



Kartarpur focus

Security concerns are high-priority, but blocking work on the corridor is not right

When India and Pakistan announced in November they would operationalise a corridor from Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab to Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara in Pakistan's Punjab, it was hailed as a step forward in an otherwise fraught relationship. Prime Minister Narendra Modi appeared to share the optimism when he likened the initiative's potential to the fall of the Berlin Wall. What has followed, however, is round upon round of wrangling between the two governments over every detail: from the number of pilgrims to be accommodated, to the security restrictions, to the documentation and mode of transport to be used by pilgrims. At the base of the differences is the deep distrust between the two governments, a chasm that has deepened in the aftermath of the Pulwama attack and the Balakot strike. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's administration feels it should be given more credit for having cleared the Kartarpur proposal, something Indian Sikh pilgrims have demanded for decades, ever since the Radcliffe Line left their sacred shrine on the other side of the border in 1947. For its part, New Delhi refuses to acknowledge Pakistan's overture, and has made it clear the corridor will have no connection with furthering bilateral talks on other issues. Meanwhile, security agencies have voiced concerns about a possible attempt by Pakistan's military establishment to use the corridor to fuel separatist Khalistani sentiment. The Modi government's decision now to postpone the next round of technical talks, which were scheduled for April 2, is driven mainly by those concerns, in particular the inclusion of some known Khalistan activists in a gurdwara committee that would interact with pilgrims from India. Last week, the Ministry of External Affairs summoned Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner and sought clarifications on the "controversial elements" on the committee, and said the next meeting would only be held after it receives Pakistan's response.

While none of the government's concerns is unwarranted, it could not have been unprepared when it embarked on the corridor proposal. Pakistan's support to separatist Sikh groups goes back several decades, and India must work to secure its border from the threat even as it opens the gates for thousands of pilgrims to travel to Pakistan. National security must get priority. But for this, there must be an effort by all stakeholders in India – the Centre, the State government and the leadership of the BJP, the Akalis and the Congress – to resist scoring political points against one another. Modalities and technical issues, such as on the numbers, eligibility and identity proof required for the trip to Kartarpur Sahib, should be ironed out by both governments. Putting off meetings is hardly a constructive solution, given the proposed opening by November to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak.

Murky swamp

The midnight manoeuvres in post-Parrikar Goa raise disturbing questions

The drama of government-formation and Cabinet shuffle amid shifts in political allegiance in Goa serves as a reminder of the dark shadows of manoeuvre and intrigue that lurk within Indian democracy. Goa politics has for long been an arena of overnight desertion and defection. But the death of Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar earlier last month, and the midnight swearing-in of Pramod Sawant, came against the backdrop of the ruling BJP's aggressively expansionary phase. In this post-2014 phase, the BJP has been unashamed about targeting its allies, as its partner in Goa, the Maharashtra Gomantak Party, found out last week. Two of the MGP's three MLAs in the Assembly joined the BJP. One of them, Manohar Ajaonkar, was appointed Deputy Chief Minister hours later, replacing Sudin Dhavalikar, the third MGP lawmaker. The breakaway faction constituted a two-thirds majority in the MGP legislature party, which just might safeguard the manoeuvre from the anti-defection provisions of the law. The split of the MGP and the merger of the splinter group with the BJP were all carried out in the dead of night, with Speaker Michael Lobo working his office through odd hours as if it were a national emergency.

In the 2017 Assembly election, the Congress had emerged as the single largest party with 17 seats in the 40-member House, and the BJP had 13 seats. Through a series of manipulative acts that raised questions of political propriety, the BJP managed to form the government. To lead the rickety coalition with the MGP and the Goa Forward Party, the BJP brought Parrikar to the State. His death triggered the current round of jostling for power. The BJP sought to lure MLAs from supporting parties to reduce their collective bargaining power even as the new government was being formed. The MGP was trying to pre-empt the BJP bid by suspending one lawmaker to foreclose the option of a split in the legislature party, when the BJP struck first. The episode has underscored Goa's disrepute as a theatre of absurdities of Indian democracy. There is speculation that the BJP is now targeting MLAs of the GFP and even the Congress. The BJP and the Congress have 14 MLAs each. The GFP lawmakers boycotted the swearing-in of Mr. Ajaonkar, who has hopped from the Congress to the BJP to the MGP and back to the BJP. Some BJP leaders have rightly warned that such machinations will undermine the party's credibility. GFP leader Vijai Sardesai has sought clarity from the Chief Minister on his political plans. It is clear that the current government or any other combination will not inspire trust and confidence in the people. If Goa is not to witness a sequence of party-hopping in search of ministerial berths and loaves of office, a fresh election might be the only answer.

