



“WE ARE JUST AN ADVANCED BREED OF MONKEYS ON A MINOR PLANET OF A VERY AVERAGE STAR.”
—STEPHEN HAWKING

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

An elusive peace

Eighteen years on, 9/11 marks the lack of closure to the war in Afghanistan



C UDAY BHASKAR

DEATH OF A DEAL

By calling off talks with Taliban, President Trump gives all sides opportunity to see what was wrong, reconsider their positions

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP has finally arrived at the conclusion that most Afghans had come to many months ago, when his special representative, Zalmay Khalilzad, began talks with the Taliban. “If they cannot agree to a ceasefire during these very important peace talks, and would even kill 12 innocent people, then they probably don’t have the power to negotiate a meaningful agreement anyway,” he tweeted late on September 7. His discovery of this foundational problem came when Khalilzad and the Taliban had all but stitched up an agreement to facilitate fulfilment of Trump’s election promise — withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Trump said he was cancelling a “secret” meeting at Camp David between him and the Taliban leaders, and a separate one with Afghan president Ashraf Ghani. But his reason for doing so, an attack in Kabul on September 5, claimed by the Taliban, in which an American soldier was killed, was bewildering — the Taliban has carried out equally or more fierce attacks through the talks. The real explanation may lie elsewhere. Perhaps it was because the US President balked at the optics of having the Taliban over on the 9/11 anniversary, or had second thoughts about giving the go-ahead to an agreement which his Secretary of State had reportedly refused to put his signature on.

Most Afghans dreaded the “deal” between the US and the Taliban. It was no peace agreement. That, Khalilzad had said, was for the Afghans to work out with the Taliban. What he and the Taliban had worked out was only a calendar for the US drawdown of its soldiers, in return for a promise — without a guarantee — that the Taliban would not allow Al Qaeda and ISIS any room. The Afghan government had been excluded in the talks and Khalilzad showed President Ghani the draft agreement only when it had been finalised. Will Trump withdraw troops without an agreement of any kind? Or is there a plan to resume talks with the Taliban later? The only certainty is that the violence in Afghanistan, which has not stopped for a day, will continue.

In their response to Trump, the Taliban claimed they were ready to begin the “intra-Afghan talks” on September 23, and warned that his announcement of “an end to negotiations... will harm America more than anyone else...” With the exception, arguably, of Pakistan, whose proxy the Taliban are, however, the world sees the Taliban in the same light — as not committed to peace unless it was granted the upper hand in Afghanistan, not trustworthy in its politics. If the world, including India, still supported the process of talks between the US and the Taliban, it was because it seemed different than the status quo. Perhaps the break that Trump has caused will give all sides an opportunity to see what was wrong, reconsider their positions and begin a more inclusive “peace process”, rather than a deal that was windowdressing an US surrender to the Taliban.

THE 18TH ANNIVERSARY of the tragedy of 9/11 was envisioned as heralding a triumphant closure to a long drawn out war under the leadership of US President Donald Trump. The war that began in October 2001 has been bloody and has led to more than 2,400 American service personnel and about 900 NATO nations’ soldiers losing their lives, along with thousands of hapless Afghan citizens. The number of local Afghans killed is imprecise but is estimated to be closer to 1,00,000.

Few US officials knew the details of the final “deal” between the White House and the Taliban but it was to be capped by a secret meeting between President Trump and the Taliban leaders on Sunday (September 8) in Camp David. It may be recalled that this venue outside the US capital hosted the historic 1978 secret peace accord between Egypt and Israel.

However, the triumphant closure to the war in Afghanistan was aborted through a series of tweets by President Trump on Saturday (September 7), who cited the killing of a US soldier by the Taliban in Kabul on Thursday (September 5), as the trigger for his abrupt change of policy.

A degree of policy fecklessness and political inconsistency characterises the last 18 years of the US-led global war on terror (GWOT), though the acronym is no longer in vogue. The enormity of 9/11 in September 2001 and the symbolism of the Twin Towers in New York collapsing had elicited near universal support and sympathy for the US at that time and it was expected that this level of global resolve would swiftly quarantine Al Qaeda and its Taliban support base in Afghanistan.

However, in a very imprudent change of objective and target by the White House, the first of many feckless policy lurches was effected when the US shifted its focus from

Afghanistan to Iraq in early 2003. Very soon, precious human lives and considerable wealth were expended with little accountability or reasonably well-defined politico-military objectives. The US soldier paid with life and limb and the US citizen through tax dollars to support a war in distant lands that seemed to have no purpose or closure.

While there is palpable relief globally (barring in Pakistan) at the US-Taliban deal being aborted at the last minute, the ostensible reason for this decision — the death of one US soldier — is unconvincing when thousands have already died in this war. US special representative Zalmay Khalilzad had spent months in shuttle diplomacy to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table and Trump’s determination to arrive at a “deal” was also linked to the US president’s re-election campaign strategy for 2020. The fact that Washington was willing to accept the exclusion of the elected Ghani government in Kabul in the preparatory negotiations was seen as an indicator of the Trump team’s resolve to seal the deal.

Why, then, was this deal with the Taliban called off at the last minute? Many reasons are being advanced, including sharp differences between the US National Security Adviser John Bolton and the State Department and those perceived to have Trump’s ear. The considered opposition to a dubious and hasty deal was also evidenced in the manner that former US diplomats, who had served in Kabul, released a joint statement (September 3) titled: “US-Taliban Negotiations: How to Avoid Rushing to Failure”.

The nine signatories (James Dobbins, Robert P Finn, Ronald E Neumann, William Wood, John Negroponte, Earl Anthony Wayne, Ryan Crocker, James Cunningham, and Hugo Llorens) make a persuasive case for US policy to be pursued with caution and conclude: “It is critical that the United States

make clear that full withdrawal will not occur on fixed dates but will, on the contrary, require conclusion of a real and clearly defined peace.”

An abiding and sustainable peace agreement has remained elusive in Afghanistan and this is a reflection of the deep fault-lines in a predominantly tribal society that has been ravaged by great power rivalry, regional perfidy and internal ethno-linguistic fissures. The 1979 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the Cold War and the cynical stoking of religious fervour by the US-Pakistan nexus enabled the rise of the Afghan mujahideen — evocatively captured in the image of an Osama bin Laden-like figure holding aloft a Kalashnikov rifle in one hand and the Koran in the other.

