



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

ERASING THE SLATE

J&K needs full democracy, noisy and chaotic as it may be. Not a bonsai pruned and stunted in North Block and/or Raj Bhavan

THE COMEBACK OF mobile phones in the Valley, with the restoration of post-paid connections, more than two months after a communication blockade was imposed, is welcome. But listen closely to the murmurs of officialdom in J&K and there is reason to worry. As this paper has reported, plans are being drawn up of a political engagement even as the top brass of all major and minor parties remains in detention — Home Minister Amit Shah has now said that the Public Safety Act has been invoked against even Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, not just Farooq Abdullah, setting any possibilities of their early release to rest. So, the question is: Who will be part of this political initiative, choreographed by Delhi? Will it skip the top rung of parties altogether and go straight to mid-level leaders, some of whom have been released over the past few weeks? Who will be in, who out? Much more troubling, however, than even the glib talk of bridging the trust deficit amid continuing lockdown and detentions, is the suggestion of the emergence of a new political class in the Valley, which will presumably fill the political void that has been created by Delhi, and be part of its new solution for Kashmir.

The Centre's belief that to script a "naya Kashmir", it needs to erase the slate and start with a blank page goes against the story of India's politics so far — of a country that has subsumed so many of its rebellions, by turning rebels into stakeholders, and where areas of insurgency have seen the politics of anger and grievance give way to one of aspiration and hope. Of course, this is not a rosy or neat trajectory, there have been spectacular missteps and incomplete transitions. In some trouble spots, the insurgencies have simply been tired out, or have been bent to excessive force applied by the Centre. Yet, it has mostly been a narrative, tortuous and turbulent, of negotiation and bargaining, between the Centre and the protagonists on ground zero, such as they are. In the current moment, however, the Centre's will to clear the political board in Kashmir, to wipe it clean, all the better, presumably, to repopulate it in its own image, stands out for its staggering ambition — and hubris.

The only way out is for politics, democratic politics, and not just mobile services, to resume in the Valley. This can only happen if the leaders of Kashmir, with all their strengths but also their flaws and inadequacies, are given the space and freedom that is their right. To mobilise for and against, to make criticisms and offer alternatives, on the teeming issues — abrogation of Article 370, the sense of humiliation of a people who have not been involved in a critical decision that affects them, demilitarisation, development. Kashmir, even with its troubled past and present, and especially because of it, deserves full democracy, noisy and chaotic as it may be. Not a bonsai democracy, choreographed in North Block and/or Raj Bhavan — constrained, stunted and pruned.

RUNNING THE GAME

Sourav Ganguly takes charge of BCCI when its functioning needs to be streamlined. He will have his hands full

SOURAV GANGULY BECOMING the BCCI president presents an arresting image for Indian cricket. It's in sync with the Lodha committee reforms that called for cricketers in cricket administration. With Ganguly set to assume top office, Indian cricket will have one of its finest captains to helm the affairs of the game. He became captain in a time of upheaval, when match-fixing rattled Indian cricket at the turn of the century. Ganguly's first priority was to end regionalism, which he did successfully. He also introduced professionalism by bringing in a foreign coach, John Wright, and initiated a fitness culture. Ganguly is taking charge of the BCCI at a time when the cricket board's functioning needs to be similarly streamlined.

Over the past few years, India has significantly lost clout at the ICC. A cricket board that contributes over 70 per cent of the global body's revenue, its money has been taken away on the pretext of creating a more equitable revenue distribution system. The ICC also browbeat India to change the scheduled 2021 Champions Trophy to a World T20. Indian cricket, at this moment, needs someone of stature as its representative to the ICC. As a captain, Ganguly always put emphasis on winning overseas. His team came close to winning a Test series against Steve Waugh's all-conquering Australia in their lair. Fans would expect that the Indian team will shed the "poor travellers" tag under his presidentship.