Seeking the next frontier

India's ASAT test has not violated any norm, but it is a reminder of the need for a global regulatory regime



RAKESH SOOD

Last Wednesday, on March 27, India carried out an anti-satellite (ASAT) test using an interceptor missile (as a kinetic kill vehicle) to neutralise a target satellite (possibly the Microsat-R launched in January this year) in a Low Earth Orbit (LEO) at an altitude of around 300 km. While India is the fourth country (after the U.S., Russia/US and China) to acquire this capability, Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the first leader to have announced the successful test in a national address. In contrast, China had quietly carried out its first successful hit-to-kill intercept in January 2007 till international reports about the consequent increase in space debris forced Beijing to acknowledge the test. France and Israel are believed to possess the capability. India's test has not violated any norm as there is no international treaty prohibiting the testing or the development of ASATs.

Keeping watch, keeping pace

After the Indian test, a senior U.S. Air Force Space Command official, Lt. Gen. David D. Thompson, appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee (Strategic Forces Subcommittee) and said that based on public information, the U.S. had expected a test, and that a base in Colorado had tracked it. U.S. systems are monitoring between 250-270 objects of space debris that were created following the test. The U.S. will notify satellite operators in case a threat to any is assessed. He added that the debris did not pose a threat to

the International Space Station, which orbits at an altitude of around 350 km.

An ASAT capability is normally a part of a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme. While a BMD targets an incoming ballistic missile, an ASAT interceptor targets a hostile satellite. Since a satellite moves in a precise orbit which is tracked, it gives greater time for target acquisition though satellites in higher orbits pose greater challenges for the kill vehicle.

Faced with Pakistan's growing missile capability in the 1990s (Pakistan acquired the M-9 and the M-II missiles from China and the No-dong from North Korea), India embarked on its BMD programme in 1999. A modified Prithvi was to be developed as the intercept missile. Work on a long-range tracking radar (Swordfish) that could track incoming ballistic missiles to enable target acquisition was also taken up. Testing began nearly 15 years ago followed by the integration of the various systems, including the active RF seekers, fibreoptic gyros and directional warheads. In 2011, an incoming Prithvi missile was destroyed by the interceptor missile over the Bay of Bengal at an altitude of around 16 km. Another half a dozen tests have been carried out since 2011, gradually expanding the parameters of the system to enable taking on targets at higher altitudes.

Both the U.S. and USSR began to develop ASAT systems as a part and parcel of their anti-ballistic missile programmes. During the 1980s, both countries concluded their kinetic kill interceptor testing. Instead, they began to focus on co-orbital anti-satellite systems and directed energy (laser) systems which could neutralise a satellite without fragmenting it and generating space debris. With de-



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

velopments in offensive cyber capabilities, a promising new area is to disrupt communication links between the satellite and ground control by damaging the transponders or the power source. After the 2007 test, China too has carried out subsequent ASAT development along these lines.

A crowded space

Since the Sputnik was launched in 1957, more than 8,000 satellites/manmade orbiting objects have been launched, of which about 5,000 remain in orbit; more than half are non-functional. Currently, more than 50 countries own/operate the nearly 2,000 functional satellites in orbit. The U.S. accounts for more than 800 of these, followed by China (approximately 280), Russia (approximately 150). India has an estimated 50 satellites. Of these 2,000 satellites, over 300 are dedicated military satellites. Once again, the U.S. has the biggest share here, with nearly 140, followed by Russia with nearly 90 and China with nearly 40. India has two dedicated satellites, one each for the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force. Indian defence forces also use the civilian government owned satellites extensively for communications, remote sensing, and location accuracy and meteorology.

Growing amounts of space debris pose a real risk to satellites and spacecraft, as the Oscar-winning film *Gravity* demonstrated.

There are over 20,000 objects of debris which are the size of golf balls while those of smaller size run into hundreds of thousands, totalling nearly 6,000 tonnes. The U.S. Department of Defense routinely tracks approximately 23,000 man-made objects achieving orbit to ensure safety of its space-based assets. One of the reasons that the international community protested strongly about the 2007 Chinese test was that it added nearly 3,000 pieces of debris as the test was done at a higher altitude (800 km), from where it would take decades to dissipate. The debris created by the Indian test, which was undertaken at a low altitude, is expected to dissipate much faster.