This marked the beginning of the political endorsement of jihadi violence that later morphed into terrorism. It was visible in the pattern of attacks on US assets in the early 1990s that provoked then US President Bill Clinton to use Tomahawk cruise missiles against terror camps in Afghanistan — but to little avail.

It merits recall that the radical ideology which triggered 9/11 and associated with Al Qaeda preceded September 2001 and India was also scarred by this Islamic terror virus in the early 1990s. The ignominy of India having to release terror suspect Masood Azhar in December 1999, who found shelter in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, is a stark reminder of the security challenge that later transmuted into the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001.

The return of the Taliban may have been averted for now but the road ahead for the hapless yet stoic Afghan citizen remains dark and dangerous. Will US policy be unveiled in the next Trump tweet?

Bhaskar is director, Society for Policy Studies

SHADES OF GREEN

Scaling up of ambition on restoring degraded land needs to be accompanied by robust methods to measure green areas

ON MONDAY, PRIME Minister Narendra Modi announced that India will scale up its ambition to restore degraded land. PM Modi’s announcement, at the ongoing 14th Conference of Parties (CoP) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Greater Noida, is significant from the standpoint of the country’s global environmental commitments. The country will now restore 26 million hectares by 2030, five million hectares more than what it had pledged at the Paris Climate Change Meet in 2015. Monday’s announcement is also salutary given the growing crisis of desertification. According to ISRO’s *Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas*, nearly 30 per cent of land in the country is degraded. This, PM Modi said, “would be reversed by adopting a landscape-restoration approach”. It will require the environment ministry to shift focus from its plantation-oriented afforestation schemes and recognise the importance of ecosystem services of land and forests such as watershed management, biodiversity conservation and improving soil health.

PM Modi also spoke of the increase in the country’s green cover in the past year. In fact, over the past two decades, the Dehradun-based Forest Survey of India (FSI) has reported a consistent increase in the country’s forested area. But the agency hasn’t convincingly answered a question: How is it that India’s forests have not been impacted by the relentless pressure on land? This paradox can be ascribed to a methodological problem with the FSI’s audits. The agency uses satellite images to identify green cover as forest, and does not discriminate between natural forests and plantations. Addressing the asymmetry between India’s green cover and land degradation data is, however, not just an academic matter. Several studies have shown the limitations of monoculture plantations in sequestering GHG emissions. A study published in the journal *Science* in 2016 found that the capacity of the green areas in Europe to absorb carbon dioxide has come down significantly despite recording an increase in such areas over the past 250 years.

Last month, a report of the IPCC elucidated the links between global warming and land degradation. Climate change “not only exacerbates many of the well-acknowledged land degradation processes”, but it “becomes a dominant pressure that introduces novel degradation pathways in... ecosystems,” it said. PM Modi’s announcement at the UNCCD meet signals the country’s intent to meet this challenge. India’s environment establishment now needs to re-evaluate the methods to measure the country’s green cover.

VOLATILE TWEETER

It’s official: No one talks the markets up, down and sideways like the electronically garrulous Donald

AFTER APPLYING MACHINE learning and deep thought to the teeming Twitter feed of POTUS, the analysts at JP Morgan have arrived at the conclusion that Trump is fiddling with financial markets, 280 characters at a time. Not only are his tweets interfering with stock value, Citigroup has discovered, but currency markets are also fretful for about 60 minutes whenever he tweets about trade or monetary policy. He does that quite a lot these days.

In response, JP Morgan has assembled a Volfefe index correlating presidential tweets with market volatility. It is named in homage to that midnight moment in Washington in 2017 when Trump told the Twittiverse, en passant: “Despite the negative press covfefe.” Someone immediately booked covfefe.com, and politicians, journalists, comedians, fact-checkers, dictionary-keepers, conspiracy theorists and internet kibitzers spent weeks investigating the true, hidden meaning of “covfefe”.

Markets are only human, and they are seeking financial meaning in Trump’s tweets. Historically, markets have enjoyed being irrational. There are contemporary punters who regard the Dow Jones Industrial Average as a joke index. In the 17th century, many strongly believed that everyone on earth would be desperate to own a tulip bulb. In the next century, they invested wildly in the South Sea Company. But the Volfefe index means business. It analyses Trump’s speech patterns and has real statistical value. In our epistemologically bamboozled era, it is something to hold on to. We look forward to more indices linked to major world leaders, none of whom make any sense. It wouldn’t improve politics, but markets worldwide would get an accurate weather report.



AJEY LELE

MORE THAN 48 hours have passed by now and news about the health of the Indian Space Research Organisation’s (ISRO) Vikram lander is not very good. The lander appears to have made a hard-landing because of which, possibly, ISRO is not able to establish any contact. Still, ISRO has not given up and they propose to keep on trying for 11 to 12 days — when sunlight would be available on the Moon’s surface, providing energy for the lander.

There have been occasions in the past when declared “dead” satellites/space probes have suddenly come alive. One recent case is that of NASA’s IMAGE satellite (Imager for Magnetopause-to-Aurora Global Exploration), launched in early 2000. The spacecraft stopped transmitting in late 2005, and NASA declared the satellite dead. But an amateur astronomer stumbled upon a signal from this satellite after many years and NASA declared this satellite alive again, on January 20, 2018, when it successfully collected telemetry data from the satellite.

As per NASA, the apparent “zombie” satellite was one of a series of nine satellites — LES1 to LES9 — launched on February 11, 1965. Actually, it never reached the correct orbit. In 2013, an amateur radio astronomer from the UK picked up a signal that was later determined as coming from LES1. However, these activities have happened in the Earth orbit. We have no such experiences from the Moon orbit.

Obviously, “hope against hope” is going to be ISRO’s policy for at least the next one lunar day (12 Earth days). Today, and rightfully so, the entire country stands with ISRO. The average citizen understands that ISRO has been sincere in its approach. For all these

BRIGHT SIDE OF THE MOON

ISRO’s Moon mission presents the country a chance to reassess its space priorities

years, with various successes in the domain of space, ISRO has raised the stature of the country internationally. Naturally, in this difficult period it is the responsibility of every Indian to keep ISRO’s motivation levels high. At the same time, it is also important to do some critical assessment of where India stands in the domain of space. For this, it is important to make an assessment of the technical resources and expertise available with ISRO in order to carry forward a major space programme, and of the nature of likely governmental funding available for these purposes. It is also important to factor in the nature of the private space industry which can support a space programme of this size. In addition to all this, international collaborations have become an important element in the present times. The government needs to carry out a detailed assessment of all these aspects.