According to the BCCI constitution, Ganguly has just 10 months to implement his vision before he goes to a three-year cooling-off period. There will be challenges. There is speculation that the BCCI under its new dispensation will carry more of a political undertone. But as a player, Ganguly knew how to get his way. As a captain, he dealt with formidable personalities like Sachin Tendulkar, Anil Kumble and Rahul Dravid. He persuaded Dravid to keep wickets in the ODIs despite the latter's reluctance. Man-management has always been Ganguly's forte. He managed to get his way even with a heavyweight administrator like Jagmohan Dalmiya. Also, he is a survivor, who played 113 Tests. As the BCCI president, however, he will have to learn to be more guarded. As a Cricket Association of Bengal office-bearer, he faced conflict-of-interest issues. But the BCCI office won't allow him to wear many hats.

BENGAL'S PRIDE

The state has scored two smash hits in one day. But there's a lot more going on in that corner of our meaningless universe

ONCE MORE, A son of Bengal has won a Nobel prize in economics, while another has cleared the field of competition for the post of chairman of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. This is broad-spectrum world dominance — brain, brawn, prefrontal cortex, motor cortex, limbic system, gluteus maximus, everything that makes us human. Bengal is celebrating, and the City of Joy is having a ball. After a span of years, there is a good reason for Bengali exceptionalism to come out and take the air of the "dying city" that just goes on living, regardless of Sharada, Narada and Dilip Ghosh-da. It is an uplifting moment.

The Didis and Dadas of West Bengal are frequently accused of being cultural supremacists. This is excessive, because they are only exceptionalists. And who can deny that the state that gave India Marx, Mao and machher jhol is exceptional? Whether it is the prevalence of hyperreality or hypochondria, no other state comes even close to the one that invented mutton rolls and permanent revolution. West Bengal leaves the competition far behind in indices as diverse as the population density of amiable lunatics and the number of streets named after poets and scientists who lived or worked in the neighbourhood. Plotting the consumption of kosha mangsho against anticid sales could reveal something of the soul of the state. Who knows, a Kuznets curve might emerge, signifying a reckless lust for life, even after Gelusil falters under the gastric onslaught.

While we admire West Bengal for mass-producing Nobel laureates (the Bengalis lay claim to Sir Roland Ross, CV Raman and Mother Teresa, too), we are only looking at a sliver of life. There's a lot more going on over there. Look beyond the cultural supremacists, and exceptional things shall be in your midst.

Govt calling the SC shots?



MADAN B LOKUR

Collegium's actions show that the NJAC which was struck down four years ago is back, with a vengeance

FOUR YEARS AGO, on October 16, 2015, the Supreme Court (SC) struck down as unconstitutional an amendment to the Constitution establishing the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC). The amendment and the corresponding law were challenged by the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association (SCAORA) believing, rightly, that the amendment would violate the basic structure of the Constitution by depriving the judiciary of its independence. SCAORA engaged Fali S Nariman, a doyen of the Bar, to argue the case on its behalf. The SC agreed with his submissions and struck down the amendment. At law, the independence of the judiciary was preserved. But is it, in fact? Judge for yourself.

Try and remember, for instance, that barely a few months after the NJAC decision, a sobbing Chief Justice of India (CJI) sought outside help to resolve the institutional problem of getting the government to move on increasing the judge strength. Nothing happened. A few months later, the same CJI complained, in open court, that the government was not implementing the recommendations of the collegium for the transfer of some judges. Nothing happened, except a response given in November the same year by the Attorney General reminding the SC of its Lakshman Rekha and by the law minister of its historic failure during the Emergency. The seeds of the NJAC striking back were sown around that time and the judiciary is today reaping the harvest.

What was the proposed composition of the NJAC? The CJI was the chair, ex officio, and along with him were the next two senior judges. The Union Minister of Law and Justice was an ex officio member along with two eminent persons. They were to recommend persons for appointment as judges of the SC and high courts and the transfer of judges of the high courts (including chief justices). Notwithstanding the declaration of unconstitutionality of the NJAC, I believe its core functions are now being performed by a body minus the two eminent persons. So, the recommendation and appointment of judges has been taken over by a "new NJAC" and without any apparent protest. Why do I say this?