Patchy international control

The salience of space in defence is evident from the fact that all three countries – the U.S., Russia and China – have set up 'Space Commands'. This has given rise to demands to prevent the militarisation of space so that it is preserved "as the common heritage of mankind". The 1967 Outer Space Treaty followed by the 1979 Moon Treaty laid the foundations of the legal regime for space beginning with the rule of law, refraining from appropriating territory, non-placement of any weapons of mass destruction in space, and prohibition of military activities on the moon and other celestial bodies. However, these treaties were negotiated when the technology was still in a nascent stage. Satellite registration was introduced in the 1970s though compliance has been patchy. The U.S. has been adamantly opposed to negotiating any legally binding instrument to prevent 'militarisation of space', questioning the very meaning of the term, given that space as a medium is increasingly used for mili-

tary applications.

In 2008, Russia and China had proposed a draft to kick off negotiations on the Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects. It was rejected by the West, and not merely because it is such a mouthful of a title. The European Union, mindful of U.S. allergy to any negotiations on this issue, began to develop an international code of conduct based on transparency and confidence-building measures. The UN General Assembly has called for a declaration of political commitment by all countries that they shall not be the first to place weapons in space. This initiative too has floundered as norm building cannot take place in a political vacuum.

At present, the U.S. is the dominant presence in space, which reflects its technological lead as well its dependence on space-based assets. It therefore perceives any negotiations as a constraint on its technological lead. While countries have developed and tested ASATs, they are not known to have stockpiled ASAT weapons. Effective use of an ASAT also requires space situational awareness capability, which works best if it is a cooperative effort. India's successful ASAT test is therefore a technology marker. Further development of interceptor technology and long-range tracking radars is necessary for a robust BMD and the Defence Research and Development Organisation also needs to move on to newer technologies to enhance its ASAT capability in the coming years.

Rakesh Sood is a former diplomat and currently Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation. E-mail: rakeshsood2001@yahoo.com

The arrogance of the ignorant

It is tragic that 'New India' chooses to attack Adivasis and forest-dwellers instead of those destroying its ecology



ASEEM SHRIVASTAVA & ABHINAV GUPTA

cated Indians. What is invaluable is what is often described as 'indigenous knowledge' – as though the knowledge gained over centuries of lived experience is of somehow lower valency than the literacy acquired in a school, or perhaps of no value at all.

Relationship with nature

Sadly, the articulate arrogance of 'New India' is such that it is unable to see any virtue in the lives of Adivasis and other forest-dwellers who have lived in and by the forests since times immemorial. Ensclosed as it is in the air-conditioned offices of metropolitan India, duly estranged from any living ecology of the earth, while fully predatory on it, it sees people who live in and by the jungles as 'underdeveloped' criminals who are among those responsible for the thinning of the forests.

This appears to be the view held by petitioners, including retired forest officers and conservation NGOs, in a lawsuit filed in the Supreme Court in 2008. They seem to believe that humans are not a part of nature and can never coexist with it. It is far from their imagination to distinguish between Adivasis who know something about living sensibly with nature and the rest of us, who do not.

That even the courts would fall to such abysmal levels of understanding has become a defining feature of the reforms era. On Fe-



RITU RAJ/KONWAR

bruary 13, the Supreme Court ruled that over 1.12 million households from 17 States, who have had their claims rejected under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, are to be evicted by the State governments before July 27. It is not clear what fraction of these are individual claims and what fraction are community claims. Nor are all of these Adivasi households. Some might fall under the 'other traditional forest-dwellers' category. Critically, the Central government failed to send its attorney to the court. Ironically, the FRA contains no legal provision for the eviction of rejected claimants. In the face of loud protests from around the country, the court issued a stay order (till July 10) on its ruling. This suits the political goals of the incumbent BJP as it prepares for the polls. Many States are yet to give their details to the courts. Once they do, the number of households to be evicted may rise. Close

to 8-10% of the Adivasi population may be asked to vacate their traditional homes and abandon their livelihoods. Has the court contemplated the gravity of the implications? Where are these people supposed to live and make a living? What justice is there in acting in such an inhumane manner?

It betrays ignorance. The judges know that we live in an ecologically imperilled time when metropolitan India has much to answer for its corporate-consumer excesses. And yet, it is among the weakest and the wisest that they choose to attack. The world's largest refinery is coming up in the Konkan, uprooting 17 villages, over half a million cashew trees and over a million mango trees. Thousands of acres of Himalayan forests and over a hundred villages will be submerged by one of the world's tallest dams coming up in Pancheshwar in Uttarakhand. Are the conservationist petitioners and courts doing anything to stop any of this? They show little courage when it comes to tackling the land mafias, builder-developers, realtors, constructors and miners, but their conscience is ablaze over conserving Adivasis in the jungles.

