is smothered by temptations of power. Asked by his pupils on how to relate to rulers, the medieval philosopher-saint Al Ghazali said, "It would be disastrous to go to a ruler to offer unsolicited advice. It is acceptable to offer your opinion if the ruler sought you. But it is best if he goes his way and you go yours."

**Strategy of intellectual control**  
Since the end of the 18th century, as technologies of knowledge production became increasingly available to larger sections of society, intellectual autonomy has been threatened not only by state power, but in other invidious ways. Colonialism is a case in point. The British strategy of intellectual control was implemented by crafting a system of education rather than brute coercion. Although the best of our thinkers outmanoeuvred this system – after all our most original thinker of this period, Gandhi, was a product of this very education – it created acute anxiety among self-reflective thinkers. For example, Sri Aurobindo lamented the "increasing impoverishment of the Indian intellect" in the face of new knowledge imposed by European contact. "Nothing is our own, nothing native to our intelligence, all is derived," he complained. "As little have we understood the new knowledge; we have only understood what the Europeans want us to think about themselves and their modern civilisation. Our



English culture – if culture it can be called – has increased tenfold the evil of our dependence instead of remedying it."

A more catastrophic malady resulting from this "well meaning bondage" was the loss of intellectual autonomy. The watchword of Indians, he argued, has become "authority", blind acceptance of ideas coming either from outside, from Europe, as was the case of the then English-educated Indians, or from inside, from fossilised traditions, as was the case of traditional pundits. It was as if the only choice before Indian intellectual elites was a hyper-westernised modernism or ultra-traditionalism. Some elites would have every detail of their life determined exclusively by Western ideas. Others would have them fixed only by *shastra*, custom and scripture. Each wanted to reform the other, which was nothing but a call to substitute the authority of "Guru Sayana with the authority of Max Mueller" or the "dogmatism of European scientists and scholars" with the "dogmatism of Brahmin Pandits". The absence of real choice was a symptom of an undermined capacity to think on one's own, the power of humans to accept or reject nothing without proper questioning.

Much the same conclusion was reached, a decade later, by the Indian philosopher, K.C. Bhattacharya. In 'Swaraj in Ideas', Bhattacharya feared that Indians might suffer from a subtler form of domination "when one's traditional cast of ideas and

sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost." To be sure, when two cultures come into sustained contact with one another, there is bound to be give and take. One culture might even give to the other more than it takes from it. However, all creative assimilation involves a real conflict of ideas, and elements of an alien culture can be accepted only after "full and open-eyed struggle has been allowed to develop" between the two encountering cultures.

## Two alien ideas in India today

I am afraid we have allowed two deeply problematic alien ideas to penetrate our collective consciousness without thorough questioning or proper comparison with ideas emanating from our intellectual traditions. One is the idea of religion, and the second, a particular conception of the nation. Religion, as a demarcated system of practices, beliefs and doctrines, is largely an early modern European invention and begins its existence in and through the theological disputes of the 16th and 17th centuries. Under the impact of colonialism, this category came to India and obliged Indians to think of themselves as members of one exclusive religious community, not just different from but opposed to others. It is of course true that gods and goddesses, ethical norms and prescriptions, rituals and practices did exist in

some form in the past. But these were not thought to be part of one single entity called Hinduism, so that those who owed allegiance to any one of these sets of practices did not think of themselves as belonging to a single system of belief and doctrine in competition with and opposition to all others. Indeed, mobility across communities and multiple allegiances were common. As a result, most people refused to be slotted into rigid, compartmentalised entities. They were religious but did not belong to a religion. This has virtually ceased to be the case.

Second, religious belief or practice, or adherence to a doctrine, was never viewed as a condition of membership in a wider national community. One's religious or linguistic identity made little difference to one's belonging to the nation. Alas, now, for many inhabitants of our territory, a nation cannot but be defined in single religious or linguistic terms. An exclusivist conception of the ethnic nation – entirely against the spirit of local Indian religions or conceptions of nationhood – devised first in Spain in 1492, developed further during the European wars of religion, and perfected in the 18th or 19th century has seized the Indian mind. Thanks to narrow-minded education institutions and now the electronic media, the idea was first disseminated and then unquestioningly accepted by Indians as if it were a long-held indigenous Indian idea. In accepting this alien idea of religion and nation without proper comparison or competition with Indian ideas of faith and community, we have sacrificed intellectual autonomy and gone down the road to hell from which Europe has itself yet to recover.