The collegium cut off its hands when it reversed a signed and sealed (but not delivered) resolution on January 11. To an outsider, it appeared that a resolution of the collegium lacked sanctity — and this seems to have been exploited by the "new NJAC". Let me cite a few glaring instances. As recently as in late August,

Justice Akil Kureshi, the senior-most judge of the Gujarat High Court, was recommended on May 10 to be the Chief Justice of the Madhya Pradesh High Court after considering all relevant factors and being found suitable in all respects. Guess what? The government sent two communications to the CJI on August 23 and 27 along with some material. On reconsideration of the communications and the material, the collegium modified its recommendation on September 5 and recommended his appointment as the Chief Justice of the Tripura High Court. Again, the contents of the communications and the accompanying material are not known. Is there something so terribly secret about them that it would not be in the interest of the institution to make a disclosure?

the *Economic Times* reported that the CJI had written to the law minister that the CJI had written to the law minister that the CJI had written to the law minister that 43 recommendations made by the collegium were pending with the government and the vacancies in the high courts were to the extent of about 37 per cent. Also, the collegium could not consider the appointment of 10 persons since some information was awaited from the government for varying periods. Who is calling the shots — the government?

Some more questions. On April 8, the collegium recommended the appointment of Justice Vikram Nath, the senior-most judge of the Allahabad High Court as the chief justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court. Sometime later, the government referred back the recommendation for reconsideration. On August 22, the collegium reconsidered the recommendation "for the reasons indicated in the file" and recommended his appointment as the chief justice of the Gujarat High Court. The reasons indicated in the file are not known and it would certainly be in the interest of the institution if they are disclosed. If the judge was unfit or unsuitable for appointment as the chief justice of Andhra Pradesh, how did he become suitable for Gujarat?

On September 5, the collegium recommended that Justice Irshad Ali be made a permanent judge of the Allahabad High Court. The recommendation was made after considering (i) the opinion of judges of the SC conversant with the affairs of the Allahabad High Court, (ii) report of the committee of judges to evaluate his judgments, (iii) possible complaints against one of the judges under consideration (could also be Justice Ali), (iv) additional information received from the chief justice of the Allahabad High Court and (v) observations of the Department of Justice and (vi) an overall assessment. What did the government do? It rejected the recommendation (without furnishing any reason or justification) and on September 20 extended his term as an additional judge by six months. Did anybody protest?

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ommended his appointment as the Chief Justice of the Tripura High Court. Again, the contents of the communications and the accompanying material are not known. Is there something so terribly secret about them that it would not be in the interest of the institution to make a disclosure? As in the case of Justice Vikram Nath, it would be worth asking how Justice Kureshi is fit or suitable for appointment as the Chief Justice of the Tripura High Court and not of the Andhra Pradesh High Court. Have we not often heard the SC say that sunlight is the best disinfectant? And then, electric light the most efficient policeman? More than a month has gone by and even this recommendation has not been acted upon by the government. Any protest?

Finally, the transfer of the Chief Justice from Madras High Court to the Meghalaya High Court — whether it should have taken place or not is not the question. It could have been achieved more gracefully, like the manner in which a former CJI dealt with a delinquent judge of the Delhi High Court. After a brief discussion with the CJI, the judge quietly resigned. But some other more important questions arise in the context of the independence of the judiciary. Was she spied upon by the Intelligence Bureau (IB)? *The Times of India* reported on September 30 that the CJI had asked the Central Bureau of Investigation to "take further action in accordance with law" on a five-page report of the IB on financial and other irregularities alleged against her. Should the IB be blindly believed — there is a well-known incident of a teetotaler being called a "boozer" by the IB? Was the CJI kept in the dark about her being kept under surveillance? How many other judges are being spied on? Isn't it somewhat unusual and frightening that judges, expected to render judgment without fear or favour, are subject to surveillance by the IB? Can their independence be guaranteed under these circumstances?

It seems to me that the unconstitutional NJAC is rearing its head and is now Frankenstein's monster. The advice of the two eminent persons postulated by the NJAC is no longer required. Actually, there is now no need to amend the Constitution to bring back the NJAC — it is already in existence with a vengeance. At the present moment, silence on crunch issues is not golden.

The writer is a retired justice of the Supreme Court of India



SHOBHINI MUKERJI

AS A YOUNG research associate, I stopped at a dhaba with my boss, me armed with hand-sanitiser and a spoon, while my boss dug in to a plate of fish with her hands. My boss was Esther Duflo, director and co-founder of J-PAL, and we were on a field visit in a village in Odisha in 2008. J-PAL was in its early years then, set up globally at MIT in 2003 and in India by 2007. Despite the expansion and recognition of its work worldwide, Esther remains the same person, down to earth, no frills or fuss, who says exactly what she means in a precise five words or less. And much can be written about Abhijit's Banerjee's fantastic cooking skills.