A dying civilisation

This is the arrogance of ignorant India and it shall not abdicate till it has laid to rest the last hopes of what was 'a wounded civilisation', and is now a dying one. For, let us

be clear about one thing: freeing the forests of their traditional inhabitants is almost certain to expose their erstwhile habitats in short order to the speedy, organised depredations of the forces of what has come to be seen by the elites as 'development'.

If remote habitats are emptied of Adivasis, there may be nobody to forewarn us when ecologically perilous tipping points are crossed in the future. To make matters worse, worrying amendments that have been proposed to the Indian Forest Act, 1927, which further strengthen the stranglehold of forest officials over India's jungles and its inhabitants, have now been made public.

Perhaps some day, when their decisions affect them, the folly of their pronouncements will dawn upon those who preside on the fates of millions today. But it shall be too late then. Before July, the safe-keepers of justice might wish to ponder Gandhi's words: "A time is coming when those, who are in the mad rush today of multiplying their wants, vainly thinking that they add to the real substance, real knowledge of the world, will retract their steps and say: 'What have we done?'"

Aseem Shrivastava is a Delhi-based writer and teaches Ecosophy at Ashoka University; Abhinav Gupta is an independent researcher who has worked on forest issues and the FRA

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.

VVPAT numbers

The Election Commission's statement – a sheepish one – that an 'increase in VVPAT numbers will delay counting by six days' (Page 1, March 30) says many things. In fact, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with Voter Verified Paper Trail Audits (VVPATs) were implemented to remove the concerns and the perception that EVMs are vulnerable to tampering. For some reason, the Election Commission (EC) has not been very keen on having a paper trail. Counting VVPATs has always been a difficult and time-consuming proposition. Therefore, if the trails couldn't be counted to the extent demanded, what else was the purpose of having such paper audit trails? For many years, paper ballots remained a trustworthy

mechanism, and helped in the declaration of accurate results within stipulated time schedules. A decade ago, the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany had said that the use of voting machines which electronically record votes and also electronically ascertain election results only meet constitutional requirements. Some of the western countries have paper ballots. It would be short-sighted of the EC not to take note of these developments.

HARIDASAN RAJAN, Kozhikode, Kerala

■ The EC should have given greater and more thought to voter acceptability in its submission than harping on how counting time would be increased by six days, admittedly a drawback. To engage more personnel for verification of paper slips

could be thought of. An additional six days is nothing in the nearly three-month-long election festival. The voter needs to be thoroughly sure and convinced of his choice.

P.R.V. RAJA, Pandalam, Kerala

Be neutral

I have some comments to make about some of the articles in this daily. Articles and reports regarding the Opposition's political alliances that are now being stitched together almost sound like exhortations and guidelines from a parent or a teacher to an erring student. To this reader it sometimes appears as if the writer of those articles, though cognisant of his/her need to be neutral, and to a very large extent wedded to neutrality, desires in some part of his/her heart that the Opposition parties should get their act together so that

they can dethrone the BJP. These seem to be minuscule deviations from journalistic scruples. There is never any such advice offered to the BJP about the strategy that it should adopt in the coming elections. There are also opinion pieces vehemently criticising the government for demonetisation and the faulty implementation of the goods and services tax (GST) – to a significant extent, rightly so. But should not these opinion pieces make it a point to mention in the same breath, with equally intense vehemence, the successful working of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and the benefits that the GST, though imperfect, will bring in the coming years? Most do try to take a balanced view, but their attempts at balance sometimes seem half-hearted. My only wish is to say, at the risk of sounding trite, that a good news outlet

must not only be neutral, it must also be seen to be neutral.

UMANG PHOGAT, Hisar, Haryana

Exhaust emissions

While the writer (Open Page, "Battling the smoke", March 31) has highlighted the ill-effects of vehicular pollution, the fact is that the rules exist only on paper. I recall my stint with an ISO-certified organisation, where every step had to meet with guidelines framed by the company. For example,

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The Ground Zero page article, "The rumble beneath their feet" (March 30, 2019), incorrectly suggested that the earth's tectonic plates drift over a molten part of the mantle. This layer, called the asthenosphere, is better described as a ductile solid, rather than molten. In the same article, a reference to IIT Mumbai should be corrected to read as IIT Bombay.

A report headlined "Bihar ATS nabs Bangladeshi terror suspect from Pune district" (March 29, 2019, some editions) incorrectly said that the suspect was a Bangladeshi national. He is an Indian from Nadia district in West Bengal.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

The dark side of grand narratives

The pursuit of national greatness must not impose a cost on the weak in the periphery



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

“The impossible is now possible” is Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s slogan for the 2019 elections. His supporters believe his vision and leadership have resulted in a new resolve for the country. They believe we now have a ‘New India’. Two incidents last week provided glimpses of this resolve – the testing of an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile on March 27 and the detention by the police of development economist Jean Dreze in Jharkhand the next day. If the first was yet another tentative claim of India’s superpower status, the second was instructive of the indisputable intolerance of the state. Mr. Dreze is a voice of India’s weakest, and the police stopped him from campaigning on the right to food in a place where three out of 100 children die before their first birthday. Since September 2017, activists have catalogued 18 deaths linked to the collapse of social security schemes in the BJP-ruled State. The missile test and the arrest are linked; in the drumbeats of hyper-nationalism, the whimpers of the weak are a dissonant note.