More importantly, there should be clarity about why India should invest in space. Actually, our forefathers had thought about it very wisely: India’s investments in space should be made bearing socio-economic development in mind — that was the mantra then, and that stands true even today. At present, space technology has become so important that the daily lives of human beings get affected and are, consequently, governed by it.

Nationalist ideology may continue to shape global politics even today. However, India should avoid getting into this trap, particularly with programmes related to science and technology. Space science is important for multiple reasons, including the quest for minerals and energy security (Helium 3).

Nationalist ideology may continue to shape global politics even today. However, India should avoid getting into this trap, particularly with programmes related to science and technology. Space is too important a science for human growth. It is not a domain for any flaunting. Going to the Moon and Mars is important for multiple reasons, including the quest for minerals and energy security (Helium 3).

quest for minerals and energy security (Helium 3). India should, thus, avoid getting swayed by rhetoric such as the “Space Race”.

Space should emerge as an important constituent of foreign policy. Missions like those to the Moon and Mars offer India prime opportunities for bilateral or multilateral collaboration. There are indications, in fact, that Chandrayaan 3 could be a joint mission with Japan, and this is an idea that needs to be welcomed. Such collaborations could allow technology sharing and they could also prove to be more cost-effective and time-saving.

India needs to make more investments in its strategic programme: Efforts made to conduct an ASAT (anti-satellite test) should not remain one-off attempts, and should be capitalised upon. Today, the armed forces require many more satellites for various purposes and ISRO just cannot be overloaded with this task. There is a need to evolve a separate agency for this purpose.

The problem with Chandrayaan 2 has presented an opportunity to have a relook at the priorities for India’s space agenda. A fresh audit could be done of ISRO’s various future programmes. In fact, in the future, money and manpower are going to emerge as major issues and, hence, this is the time to undertake exercises of prioritisation. And, to reiterate, investments in this domain should be done only for social reasons, for science and for security. If India has to emerge as a space power, then it should be via a combination of soft and hard power. Missions like the ones to the Moon offer such opportunities.

The writer is a senior fellow at IDSA, New Delhi



SEPTEMBER 11, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

CLAMPING DOWN PRESS MRS INDIRA GANDHI said she could not give any guarantee that censorship on the press would not be imposed again. Participating in a meet-the-press programme of the Bombay Union of Journalists, Mrs Gandhi said that all countries had some kind of censorship or the other. “How can I give a guarantee?” she said replying to a question. She admitted that some journalists were “punished unjustly” during Emergency, but added that during the last two-and-a-half years, “Former Information Minister, Advani, has put RSS men in most newspapers, All India Radio and Television”.

SINO-BHUTAN TIES RECENT INTRUSIONS BY Tibetan graziers deep into Bhutanese territory have underlined the need for direct talks between Thimpu and Beijing. This was revealed by King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan, in Bombay. He said he learnt from Indian officials in Havana that some armed Chinese were also seen alongwith the graziers. But that he could only confirm this fact after making inquiries in Thimpu. In a rare interview with two Indian journalists, the king discussed a host of issues, and dismissed as “utter nonsense” the suggestions that Bhutan was aspiring to have close relations with China at the expense of its ties with India.

SUGAR PRICE CONTROL THE GOVERNMENT HAS clamped statutory price control on sugar. Under the new dispensation to the sugar industry, the ex-factory prices will be so fixed that the retail price will range between Rs 290 and Rs 300 per quintal. The decision to impose statutory price control on sugar was taken at an hour-long meeting of the Union Cabinet in New Delhi. The meeting reviewed the state of the economy and took decisions to check the prices of essential commodities. The meeting was primarily convened to discuss the price situation and almost all the ministers felt that the measures taken so far by the government had not produced satisfactory results.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

The Valley without 370

Centre's goal is to engage with Kashmiris tired of violence, provide safe spaces to express their desire for peace



ABHINAV KUMAR

AUGUST IN THE Kashmir Valley is more like spring in the rest of north India. The temperatures are mild, flowers are in full bloom, and the fruit and dry fruit that the Valley is famous for, apples, plums, walnuts and almonds, are ready for harvest. After the lull of the monsoon, tourists begin to return in increasing numbers. Usually, it would be a busy and bustling time across the Valley. However, after the decision of the Government of India with regard to the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A and the bifurcation of the state into two Union Territories, there's an uneasy calm.

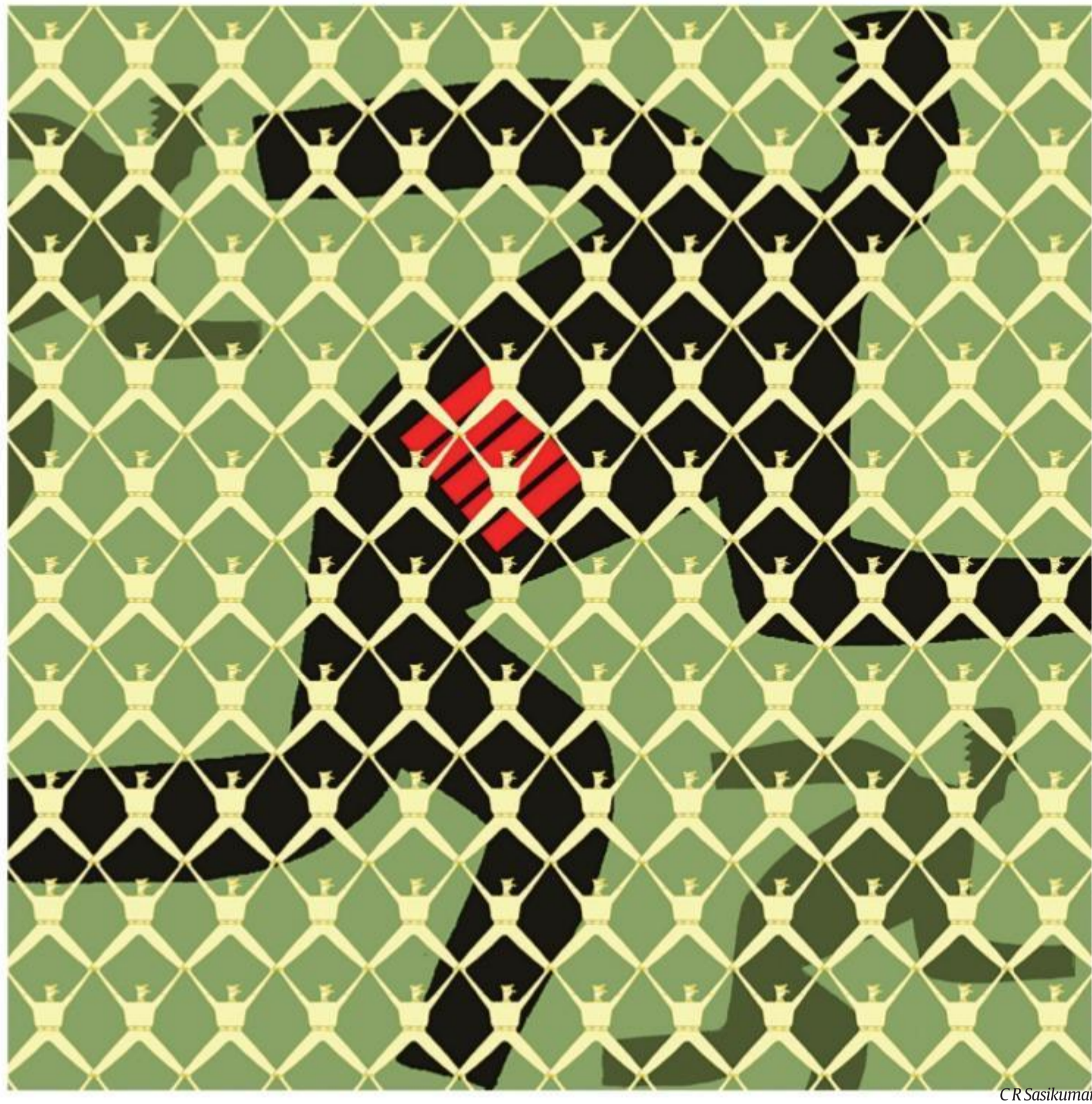
For all the uniformed forces tasked with keeping the peace in the Valley, the last five weeks have been a great test of their commitment and capability. The Jammu and Kashmir Police, the Indian Army, the CRPF, the BSF, the ITBP and the SSB are all deployed in significant numbers across towns and villages in the Kashmir Valley to ensure that the mistakes we may have made while handling the agitations of 2008, 2010 and 2016 are not repeated.