To define one's identity or community in terms of a single, exclusive religion – Hindu, Muslim or any other – is a perverse European notion, a mark of our cultural subjugation, a symptom of the loss of our intellectual autonomy. To have done so is to have uncritically abandoned our own collective genius for something ill-suited to our conditions. Can this be reversed? Is it too late to heed Sri Aurobindo's warning or follow Gandhi's example? Can we recover our collective intellectual autonomy?

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# Solar powerhouse

For residential consumers to see rooftop solar as a viable electricity option, building awareness is crucial



UTTARA NARAYAN & AMALA DEVI

In February, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved phase 2 of the grid-connected rooftop solar programme, with a focus on the residential sector. India has set an ambitious target of achieving 40 GW of rooftop solar capacity by 2022. However, while there has been progress on rooftop solar installations among industries and commercial consumers, the uptake among residential consumers has been slow.

Urban residential electricity consumers are still hesitant to consider rooftop solar power for their homes. This is because they don't have enough information about it, according to a 2018 study by the World Resources Institute in five cities – Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Jaipur and Nagpur.

## Limited access to information

For residential urban consumers, one of the key barriers to installing rooftop solar systems is that they do not know who to contact to understand the processes to be followed and permissions required. There is no single source to access information, evaluate benefits and disadvantages, and examine if any government support (such as a financial subsidy) is available. Most of the technical information provided by various sources, including the government, tends to be Internet-based. The study shows that less than 20% of respondents rely on the Internet to make a decision concerning rooftop solar systems. A significant majority of consumers seek face-to-face discussions and recommendations from friends and family.

Devising simple, well-designed and creative ways to disseminate information is important to help consumers make informed decisions. Information must be made easily available to the consumers on the amount of shadow-free roof area needed for generating a unit of electricity and pricing; operating the system, after-sales maintenance and support; and reliable rooftop solar vendors.

The local electricity linesmen, electricity inspectors, and other nodal officials in the electricity department also have key roles to play. Building their capacities to disseminate such information and handle consumer queries and concerns, and providing basic training in billing and metering for solar power can go a long way in improving consumers' experience.

Objective information must be put out

through various avenues, so that it is accessible to all segments of the population and in local languages. Such awareness drives will reach larger audiences. Information kiosks can be set up in public institutions like banks to offer information on the technology, as well as on practical issues such as guidance on selecting vendors. A robust feedback mechanism can be put in place for consumers to share their experiences with others.

Consumer rights groups, rooftop solar system vendors, and resident welfare associations (RWAs) in larger cities are beginning to organise campaigns and workshops to generate awareness and create a dialogue with consumers. In November 2018, for instance, the Bangalore Apartments' Federation held a workshop on residential rooftop solar to sensitise their members. Several RWAs have initiated discussions with residents to explore collective installation of rooftop solar, starting with common facilities like lifts and water pumps.

## Lessons to learn

Since the market for residential rooftop solar power is nascent, there are opportunities to learn from more mature consumer durable markets. For example, RWAs can tie up with vendors to organise demonstration programmes, so that consumers can observe, operate and understand how the system works.

It is important to also acknowledge that enthusiasm for rooftop solar energy largely comes from those with higher disposable incomes and who live in their own houses. This is one of the several reasons that electricity utilities are not very supportive of consumers generating their own power, as this would impact their revenues. Rooftop solar is a promising energy source for everyone, including socio-economically weaker consumers. However, awareness building sessions need to be socially inclusive and should take place during periods when consumers are likely to be at home.