Timid or not?

One school of strategists has always lamented that India is a ‘soft state’ reluctant to use power to achieve its goals. Hindutva strategists have linked this alleged softness of the Indian state to the ‘timidity’ of Hindus, as well as ‘appeasement’ of Muslims and Christians by the Congress. Over the last five years under Mr. Modi, India has ostensibly shed its timidity. Union Minister Arun Jaitley said after India’s airstrikes in Pakistan: “I remember when the U.S. Navy SEAL had taken Osama bin Laden from Abbottabad... Today it is possible [for India] also to conduct such operations.” In a recent speech, Mr. Modi said about terrorists, “We will enter their homes and eliminate them.” In his first campaign speech, on March 28, Mr. Modi said “terrorists and their supporters across the border” wanted him to lose. BJP president



“The search for greatness could numb our soul.” Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public meeting in Balangir, Odisha. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

Amit Shah said on the same day: “Only two countries in the world avenged their soldiers’ deaths earlier: the U.S. and Israel. Now, India is the third.” India, which is synonymous with Mr. Modi in the narrative, is decisive, capable and willing not merely to achieve its domestic goals, but also to coerce other countries to fall in line.

Hindutva’s geographical core is in north, central and western India, and its social core consists of upper caste Hindus and the emergent middle class. Hindutva tried to reach out to the periphery by entering into alliances under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who became its first Prime Minister. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) during the Vajpayee years roped in ethnic parties in the south and lower caste parties in the north by suspending its three most controversial objectives: abrogation of Article 370 that grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir, the uniform civil code, and construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya at the spot where a Hindutva mob demolished the Babri Masjid in 1992. With its support in the core consolidated and expanding, Hindutva 2.0 under Mr. Modi went for the jugular in the periphery.

This approach has been demonstrated the starkest in Jammu and Kashmir. In 2014, as Prime Minister, Mr. Modi campaigned relentlessly against the two regional parties in the State, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the National Conference. After the elections, the BJP

and the PDP formed a coalition government, but far from brightening the prospects of a political solution in the State, it has been downhill since then. The Modi government reversed all the gains made in the State towards normalcy. The BJP-PDP partnership did not temper the hyper-nationalism of the former as many hoped; it delegitimised the PDP before its supporters, weakening New Delhi’s link with the Valley further. The BJP is part of the government in seven of the eight north-eastern States now, by forming social coalitions of its own, such as in Tripura, or by forming alliances with regional parties, such as in Manipur. The BJP is soft-peddalling its cow protection agenda in the Northeast, but its goal of full cultural integration of the region with the mainland, or with the Hindi-Hindu nationalism of the Sangh Parivar, is never hidden.

Trimming society

Hindutva has a grand vision for India, and even the entire world, if one were to go by Mr. Modi’s speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2018. Mr. Modi’s pursuit of that grand narrative of ‘India as a leading power’ is happening even as the perils of several grand strategies that came before are playing out. The U.S. and Israel, the models that Hindutva proponents want to emulate, continue to pay a heavy price. The U.S.’s project to remake the rest of the world as its clones has come a cropper, but not before huge costs were

paid in terms of lives and resources. Beijing is pursuing its own grand vision of reshaping the world.

For all such pursuits of grand ambitions, which appeal to the core of any society, aggregation and diversion of national resources from the weakest in the periphery are essential. Trying to trim any society to fit into a straitjacket, unidimensional notion of greatness generates agony and hardship as it requires massive use of force. Authoritarian societies achieve it easier, as in China. When a democracy does this, it drifts away from its ethos and turns authoritarian, as has happened in the U.S. and Israel. “How can we talk about being free in this country when we have to leave each day in fear of gun violence in schools... and even from law enforcement?” African-American Senator Cory Booker, who is running for the Democratic presidential nomination, said on the same day that India declared parity with the U.S. in anti-satellite warfare. He will surely be accused of talking the language of America’s enemies by the hyper-nationalists in the country.