Colleagues in the civil administration have also responded admirably to many of the administrative challenges created by this lockdown. Our immediate goal was to ensure that large-scale mob violence, civilian casualties and terror strikes are averted. After five weeks of painstaking efforts, personally supervised by the NSA, we can express some satisfaction at what has been achieved thus far. For comparison's sake, in the first five weeks after the death of Burhan Wani in July 2016, there were over 40 civilian casualties in firing by the security forces.

So far, we have successfully managed to prevent large-scale mobs from forming to indulge in violence. The preventive arrests have had a positive impact. We have kept civilian casualties to a bare minimum. There may be some dispute about the exact number, but it is definitely in single digits. And thus far, we have not allowed jihadi groups to execute a major terror attack. It is a sign of their desperation that they have resorted to attacking fruit traders and shopkeepers. Landlines have been restored even though mobile and internet connectivity remains blocked. The authorities are keen that schools and shops resume their normal functioning at the earliest, but right now they are being prevented from doing so by jihadi separatists.

However, there is no room for complacency. Our challenges have been met so far but the road ahead is long and difficult. Anyone who thinks that a society that has been shaped by the logic of azadi for 70 years and the logic of jihad for the last 30, will peacefully and happily accept these changes, is being unrealistic. While we are all prepared for the long haul, it is the narrative outside the Valley that is a cause for some concern.

Sections of the national and international media reporting about Kashmir have adopted a stance that has little to do with the ground realities. This view presents our uniformed forces as lawless psychopaths on the rampage, committing unspeakable atrocities on hapless Kashmiri citizens. Morphed as well as old images and videos, many created by the ISI and its proxies, are being circulated without verification to support this narrative. Wild allegations by aggrieved citizens are being accepted at face value and are being reported verbatim as facts without adhering to the basic principles of journalistic checks. One report talked of military camps filled with children bathed in blood. Another talked of mass sexual harassment during the cordon and search operations. Another tried to mischievously drive a wedge between the security forces by falsely claiming that all of Jammu and Kashmir police had been unarmed. It is almost as if the Kashmir that we



CR Sasikumar

are policing and the Kashmir that is being reported on inhabit two alternative realities.

One can understand the lack of objectivity of the Western media and of platforms like *Al Jazeera*. Since 1989, they have consistently ignored atrocities committed by militants in Kashmir and portrayed the situation primarily in terms of human rights violations by the Indian state. For this constituency, acts of terror are not a human rights violation. The attempts to impose Sharia by bombing bars and cinema halls were not human rights violations. The killing of elected representatives and the forced boycott of elections are not human rights violations. The use of children for stone pelting and fidayeen attacks are not human rights violations. And the ethnic cleansing of Pandits was definitely not a human rights violation. We are to believe that perhaps it was simply a voluntary migration that was encouraged for their safety.

There are deep historical and cultural reasons for this bias. The 9/11 attacks did make the West a bit more sympathetic to our concerns about Kashmir. But having exhausted their bloodlust in Afghanistan and Iraq, the West, especially the US and the UK, seem to be reverting to a more sophisticated version of the Great Game that is largely based on the geopolitics of Afghanistan and Central Asia. This neocolonial view accepts the logic of Partition, sees Pakistan as a crucial ally whose complicity in global networks of narco-terrorism is routinely brushed under the carpet, and India is a pretender with ambitions on the global stage that must be occasionally humoured, but never seriously accommodated.

Many of our influential intellectuals continue to parrot standard tropes based on the old binaries of the left and right and on articles of faith such as secular versus communal. Terms like genocide and concentration camp are being used fast and loose with little understanding of their historical meaning and applicability to the current situation in the Valley. For this group of self-styled de-

fenders of our constitutional democracy, Article 370 is the foundation stone of the Valley's relationship with India. Not several thousand years of shared history and culture. And, of course, it doesn't matter that there is a clear-cut democratic mandate for abrogating Article 370. It doesn't matter that after three decades of Pakistan-supported jihad, there was a need to change the rules of engagement. And it certainly doesn't matter that assimilating Kashmir is absolutely vital to the idea of India. The first partition of India was a grievous wound, but we survived. The second partition of India would surely be fatal.

There is much talk of the hurt Kashmiri sentiment and how it is simply waiting to erupt. There is no such talk of the Ladakhi sentiment or the Jammu sentiment. As and when restrictions are eased, there will surely be desperate attempts to orchestrate civil unrest and mob violence. If that happens, we will take whatever steps required to restore public order. Pakistan proxies across the LoC are planning their own strikes. We are prepared for them too.