The uptake of rooftop solar across economic categories is also contingent on policies that make it more accessible and affordable. Consumer groups and development organisations have a significant role in systematically following key policies and institutional procedures and ensuring that consumers' concerns in accessing reliable information are addressed. Raising awareness and building consumer capacity to engage with the sector are crucial for ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all and for India to achieve its rooftop solar targets.

Uttara Narayan and Amala Devi work with the energy programme at the World Resources Institute India

## SINGLE FILE

# Kashmir conundrum

Indian Muslims must not pay the price for Kashmiri transgressions

MOHAMMED AYOOB



Terrorism in the Kashmir Valley poses a significant internal security threat to the Indian state and has tremendous potential to trigger a military confrontation between India and Pakistan. However, the adverse impact of separatism and terrorism in Kashmir on Indian Muslims' position in Indian society has not been adequately examined.

Kashmir has become an albatross around the neck of Indian Muslims. Terrorist activities and calls for "azadi" by a minority of Kashmiri Muslims are increasingly complicating Indian Muslims' efforts to find a place of trust and dignity within the larger society. Kashmiri separatism accompanied by Pakistan-supported terrorism revives memories of Partition and raises questions about the loyalty of all Indian Muslims. It also immeasurably weakens the underpinnings of a plural society and secular state, which are already under threat from majoritarian nationalism.

The trajectory of Kashmiri politics has been distorted from the very beginning. New Delhi is responsible for a fair share of the problems it faces in Kashmir today because of its wrong-headed policies – from the removal of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953 to the rigged elections of 1987 that provided the immediate stimulus for the armed separatist uprising. But all this does not detract from the fact that the accession of Kashmir to India is an irreversible reality.

Unfortunately, a significant number of Kashmiri Muslims refuse to accept this reality unambiguously. While they may not be involved in violent actions against the Indian state, they are either unwilling or unable to forcefully oppose the twin forces of secessionism and terrorism. Furthermore, reported attempts by some Kashmiri youth to thwart counter-terrorism operations when they are under way provide evidence of their support for terrorists. These actions add to the feeling in the rest of the country that Kashmiri Muslims are anti-Indian, and some of this sentiment affects the majority community's perceptions of Indian Muslims in their entirety. Such ill-conceived actions also provide justification for the anti-Kashmiri feelings in the rest of the country that surface in times of crisis such as the Pulwama terror attack.

It is incumbent on Kashmiri Muslims to make it clear that they will have no truck with separatists and terrorists among them no matter what their own grouse may be against the Indian state. It is also obligatory for Indian Muslims to disown and denounce those among the Kashmiris who harbour secessionist tendencies. Indian Muslims paid a heavy price for Partition, which was based on the false notion, discredited by the separation of Bangladesh from West Pakistan, that nations can be defined on the basis of religion. Muslim opinion leaders must communicate clearly that Indian Muslims do not intend to pay the price for the transgressions of some Kashmiri Muslims against the Indian state.

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## NOTEBOOK

# Another pilot, another release

The events that unfolded 20 years ago, when Pakistan captured Flt. Lt. Nachiketa

AMIT BARUAH

It's a vignette known only to family and a few friends. But now, with the country gripped by events surrounding the dramatic capture and release of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, maybe it's time to tell it to a wider audience.

As *The Hindu's* correspondent in Pakistan (1997-2000), and living in Islamabad, I was caught smack in the middle of the 1999 Kargil war. With Pakistan initially projecting it as a "mujahideen" versus Indian Army conflict, my reporting from Islamabad remained unaffected.

On May 27, 1999, Pakistan claimed to have shot down two aircraft – a MiG 21 and a MiG 27 – as India moved to clear the Kargil heights of Pakistani intruders. Flight Lieutenant K. Nachiketa, piloting the MiG 21, was taken prisoner, while Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja appeared to

have been shot dead by Pakistani forces after being captured.

On June 3, then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced at a press conference that Flt. Lt. Nachiketa would be freed as a "goodwill gesture" (Prime Minister Imran Khan used the words "peace gesture" in the case of Wg. Cdr. Varthaman) and would be handed over to then Indian High Commissioner G. Parthasarathy inside the Pakistani Foreign Ministry at 7.30 p.m. (IST) with the media contingent in attendance.