Working with Esther and Abhijit for more than a decade has given me immense appreciation for these brilliant yet unpretentious people. They have always been open to hearing the ideas of research associates and field staff. They devise elegant solutions to complex development challenges, turn unwieldy ideas into actionable plans, engage with colleagues and bureaucrats, and return home to review a 250-page journal submission — all as part of a day's work.

For them to join the ranks of Jan

THE PEOPLE'S ECONOMISTS

This year's Nobel laureates shone the light on ways to address poverty

Tinbergen, Milton Friedman and Amartya Sen is one thing, but to attract global attention to the powerful methodology in which they, along with their co-laureate Michael Kremer, have been pioneers is another thing entirely. They have led the charge to mainstream the application of a rigorous and scientific lab methodology — the randomised evaluation — outside the laboratory, amidst the complexities of the real world, in order to derive precise measures of the impact of poverty alleviation programmes. In their own words, back in the late '90s and early 2000s, Abhijit and Esther, together with their early partners, took a leap of faith and used randomised evaluations in the field — at the time not a widely-used practice in development economics. Their intention was to do research which was hands-on, solve real problems, and also learn, with greater precision, how the world works.

Under their leadership, and with the efforts of J-PAL's network of 181 affiliated researchers, we have moved the frontiers in the fight against poverty and inequality in cost-effective and measurable ways. Whether we are thinking about innovative

ways to bring women out of extreme poverty, improve educational attainment or increase immunisation rates for children under the age of five, our work fills critical evidence gaps. This research is then brought to policymakers in a manner that is globally informed, by pooling the best insights from randomised evaluations in 83 countries, as well as grounded by local conditions and implementation feasibility, to enable context-specific policy decisions. J-PAL's scientific evaluations have debunked commonly held beliefs, and have resulted in evidence-based policy decisions.

As the news broke, my 79-year-old grandmother called to congratulate me, and to ask me specifically what it is that we at J-PAL do. Therein lies the significance of this moment. Not only have these Nobel laureates spent their careers bringing rigorous research to play in important policy decisions, but their work, and this recognition, have brought a powerful approach for fighting global poverty into our everyday conversations.