While there may be many in the Valley who will not immediately accept the change in their constitutional status, we hope their number will be significantly exceeded by those who are sick of the violence and disruption that has defined their life for over three decades. Engaging with them and giving them a safe space to express their desire for peace and prosperity is our primary mission in the Valley now.

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The author is an IPS officer serving with the BSF in Kashmir. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Where dialogue makes things possible, walking away from negotiations achieves nothing. Calling off the talks will hardly lead to the change in the current situation that the Americans are hoping for." — DAWN

He held his own

Ram Jethmalani was not just a good lawyer but also an exceptional parliamentarian



SHANTI BHUSHAN

THERE HAVE BEEN two iconic Rams whom Indians all over the world have known well. One was the Ram of Ayodhya, the other, our Ram of the modern era. He had also attained an iconic status in his life. Ram was banished from Ayodhya due to the intrigues of a Kaikeyi and a Manthara. Our Ram was banished from a party that he had helped to found with others — the BJP. History is still to tell us who the Kaikeyi and Manthara were in his case.

Ram Jethmalani had a brilliant mind which enabled him to complete his law education at the unbelievably young age of 17. The Bombay High Court rules at that time did not permit the enrollment of a lawyer until he attained the age of 18 years. Ram fought against that rule and succeeded in the rule being relaxed for such a brilliant person. He started his practice in the province of Sind, now in Pakistan, in 1940. But when Partition forced him to migrate to Bombay in 1947, he had to start all over. He set up an office in a garage in Bombay and worked hard waiting for his break. This came in the shape of the now famous Nanavati case in which Nanavati, a well-known naval officer, was accused of shooting down Prem Ahuja, his wife's lover. Ram assisted the senior prosecutor on behalf of the Ahuja family and made his name. He never looked back since then and became the best-known criminal lawyer of the Bombay High Court.

It is, however, a myth that he was the most astute criminal lawyer. Having watched him for many decades, I can vouchsafe that he was an equally astute constitutional lawyer as well as a civil lawyer.

Perhaps, he would have only continued to remain known as the most successful criminal lawyer of the Bombay High Court, not at all known outside Bombay, but, according to his own statement, for something that I did in 1975, which changed the course of his life.

While speaking at the celebration of my 90th birthday in November 2015, he made this startling revelation. I first wondered as to what he meant by that, but he proceeded to explain that it was my winning the election case against Indira Gandhi in 1975 in the Allahabad High Court, which resulted in the proclamation of the Emergency, which had changed the course of his life. Ram severely criticised

this declaration of Emergency in a meeting of the Bombay High Court Bar Association, where I happened to be present. A warrant was issued for Ram's arrest and Bombay lawyers filed a habeas corpus petition in which they secured temporary relief against his arrest. How Ram managed to escape from India is a story which will be told for generations. He went to the US and taught law in prestigious law colleges. When the Emergency was over in 1977, he returned to India as a hero and there was a clamour in Bombay for his contesting the Lok Sabha elections against Mrs Gandhi's law minister, H R Gokhale. I campaigned for him in the lanes and bylanes of Bombay for three days and three nights. After getting elected, he had to migrate to Delhi as a Member of Parliament. This was how my actions of 1975 had changed the course of his life. It was in Delhi as an MP that he came to be known all over India and abroad. He remained in Parliament almost continuously till his death. Even when he died he was still an MP.

Ram experienced a number of tragedies in his life. One by one his two wives died. His daughter Rani, a lawyer, also died after a liver transplant. The biggest shock to him was when one of his sons died three years ago, which he was unable to cope with. A few months back I visited him at his home and was sad to discover that, though he looked healthy, he was suffering from dementia.

Apart from having a brilliant mind, Ram was a very hard-working professional. Very few lawyers make good parliamentarians, but Ram was an exception. His courage at the time of the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984 was truly remarkable. Many of us had gone to the riot-affected areas to rescue Sikhs trapped there and Ram was one of us. When the hostile crowd wanted to attack us he came out of the car, stood in the middle of the road and told the hostile crowd who he was and told them to go ahead if they still wanted to attack.

What kept him physically and mentally healthy for such a long time that he could practice for more than 75 years was his love for badminton. He was an enthusiastic badminton player and had a world-class badminton court built at his official residence at 2 Akbar Road at his own cost. He was a founder member of our Committee on Judicial Accountability and vigorously participated in all the campaigns against judicial corruption.

Ram had made a beautiful speech while releasing my memoirs, *Courting Destiny*, in November 2008. I wish some day some scholar would produce a biography of Ram that I believe could be titled, "Courting Controversies".

The writer is a former Union law minister

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

US AND THEM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Neighbour's court' (IE, September 10). The Indian government should be worried more about winning the trust of the people of J&K than dealing with Pakistan. Failing to do so puts a question mark on our credentials as the world's largest democracy. Why do we want to compare ourselves to a country, whose PMs have not been able to complete their term in the recent past? **Vinay Saroha, Delhi**

PM'S SHOW

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Regime reveals itself' (IE, September 10). After the BJP's massive win in 2019 general elections, the party and the NDA have become PM Narendra Modi's show in every conceivable manner. This political scenario does not augur well for the future of the world's biggest democracy. **Tarsem Bumra, Mahilpur**

THEY DESERVE PRAISE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Mission continues' (IE, September 9). Space research missions should not be seen as failures if one of their components do not function. Chandrayaan-2's orbiter will try to establish contact with the lander, Vikram, and send data on the unexplored South Pole, which is believed to have significant amounts of water in its ice craters. This was one of the important objectives of Chandrayaan-2. **Lal Singh, Amritsar**

JOIN WITH CAUTION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Seize the pact' (IE, September 10). Protectionist tendencies all over the world run counter to globalising tendencies. Regional pacts increase the chances of the country having a strong

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

say on the world podium with respect to several issues. Staying away from RCEP-FTA could reduce India's bargaining power at several fora. But joining it should not be at the cost of domestic industries. **Ajinkya Pawar, Delhi**

UNFAIR TO FARMERS

THIS REFERS TO the report "Government pushed for zero budget farming, top scientists question" (IE September 10). Agriculture contributes 17-18 per cent to country's GDP but more than one-third of the world's malnourished children live in India. Farming cannot be done on zero budget. There is burden on farmers to feed their cows and buy seeds to make their soil more fertile. Government should reconsider this policy. **Sugandha Jain, Jammu**



VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

UNDERSTANDING RSS

IN HIS ARTICLE in *Panchjanya*, "RSS ideology is all inclusive", Joint General Secretary Manmohan Vaidya talks about the intolerance shown by the "left liberals" against the Sangh and its ideology. Vaidya begins the article with a reference to the recent visit of German Ambassador to India, Walter Lindner, to the RSS headquarters in Nagpur. The visit was criticised by many on the social media. Vaidya writes that a group named left liberals has grown with the support and protection of the administration, especially under the Congress. He adds that he does not know who gave them such a "contradictory" title as the behaviour of this group is the "exact opposite" of the term (liberal) and they appear "illiberal". "In reality these people are illiberal and intolerant towards those who do not agree with their ideology," says Vaidya. He also says that these people have, using lies and unsubstantiated allegations, opposed the RSS.