Coming out of the press conference, I phoned Mr. Parthasarathy and said he would receive a call from the Pakistani asking him to reach the Foreign Office and take custody of Flt. Lt. Nachiketa. "Please don't go there. The intention is to embarrass you and India," I told him and cut the call.

Alerted, the High Commissioner sought instructions from Delhi and told

the Pakistanis that he would not go the Foreign Ministry and would not take custody of Flt. Lt. Nachiketa in the full glare of the media.

Things moved swiftly after that. Since it had been announced by Mr. Sharif, the Pakistani side got in touch with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which had set procedures in place. Three hours after being brought to the Foreign Ministry on Constitution Avenue, the ICRC allowed photographs of Flt. Lt. Nachiketa to be taken, but he did not speak to the waiting press. The smiling Flt. Lt., dressed in trousers and shirt and dignity intact, was pictured with Tariq Altaf, an Additional Secretary in the Pakistani Foreign Ministry.

A white Land Cruiser vehicle of the ICRC finally drove him to the Indian High Commission, where the High Commissioner and other senior officials were waiting for him,

around 11 p.m. I was also waiting – to confirm his release and then file the report for the newspaper.

Flt. Lt. Nachiketa slept that night at the residence of the Indian Air Adviser "Jack" Jaiswal and when I met him the next day at the High Commission, he was full of questions. "How is it to report from Pakistan?" he asked me. "How were you treated?" I asked him. He only said, "It's the first night I managed some sleep in all these days." Nothing more, the rest was just polite chatter. He did not appear to have suffered any physical injuries. Later, he was driven across the Wagah border in a High Commission vehicle. Only four months before that, I had stood watching the Delhi-Lahore bus roll in from Attari to Wagah with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on board.

Twenty years on, India-Pakistan relations continue to be on a roller-coaster ride.

## FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 5, 1969

### Curfew in East Pakistan

Life in East Pakistan was paralysed to-day [March 4, Dacca] following a general strike and hartal in response to the call by the all-party Students' Action Committee to press its demands for better educational facilities. In West Pakistan doctors are on strike and large parts of Pakistan are in the grip of a postal strike. An 18-hour curfew was imposed at noon to-day in Bogra after clashes between police and anti-Government demonstrators as East Pakistan observed hartal. Men of the East Pakistan Rifles were called in to help the civil authorities in Bogra after crowds had attacked a kotwali, set fire to the municipal office and local Muslim League office and cut telephone wires. Police used teargas to disperse violent crowds without much effect. Eight policemen including two officers were injured when demonstrators attacked the kotwali. Official circles said at Faizpur in Rangpur district, two rival groups of students clashed this morning.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 5, 1919.

### Bombay Mint Strike.

The strike of the employees of the Mint at Bombay still continues. Major Willis, Mint Master, posted a notice on the Mint gate on Saturday [March 1] informing the men that the special bonus which he had recommended had not been sanctioned by the Government and that in lieu of the bonus he had sanctioned a permanent increase in the wages at the rate of one anna to those who were in receipt of 10 annas and less per day and 2 annas to those who were in receipt of more than 10 annas a day. The notice was read by the strikers who appeared to be satisfied and it was expected they would resume work without any further trouble. Instead of doing so the strikers yesterday made a representation to the Mint Master through a pleader reiterating their original demand of increase of 4 annas a day all round and further they asked a bonus of two months wages and strike pay.

## CONCEPTUAL

# Modern monetary theory

ECONOMICS

This refers to an economic theory which argues that a government that borrows in its own currency can technically never default on any of its liabilities. This is because these governments can simply print fresh money to pay off their debt. Many supporters of modern monetary theory believe that governments should simply stop worrying about fiscal deficits. Instead, they argue, governments should increase their social spending through programmes like universal basic income and other forms of social welfare. Critics of modern monetary theory, however, say that such a policy will lead to higher price inflation, which is simply an indirect tax on citizens.

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