Mukerji is the executive director of J-PAL South Asia

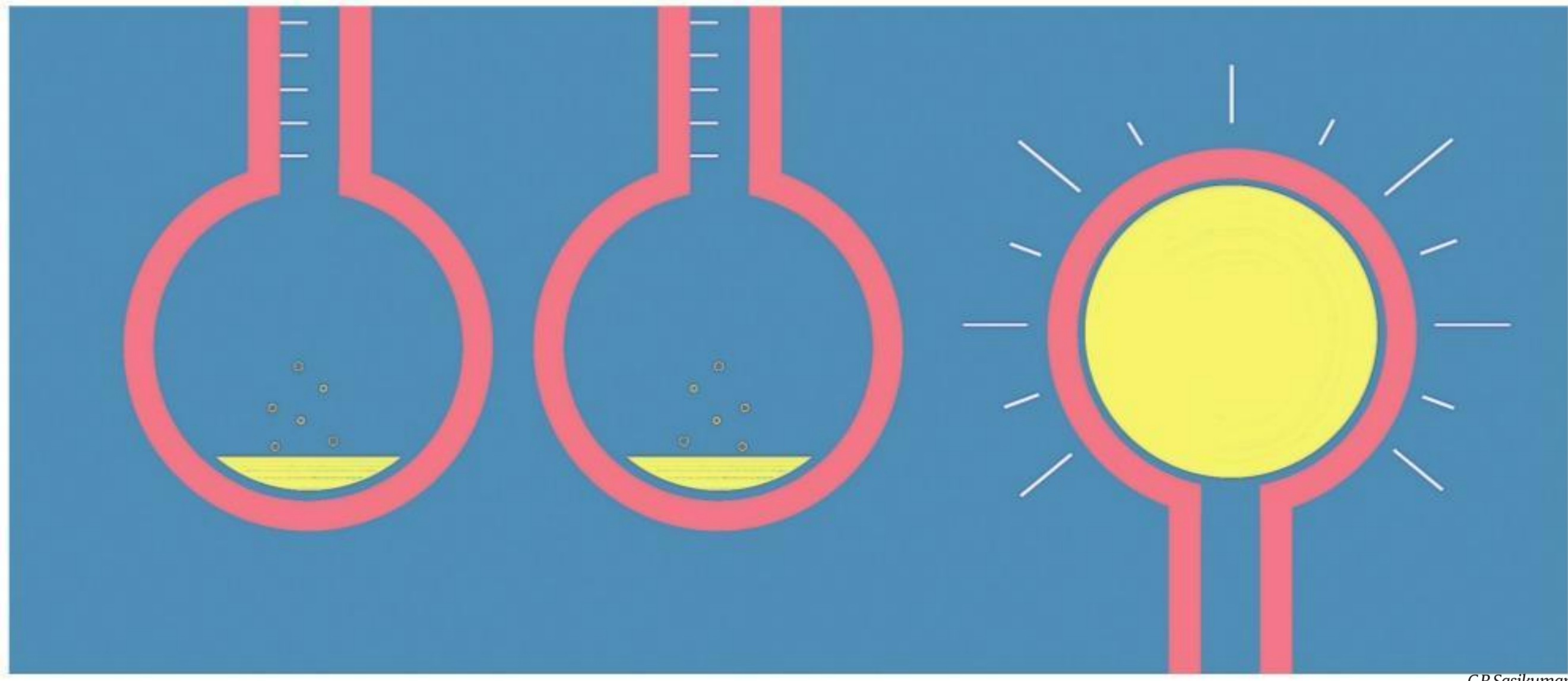


OCTOBER 16, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

FUEL FOR TARAPUR THE JIMMY CARTER administration does not seem to have taken any firm stand yet on the pending Indian applications for fuel for Tarapur. The scenario sketched by observers is as follows: Very soon the state department will reply to the nuclear regulatory commission. In the context of the general friendliness of the US administration to India and the desire of the Carter administration to utilise the two-year grace period for diplomacy, it is almost certain that the state department will recommend further supply. What the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will do is anybody's guess. The chances are probably slightly against continued supplies.

CONG-CPM TALKS THE CONGRESS AGREED to join hands with the Marxists during the Lok Sabha poll as the latter only too readily resiled from the firm postures they had adopted earlier. This was the net outcome of the 90-minute long meeting of the leaders of the Congress, the CPM and the CPI held in New Delhi. The Congress general secretary, Yunus Saleem, emphasised that his party will continue to support the Koya Ministry in Kerala and vote for the controversial land gift bill even when they reach an understanding with the CPM for the Lok Sabha election. The question of dissolution of the Assembly was not discussed, he added.

PAK NOBEL WIN THE 1979 NOBEL prize in physics was awarded to two Americans and a Pakistani and the chemistry prize to an American and a West German. A total of four of seven laureates selected for the three 1979 science prizes are Americans, the same number as last year. The physics prize was awarded to professors Sheldon L Glashow and Steven Weinberg, both 46, of Harvard, and Abdus Salam, 53, a Pakistani physicist working in London and Trieste, Italy — for studies aimed at unlocking the mystery of forces that hold matter together. They believe their work may eventually find a single force underlying the universe.



CR Sasikumar

A need to democratise science

Research in elite institutions must focus on the problems of their surrounding environment



MILIND SOHONI

IT IS GOOD to hear that the Department of Science and Technology (DST) of the Government of India has engaged in a review of its State Science and Technology Councils (SSTC) Programme. The SSTCs were formed to spearhead the use of science and technology (S&T) for regional problems and to foster "scientific temper" within states, and the DST programme was mandated "to provide core support". Sadly, this was neglected and most SSTCs are now intellectually adrift. The second review meeting is being held this week in New Delhi, and is led by notable bureaucrats, scientists and educationists. This provides an opportunity to reform our scientific institutions and align them with the interests of the people.