Vaidya notes: "RSS is not a banned organisation. Even though the government has, without any legal basis, banned the Sangh and has later revoked the ban without any conditions. It is not even a secret organisation. Its activities are conducted in open fields and anyone can participate in them."

Apart from the German ambassador's visit, Vaidya mentions the invite to former President Pranab Mukherjee as an example of the organisation's inclusive nature, even though Mukherjee has been a Congressman all his life.

Vaidya says that in his four-decade association with the RSS, he has never heard any senior functionary of the RSS "glorify" either Hitler or Nazism. "The illiberal brigade present in the media and the intellectuals has always cited MS Golwalkar's book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, which was published for the first time in 1938, when Golwalkar did not hold any post in the RSS," Vaidya says. He stresses that "this book does not represent the views of the RSS". Vaidya concludes that the illiberal left in the media and among the intellectuals "never had any interest in meeting and understanding the volunteers of the Sangh".

PARTITION STORIES

PANCHJANYA HAS STARTED a series looking

into "stories related to the Partition". The inaugural story in the series is, "The League's scheme to make India devoid of Hinduism". The article states: "The Congress has been betraying the Hindus since before Independence. The question is, if it was not a Hindu organisation then how did it continue to make deals with the Muslim League? The partition of India was a result of the secularism of Congress."

It is often heard, the article claims, that it was the obstinate conduct of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League, which was responsible for the Partition. That it is only the "partial" truth and not the "entire truth". It adds that the foundation of Partition was laid down when Congress reached an agreement with the Muslim League in 1916. Slowly the voice of Jinnah had become the voice of the entire Muslim community. It adds: "Jinnah had decided to make the centuries-old dream of the Muslim community come true". The dream, the article says, was "to bring India under the Islamic flag".

DEFENDING NRC

THE EDITORIAL IN *Organiser* is on the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which it calls the "National Register for Citizenship". The editorial speaks about the recently published final draft of the NRC, which has left

out over 19 lakh people. It states that "some in media and political circles are happy to find loopholes in the NRC and projecting it as a Hindu-Muslim issue" and that the international media too is "playing with the fire and attacking the government for completing the process as per the schedule given by the Supreme Court". The editorial conceded that "corrective action" is required in "many aspects" which will need "political will to implement".

It explains that the entire process was "directed and monitored" by the Supreme Court of India and hence "should be seen from the national-legal point of view rather than a secular-communal prism". It says that "whatever may be the political positioning of the Congress", the commitment for NRC was made in the Assam Accord signed by Rajiv Gandhi, when he was the prime minister, to "provide certain safeguards for Assamese people to protect, preserve and promote their cultural and linguistic identity".

It is "vital" to secure the international borders "to avoid all kinds of illegal migration, and to implement development and connectivity related clauses of the Assam Accord". It adds that the "issue of illegal migration is not limited to Assam", but has security implications for East and Northeast region.

(Compiled by Krishn Kaushik)

How ISRO is trying to reconnect with Vikram, within a deadline

AMITABH SINHA
 PUNE, SEPTEMBER 10

IT'S OVER three days since the Vikram lander of Chandrayaan-2 mission lost its communication link with the ground station. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has said its efforts to restore the link have not been successful so far. In the meanwhile, Vikram has been located on the Moon's surface through the orbiter module, which has also taken a thermal image of the lander. The condition of Vikram — whether it has been destroyed, or is still intact — is not yet known.

Is there still hope to restore contact?
 In this case, the time elapsed since contact was lost has no bearing on the chances of re-establishing contact with the lander. The probability of establishing contact is not going down with time. But there is a dead-

line nonetheless. The ISRO has to succeed in the next two weeks (by September 21).

Why this deadline?

Because the Moon will enter into a lunar night after that. Remember, even the lander and rover were supposed to be functional only for 14 days from the day of their touchdown. Lunar days and nights are equivalent to 14 Earth days. The nights on the Moon can be very cold, especially in the south polar region where Vikram is lying. Temperatures could drop to as low as -200°C. The instruments aboard the lander are not designed to withstand that kind of temperature. The electronics would not work and would get permanently damaged. So, if no connection is established in the next two weeks, ISRO will have to all but give up hope after that.

How is ISRO trying to establish contact?
 Communication with remote objects is



At mission control for Chandrayaan-2 on Saturday morning. ISRO

possible through electromagnetic waves. For purposes of space communication, frequencies in the S-band (microwave) and L-band (radio waves) of the electromagnetic spectrum are usually used. As of now, it is not known why the communication link was lost. Since it happened when the lander was in flight, power failure in its communication unit can be a probable reason. But after that, the lander has hit the Moon's surface at a speed far greater than needed for a safe landing. It could have suffered partial or complete damage.

Communication with the instruments can be made only if those instruments are in working condition. Vikram was designed to communicate with both the ground station and with the orbiter. An attempt is being made from both to restore contact. Signals of specific frequencies, which the instruments on the lander are tuned to receive, are being sent in the hope that one instrument or the other would be able to receive them and respond.

What factors can help or hinder this?

A key issue is the position of the antenna on the lander. It was supposed to be erect and free of any obstructions, so that it could scan a wide area to receive signals. A torchlight, if held up for example, spreads in a conical fashion and after a certain distance, the cone would spread almost 180°. A vertical antenna can also scan for signals from a similarly vast conical area. However, if the antenna is buried, pointing towards the ground, or is otherwise obstructed, its ability to receive signals would be diminished considerably. The conical area in which it can scan would also be reduced.

The orbiter has the best chance to establish contact. Making many revolutions of the Moon every day, it will be trying to send signals to Vikram every time it crosses over it.