Subordination of particular aspirations, and even human rights, to a nationalist grand narrative was not impossible before Mr. Modi. Testing ASAT was also not impossible. The Indian state is not designed to be, and has not behaved, soft by any standards, as Gyan Prakash depicts in his recent book, *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy’s Turning Point*. India’s dealings with insurgencies of various kinds have been brutal, and the elimination of Sikh separatism during Congress rule is a case in point. At the same time, the Congress system had a mechanism to deal with the aspirations of the social and geographical peripheries of the nation. There were restraints to global adventurism and peace was sought with insurgents, sometimes successfully.

In Hindutva 2.0’s grand vision, the periphery is only a theatre to demonstrate strength before the core. The weakest amongst us will pay for this – as slain soldiers, petty criminals shot dead by the police, starvation victims and hapless undertrials. Their voices will be muffled. The search for greatness could numb our soul.

varghese.g@thehindu.co.in

FROM THE READERS’ EDITOR

What is missing in the 2019 election coverage

The media’s coverage of the Election Commission is too gentle



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

When the Election Commission (EC) announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s address to the nation on Mission Shakti did not violate the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), it raised questions. The EC was forced to examine the issue following a formal complaint from the CPI(M) regarding the address. The EC arrived at the decision on the basis of a report submitted by a committee of officers. The committee found that the address was not live, and stated that Doordarshan’s source for the telecast was Asian News International. What the EC failed to explain is how this detail meant that the address did not violate the MCC.

Autonomy of EC under a cloud

When T.N. Seshan was the Chief Election Commissioner, the EC exercised its powers freely. Rules were not only implemented but were widely seen as being implemented. However, in the campaign to the 2019 general election, the autonomy of the constitutional body seems to be under a cloud. When the BJP displayed hoardings with Indian Air Force Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman’s photograph on them, the EC merely asked political parties to “desist from displaying photographs of defence personnel”. People do not expect the EC to behave weakly.

The idea of having a strong leader and weak institutions is not endorsed by many in India. The India Digital News Report, published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, revealed the many elements that are impacting journalism and the way people access news. Two findings stood out.

The first is that fear lurks among Internet users in India, and there is trust in institutions to fix this system in which misinformation thrives. The survey covered English-speaking Indians. Nearly 55% of the respondents said that speaking their mind could get them into trouble with the authorities. Fifty per cent said they tend to “think carefully while expressing [their] political views openly on the Internet because this could make

work colleagues or other acquaintances think differently” about them.

The study says the levels of concern in India are comparable to those found in Brazil and Turkey. It pointed out that these high levels of concern could be based in part on recent events in India. Since 2012, at least 17 people have been arrested for posting material that was considered offensive or threatening to a politician. People who spoke out against Prime Minister Modi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were arrested. In December 2018, a journalist was jailed under the National Security Act for criticising the BJP and the Manipur Chief Minister. The second crucial finding is that 64% of the respondents, compared to just 41% in the U.S., felt that the government has a role in acting against disinformation.

To better understand disinformation problems in India, the study asked its English-language Internet users about their exposure to, and concern over, different types of potentially problematic content that previous research for the Reuters Institute identified as examples of what the public associates with fake news and disinformation. The study revealed that people do not conflate issues and find “poor journalism” to be hurting as much as disinformation. The categories include false news narrowly defined (stories that are completely made up for political or commercial reasons), and also hyperpartisan political content, whether from politicians, pundits, or publishers (stories in which facts are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda), poor journalism (stories that respondents consider marred by factual mistakes, inaccuracies, etc.), and more.

Failure of the media
A closer reading of both the Reuters study of the digital news space and Indian newspapers shows an obvious failure in Indian journalism. It has not examined the slow transformation of the EC from the T.N. Seshan model to the pre-1990s system. From issues relating to the allocation of symbols to smaller parties to the conduct of by-elections in a State like Tamil Nadu where nearly 10% of the Legislative Assembly is unrepresented, the media’s coverage of the election body is too gentle.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

Taking a chance with Imran

Imran Khan is India’s best bet in years to ensure a durable peace with Pakistan, including on the Kashmir issue

UDAY BALAKRISHNAN



In the recent firefight between India and Pakistan following the Pulwama attack, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan showed a maturity rarely displayed by any of his predecessors. However much we’d like to believe that Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman was repatriated because

of international pressure, it is entirely possible that Mr. Khan, overruling his army, ordered his release to establish himself as a voice of reason.

India lost the chance to gracefully accept its downed pilot’s release by Pakistan and loosen just a bit of the grip of Pakistan’s generals over Mr. Khan. Instead of viewing Mr. Khan as a stooge of the Pakistan army, India must start working with him to achieve a durable peace by notching up a series of small successes that could lead to bigger ones. Each of these, like the steps taken to open the Kartarpur corridor, will likely build up Mr. Khan’s capacity to be his own man and stand up to an army that in the past has always scuttled any peace move with India.