As a developing country, India faces many challenges. Managing floods and droughts, designing better timetables for city buses or developing biodegradable paints for Ganapati idol makers, are all extremely challenging tasks. The systematic study of such problems and their solutions will lead not only to better development outcomes, but also new science, enterprises and jobs. The primary responsibility of solving them lies with our scientists and bureaucrats, not politicians. Unfortunately, this is not fully appreciated by our society or accepted by our elite institutions as their mandate.

The result is that our industry imports much of its sophisticated machinery. Our state agencies call on expensive international consultants even in traditional areas such as irrigation. International companies fill our pot-holes with cement, and foreign universities prepare our smart city plans and assess our drinking water systems. These universities know that solving hard real-life problems is the road to "world-class" research and international rankings.

Many of the development problems, for instance, water or public health, are on the State List. Most state departments do not make any provision for research in their budget simply because it may be too disruptive, or that they do not find viable partner institutions. The SSTCs are well-placed to enable problem discovery, identify higher education institutions to work on these prob-

lems and engage with state agencies.

However, there are three hurdles. The first is funding. From the DST kitty of Rs 3,000-4,000 crore, barely Rs 100 crore makes it to the SSTCs put together. State funding is scarce. For example, the Maharashtra SSTC has an annual budget of about Rs 60 crore. Compare this with the Rs 200 crore research grants that IIT Bombay alone receives from central agencies, with little to show. Second, much of the SSTC budget is disbursed in the same patronising "project proposal and approval" method of the DST, rather than in sectoral engagement and people-driven problem identification. Chronic issues in rural electricity or public health or disasters such as the recent Sangli floods are never analysed since they are not seen as scientific problems but social, political or implementation problems to be undertaken by NGOs or the concerned state agency.

Finally, there is the imagination, peculiar to us, of a "world-class" science, of gifted scientists working on new discoveries at the frontiers of science. However, the more informed paradigm is that science is about empowering people, and not merely about few fashionable research areas. It is about the practice of observation, analysis, reporting and argumentation, which may happen within a laboratory or outside it, and which speaks not only to scientists, but to administrators, people, their representatives and the civil society at large. Thus, "why is my bus late" is as much a question for science to address as "why does a solar eclipse happen". Only such an approach will enable us to fix our public transport, analyse the droughts of Marathwada or manage the sea of solid waste which drowns us all.

The above hurdles primarily arise from the largely unaccountable "babu science" of the DST, and other central agencies, the venerable sarkari science of nuclear, space and defence scientists — a science of "national priorities" rather than social comprehension, and the fiction of global "cutting edge" science of our elite MHRD institutions.

So what is to be done? The DST should disburse about Rs 2,000-2,500 crore directly to SSTCs with precise guidelines on problem area selection, publicly available reports as research outcomes, identification of regional institutions, strengthening of universities, and working with regional agencies. The DST should be a clearing house for data from central agencies such as the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA).

The SSTC should become the nodal center for research in and for state agencies and administrative units such as forests lands, watersheds, districts or cities. This will enable

As a developing country, India faces many challenges. Managing floods and droughts, designing better timetables for city buses or developing biodegradable paints for ganapati idol makers, are all extremely challenging tasks. The systematic study of such problems and their solutions will lead not only to better development outcomes, but also new science, enterprises and jobs. The primary responsibility of solving them lies with our scientists and bureaucrats and not politicians

sectoral research, funds, logistical support and access to state-level data. There should be innovative funding mechanisms, for example, providing Rs 10 per capita or Rs 1 crore per district per year as research funding for work on regional problems. This will enable rolling out a citizen's right to science, for a community to seek scientific analysis of the problems it faces. For example, Nasik city may choose to develop a public transport plan, or a village may want a study of its disappearing groundwater and advice on installing an RO plant.

The SSTC should work with the state higher education department to evolve curricula and research frameworks for the state's development requirements and provide academic space for SSTC projects, and evolve a network of regional institutions to work with district-level agencies.

There should be better alignment of research and development with existing programmes at the national and state level. For example, the SSTC may offer a programme for institutions or enterprises to prepare air quality action plans for cities as required by the National Clean Air Programme or district irrigation plans as a part of the national PMKSY programme. The elite MHRD institutions can play an important role since they are largely above the hurly-burly of state-level politics. They must anchor research on regional problems, develop suitable curricula and mentor and collaborate with regional institutions. A beginning would be for each Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER) to identify a thrust area of regional interest. The SSTC should help in ensuring this. Finally, there should be a Model State Science and Technology Council Act to ensure the above agenda to prevent capture by venerable scientists or elite institutions, and to allow people and their representatives to initiate studies on problems which bother them.