It is not rare to lose contact with a space object, and then re-establish connection. But it is far more easier if the space object is in orbit, or otherwise in good working condition.

SIMPLY PUT **QUESTION & ANSWER**

Afghan deal is off. Now what?

Trump has said he has 'called off peace negotiations' with Taliban. But a resumption of talks cannot be ruled out; nor can a full US withdrawal without a deal. And could India have unexpectedly got a foot in the door?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
 MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 10

ON SEPTEMBER 8, President Donald Trump posted on Twitter that (a) he had been scheduled to meet, within hours and on US soil, the leadership of the Afghan Taliban, and (b) he had "cancelled the meeting and called off peace negotiations" because the Taliban had, "in order to build false leverage", admitted to a terrorist attack in Kabul in the middle of the "very important peace talks".

What does this mean?

In effect, Trump upended a nine-month *pas de deux* in Doha between Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, and the Taliban to close a deal for US troops to leave Afghanistan, in return for a commitment that the Taliban would not allow terrorist activities. A draft agreement was ready by the end of August.

Khalilzad, who had flown to Kabul to brief President Ashraf Ghani — the Taliban had insisted that the Afghan government would not participate in the talks — on the details on August 31, said an agreement had been reached in principle, and Trump would have to greenlight the draft. He made it seem like this was a formality.

Why did Trump back out?

The immediate reason he gave was the September 5 suicide car bombing in central Kabul. The bombing, claimed by the Taliban, killed 12 people including a US serviceman and a Romanian soldier, and left 40 injured. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo offered the same justification.

But few are convinced that this was the real reason.

There had been a steady increase in the number of Taliban attacks from January, when the talks began. Indeed, on September 2, while Khalilzad was in Kabul, the Taliban set off a tractor bomb near a heavily guarded compound for foreigners, killing 16 people and injuring 119 others.

Time magazine said Pompeo, who was to be one of the two signatories on the deal — the other was the Taliban's chief negotiator, Mullah Baradar — had second thoughts about putting his name to a deal that contained no guarantees from the Taliban, including on a ceasefire, or an agreement to participate in the "intra-Afghan talks". Trump may have been looking for a way out, and the September 5 bombing may have given him an opening.



Taliban claimed responsibility for this car bomb blast in Kabul on September 5, one of the reasons Trump has cited in calling off the negotiations. Reuters

What would have happened at the Camp David meeting (that Trump cancelled)?

Trump's tweet disclosed for the first time that he had invited the Afghan President and the Taliban for separate talks at Camp David, the US President's retreat. *The New York Times* reported that Trump's plan was to bring them together in a "grand announcement". However, several US media outlets reported that this secret meeting, scheduled for September 9, had in fact been called off two days before the President posted his tweet.

It appears that the Taliban did not want to attend the meeting before the agreement had been signed. They feared being forced into talks with Ghani, and into accepting a ceasefire.

Ghani, for his part, was preparing to fly to Washington, and knew of the cancellation a day before the tweet. Trump went public with the secret meeting, appearing to cancel it on Twitter, apparently to take charge of the narrative.

The meeting, if it had actually happened, may not have gone down well with Trump's domestic constituencies.

His hosting the Taliban, who sheltered Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda, two days before the anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, would have been terrible optics. Camp David was also where the historic Egypt-Israel accord was reached, which brought for Anwar al-Sadat and Menachem Begin the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize.

So are the talks with the Taliban dead?

It is difficult to say this with certainty. Trump famously resumed his talks with North Korea's Kim Jong-un after cancelling them. The Khalilzad camp hopes there will be a resumption in a month or two. But if that happens, US negotiators would have to get more out of the Taliban than the draft agreement seems to contain. If the talks are finished, so is Khalilzad, who saw the Afghan deal as a stepping stone to a bigger profile in a possible Trump 2.0.

Pakistan, which played a proactive role to bring the Taliban to the table, and was praised by Trump for it, too has expressed hope for "optimised engagement following earliest resumption of talks".

But then again, it is also possible that Trump may decide to withdraw US troops without an agreement. *The Washington Post* reported this was the view that National Security Advisor John Bolton, who was opposed to a deal with the Taliban, held — however, in an iteration of the US President's remarkable unpredictability, Bolton himself was fired on Tuesday.

How have the Taliban reacted?

They issued an angry statement on the letterhead of the Islamic Emirate, simultaneously claiming a commitment to peace and warning of more violence. "...We had selected 23 September as the first day for the intra-Afghan talks after the agreement had been signed and announced... Now, the an-

ouncement by the President of the United States of an end to negotiations with the Islamic Emirate will harm America more than anyone else; it will harm its credibility, and further expose its anti-peace stance to the world; it would [result in] an increase in financial damage and casualties to its forces; it would demonstrate its political interactions as untrustworthy...". (Translated statement from the Afghan Analysts Network).

What has the Afghan government said?

It cannot be displeased. It was excluded from the entire process on the say-so of the Taliban, and feared the commitments that Khalilzad was making to the Taliban. Afghans who had invested in the building of a democratic country, feared that the US withdrawal would be followed by a repeat of 1996 when the Taliban simply outgunned others to return to power. They also feared this was Pakistan's plan to take control of Afghanistan through a proxy.

"...[T]he government considers the Taliban's obstinacy to increase violence against Afghans as the main obstacle to the ongoing peace negotiations. We have consistently stressed that genuine peace is possible when the Taliban stop the killing of Afghans, embrace an inclusive ceasefire, and enter into direct negotiations with the Afghan government. The government of Afghanistan reiterates its stance on holding the presidential elections on September 28..." the government said in a statement.

Before the deal fell through, Amrullah Saleh, who is a candidate for vice-president as a running mate of President Ghani, had been outspoken in his criticism of the deal. He had told *The Indian Express* in an interview: "[The Americans] are breaking norms by trying to sign a deal with a terrorist entity, a non-state malign actor and an insurgent group. We don't know how they will give it legal justification." (See *interview on www.indianexpress.com*)

India had no role in the Afghan talks. Has it now got a chance to get back in the Great Game?

India has not reacted yet to the failure of the Afghan talks. But it was unhappy at Pakistan's role in the process, and the possibility that the Taliban would return to power. India had no official contact with the Taliban. The break in the talks could be the opening that New Delhi was looking for to make contact with at least those sections of the Taliban that are not under the thumb of Pakistan.