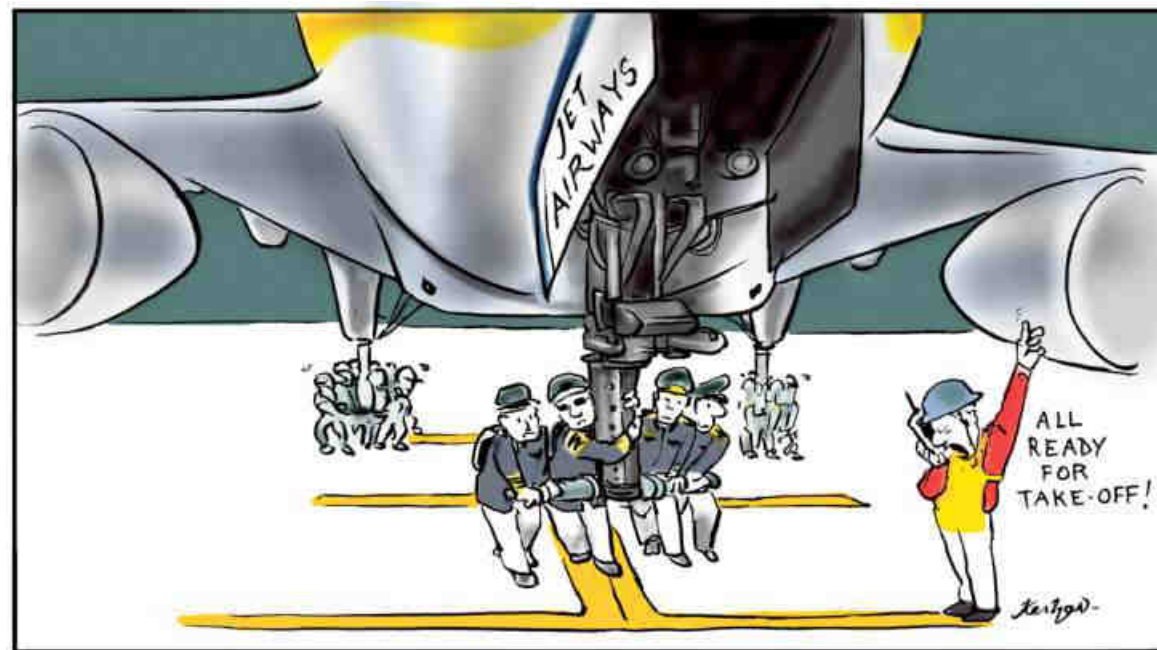
Indeed, Mr. Khan might be different from his predecessors, having been a much-loved national hero long before he became Prime Minister. He continues to be popular and admired by Pakistan’s youth who make up much of that country’s population. As Madiha Afzal states in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, Mr. Khan is no pushover for the army.

Mr. Khan is widely perceived to be honest, unlike his immediate civilian predecessors, and might well have a genuine desire to better the lot of his people. Mr. Khan also realises Pakistan’s terrible predicament – broke and caught in a Chinese debt trap it cannot talk about, besieged by militants within, and facing an India with a new-found determination to hit back when hurt.

For 71 years Indians have made Pakistan central to their lives. India’s greatest joy is when it beats Pakistan on the battlefield or the cricket pitch or corners it in the United Nations. Indians have built up Pakistan as a formidable adversary, which it is not.

Just one State in India, Uttar Pradesh, has a population than is larger than Pakistan’s. India is about four times bigger than Pakistan area-wise. And its GDP, in PPP terms, is about 10 times greater. To Pakistan it is India that is a formidable enemy, one at whose hands it has suffered violent vivisection and a monumental military defeat. It is no wonder then that Pakistan is paranoid about India and has always leveraged its only strength, a much more strategic location, to corner it. In Mr. Khan India now has a popular Pakistani leader it should engage with. He is India’s best bet in years to ensure a durable peace with Pakistan, including on the Kashmir issue. It is in India’s interest to reach out to Mr. Khan boldly and with hope.