TELLING NUMBERS

A suicide every 40 seconds: taking stock of global trends

A FACT sheet released by the World Health Organization last week shows that close to 8 lakh people die due to suicide every year. In other words, suicides account for one death every 40 seconds. Another important fact that often gets missed is that behind every successful suicide, there are more than 20 attempts at taking one's life.

Chart 1 provides the regional spread of suicide rates. Against a global average of 10.53 deaths due to suicide (per 100,000 population) Europe tends to register the maximum deaths due to suicide while Eastern Mediterranean reports the lowest average. However, even within each region, there are wide disparities. For instance, as *chart 2* shows, India and Pakistan report very different levels of suicide rates.

Chart 2 shows country-specific rates of a wide variety of countries both in terms of geography and resource allocation as well as in terms of economic prosperity. It ranks India next to some of the other countries most comparable to it such as Indonesia, Brazil and China. Russia's data stands out for being over four times the global average.

The report said that while suicide happens throughout the lifespan, it was the second leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year-olds. *Chart 3* shows the break-up of the number of suicides globally among young people. The leading cause for death in this age group is road injury (for men) and maternal conditions (for women).

While the link between suicide and mental disorders, especially depression and alcohol use, is well established, WHO finds that many suicides happen during a crisis and because of an individual's inability to deal with stress. However, by far, WHO states, "the strongest risk factor for suicide is

REGION-WISE SUICIDE RATE, AGE-STANDARDISED (PER 100,000 POPULATION)

Region	Year 2016
Africa	11.96
Americas	9.25
South-East Asia	13.4
Europe	12.85
Eastern Mediterranean	4.3
Western Pacific	8.45
Global	10.53

COUNTRY SPECIFIC RATE, AGE-STANDARDISED (PER 100,000 POPULATION)

Country	Year 2016
US	21.1
China	7.9
Japan	20.5
UK	11.9
Russia	48.3
South Africa	21.7
Brazil	9.7
Indonesia	5.2
Saudi Arabia	4.6
Pakistan	3
India	18.5

Source: WHO, figures for 2016

a previous suicide attempt".

As far as methods of suicides are concerned, almost 20 per cent of all suicides are due to pesticide self-poisoning. The use of pesticide points to the setting where such suicides happen — rural agricultural areas in low- and middle-income countries. Other common methods are hanging and firearms.

NUMBER OF SUICIDES GLOBALLY IN YOUNG PEOPLE (2016)

Age group	Males	Females	Both
15-19	25,690	27,060	52,750
20-24	45,646	33,046	78,691
25-29	51,074	30,209	81,284
Total (15-29)	1,22,410	90,315	2,12,725

THIS WORD MEANS

CRYODRAKON BOREAS

A giant flying reptile, newly identified

PALEONTOLOGISTS HAVE identified a new species, named it *Cryodrakon boreas*, and declared that it could be one of the largest flying animals. With a wingspan of over 10 metres, it is believed to have flown over the heads of dinosaurs. The reptile lived over 77 million years ago in what is western Canada today.

Its remains were, in fact, discovered 30 years ago from the Dinosaur Park Formation located in Alberta. Then, paleontologists had assumed that it belonged to an already known species of pterosaur, *Quetzalcoatlus*. A new study by researchers from the Queen Mary University of London, published in the *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*, has concluded that the remains belong to a new species, which is also the first pterosaur to be discovered in Canada. The



Artist's impression of the reptile. David Maas/QMUL

remains included a skeleton consisting of parts of the wings, legs, neck and a rib.

The researchers came to the conclusion after analysing the remains ago as well as additional, undocumented material that was uncovered over the years.

What is Bombay blood group, rare and sought after?

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
 MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 10

OVER THE last two weeks, the "Bombay blood group", a rare blood type, has been at the centre of attention in Mumbai's healthcare scene. Demand for the blood type has coincidentally spiked at hospitals, but supply has been scarce.

Blood types, common & rare

The four most common blood groups are A, B, AB and O. The rare, Bombay blood group was first discovered in Mumbai (then Bombay) in 1952 by Dr YM Bhende. Each red blood cell has antigen over its surface, which helps determine which group it belongs to. The Bombay blood group, also called hh, is deficient in expressing antigen H, meaning the RBC has no antigen H. For instance, in the AB blood group, both antigens A and B are found. A will have A antigens; B will have B antigens. In hh, there are no A or B antigens.

Rare in India, rarer globally

Globally, the hh blood type has an inci-



Harshal Ware, whose type is Bombay blood group, donates a unit in Pune. Think Foundation

dence of one in four million. It has a higher incidence in South Asia; in India, one in 7,600 to 10,000 are born with this type.

Dr Arun Thorat, in-charge of Maharashtra State Blood Transfusion Council, said this blood type is more common in South Asia than anywhere else because of inbreeding and close community marriages. "It is genetically passed," he said. Shared common an-

cestry among Indians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis has led to more cases of hh blood phenotype in this region.

Testing for the group

To test for hh blood, an Antigen H blood test is required. Often the hh blood group is confused with the O group. The difference is that the O group has Antigen H, while the hh group does not.

If anyone lacks Antigen H, it does not mean he or she suffers from poor immunity or may be more prone to diseases. Their counts for haemoglobin, platelets, white blood cells and red blood cells are similar to the count of others based on their health index. Because of rarity, however, they do face problems during blood transfusion.

Transfusion limitations

A 2015 study in the *Asian Journal of Transfusion Science* observed: "The individuals with Bombay blood group can only be transfused autologous blood or blood from individuals of Bombay hh phenotype only which is very rare." Rejection may occur if they receive blood from A, B, AB or O blood group. In contrast, hh blood group can do-

nate their blood to ABO blood types.

An unofficial registry for Bombay blood group lists over 350 donors across India. "But at any time there are only 30 active donors available," said Vinay Shetty of Think Foundation, an NGO. This group is generally not stored in blood banks, mainly because it is rare and the shelf life of blood is 35-42 days. So, whenever there is a demand for a Bombay blood group patient, a donor is required very urgently. Sometimes, facilities need to be created for transporting the donated blood from one city to another. Two weeks ago, a patient in Kota got hh blood from a Pune-based donor. The blood was flown to Jaipur and taken to Kota hospital by road.

Shortage in focus

The spike in demand is coincidental, said Shetty. Last week, he received requests from three hospitals in Mumbai for multiple hh blood type patients. Two of them are cancer patients in Tata Memorial Hospital. Patients of this blood group could die for want of blood. In Sri Lanka in 2017, a cancer patient died for want of hh blood group negative.