The writer taught public policy and contemporary history at IISc, Bengaluru



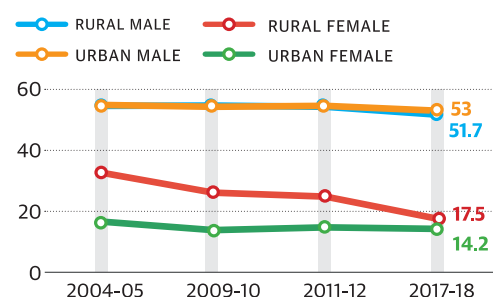
DATA POINT

Rural job crunch

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data have revealed a drastic increase in the number of unemployed in India. A comparison of the employment-to-population ratio (EPR) in rural versus urban areas shows significant variations. Rural EPR came down relatively more in 2017-18 compared to urban EPR, according to the PLFS data accessed by *The Hindu*

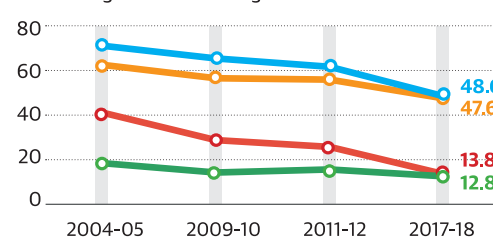
Rural women hit the most

Among all the cohorts, the EPR of rural women registered the sharpest decrease in 2017-18. It reduced by 7.3 percentage points from 2011-12, while the corresponding figure for rural men was 2.6 percentage points. The graph shows the EPR among usual workers (workers who worked regularly in the past year)



Rural youth affected

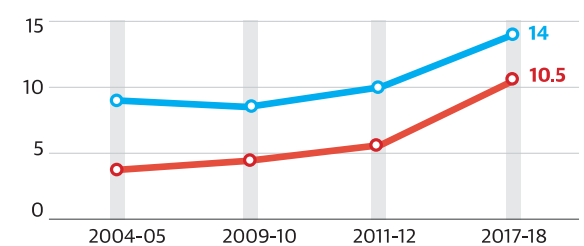
Among those aged 15 to 29, the decrease in the EPR of rural men and women was higher than that of their urban counterparts in 2017-18. The graph shows the EPR among usual workers aged 15 to 29



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey

Share of rural salaried employees goes up

In 2017-18, the share of regular wage/salaried employees went up significantly among rural men and women workers while that of casual labourers went down. The graph shows the share of regular wage/salaried workers among all those employed in rural areas



Lower quality of jobs

Though the share of salaried workers has gone up, the quality of jobs has come down among rural men. The table on the right shows the % of regular wage/salaried rural workers without written job contracts

Period	% of regular rural workers not eligible for paid leave		% of regular rural workers not eligible for social benefits	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2004-05	47.3	48.7	55.5	60.8
2009-10	50.2	47.6	55.8	61.5
2011-12	51.7	48.1	56.8	63.4
2017-18	58.1	47.9	51.9	55.1

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 1, 1969

Yahya Khan installs himself as Pak. President

General Yahya Khan assumed the office of President of Pakistan to-day [March 31], six days after taking over powers from Field Marshal Ayub Khan, it was officially announced in Rawalpindi. The Pakistan Government issued a statement saying that Gen. Yahya Khan was assuming the Presidency until a new Constitution was framed in Pakistan, which has been under martial law since Mr. Ayub Khan stepped down as President. The 52-year-old Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army who became the Chief Martial Law Administrator last Tuesday [March 25], as violence mounted in Pakistan, becomes the third President of the county. A tough veteran infantry officer of World War II, Gen. Yahya Khan succeeded President Ayub who himself took over from President Mirza in a bloodless coup in 1956.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 1, 1919.

Two Disallowed Resolutions.

H.E. Lord Pentland has disallowed two more resolutions of the Hon’ble Mr. B.V. Narasimha Iyer before his departure from these shores. The resolution which had been admitted and included in the preliminary agenda already published recommending the appointment of a committee to inquire and report upon the conditions of Indian Labour recruited and transported from the Madras Presidency to the Malay States, etc., has been on reconsideration disallowed by H.E. under rule 3 (c) which states that no discussion shall be permitted except with the Governor’s sanction [on] any matter which is the subject of discussion between the Governor General in Council or Secretary of State and the Local Government. One wonders whether H.E.’s sanction given at the preliminary agenda can be withdrawn now, or whether the existence of a correspondence has suddenly been discovered.

POLL CALL

Election manifesto

An election manifesto refers to a statement issued by a political party fighting an election that informs people about the party’s programmes and policies on a wide range of issues. The manifesto cannot contain anything that is repugnant to the ideals and principles enshrined in the Constitution and must be consistent with the letter and spirit of the Model Code of Conduct. While political parties can promise welfare schemes in their manifestos, they cannot make promises “which are likely to vitiate the purity of the election process or exert undue influence on the voters in exercising their franchise”. The manifesto should reflect the rationale for the promises made and the ways in which such promises can be met financially.

MORE ON THE WEB

Making the most of Mueller | Thoughtcast

<http://bit.ly/MuellerThoughtcast>