This is, of course a decentralisation of the agenda of science and democratisation of access to science and its methods, which is long overdue. This will bring real science closer to schools and colleges and allow the community to participate in its own development. This approach is certainly in line with the spirit of science, and certainly what was intended by Bharat Ratna C Subramaniam, who initiated the SSTC programme and was a key figure in both the Green Revolution and the White revolution.

The writer is with Centre for Technology Alternatives for Rural Areas, IIT Bombay. He is currently on deputation to IIT Goa

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The decision by the Trump administration to quit Syria stands apart because the status quo was entirely sustainable. American forces were not taking high numbers of casualties. The region under control of the Kurds was largely quiet."

— THE NEW YORK TIMES

The return of al Qaeda

The outfit's recent activities point to dangers closer home. India must exercise caution



ANJU GUPTA

On October 8, the Afghan Intelligence, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), declared that the chief of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Asim Umar, had been killed in a US-Afghan raid on a Taliban compound in Helmand on September 23. Till date, the AQIS official media or their known social media accounts have neither confirmed nor accepted this claim. Taliban termed the report as "fabricated propaganda" making no comment on AQIS or Umar. It is highly likely that Umar, India born, has been killed. However, his death is not going to halt concerted efforts by AQ/AQIS network to recalibrate its activities in South Asia, especially in India.

After the killing of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011 and with the rise of AQ in Iraq (which morphed into ISIL) around early 2013, most experts believed that the AQ network had lost its capability to mount a global jihad. ISIL became the principal challenge to international security worldwide. The AQ top leadership, which included chief Ayman al Zawahiri, continued to operate from the Af-Pak region. However, AQ media also started churning out audios, videos and online magazines on South Asia. The key faces of such propaganda were Umar, then an unknown cleric, and Ustad Ahmed Farooq, a Pakistani of solid standing amongst jihadis of the region.

Their sermons targeted India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, US and, to some extent, Pakistan. This group had already started identifying themselves as AQ in "Barre Sagri" (South Asia), suggesting a South Asia-focused AQ branch, which was exhorting Muslims of these countries to wage jihad in their own countries against pro-West governments.

The AQIS was formally declared on September 3, 2014, through a video in which Zawahiri declared Umar as the chief, offering him bayat (allegiance) — which had never been offered in the past by any AQ leader to any of its regional branches. Further, a senior al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, Usama Mehmood, was also declared the spokesperson of the group.

Soon, the group started claiming the killing of prominent intellectuals in Bangladesh and participating in Afghan jihad along with the Taliban. In a US-Afghan raid in Shorabak in Helmand province in October 2015, many AQIS operatives were reported killed or arrested, including many Punjabi Pakistanis.

The arrests of a Sambal resident, Mohd Asif, and Cuttack-based Maulana Abdul Rehman, by the Delhi Police special cell in late 2015, established that Umar was originally from Sambhal and his name was Sanaul Haq. He studied at Deoband for sometime with Rehman and later fled to Pakistan where he joined Harkat ul Mujahideen. The arrests pointed out that

AQIS was trying to recruit cadres in India for training in Pakistan and Rehman was aiding the process.

The Delhi police chargesheet stated that Rehman disclosed how, after his training in an LeT camp in Muzaffarabad (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir), he was taken by LeT operative Farhatullah Ghori to Rawalpindi Jail. There he met LeT operational chief Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi. The LeT link of Rehman made it very clear that AQ-LeT-Pak ISI link was intact. AQIS was a new name for the same set of jihadis focussed on targeting Indian interests apart from that of West, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

The AQ media network has been churning out substantial propaganda for the past many months, including bringing out ISIL-style updates of its daily actions against its enemies. Their channels are now reporting activities of all branches together, including the old and new propaganda by AQIS, under the brand name, As Sahab media. And the recent additions on these channels is Kashmir: AQ chief Zawahiri posted a video on Kashmir in July this year calling for jihad in Kashmir, and asserting that Pakistan had prevented Arab Mujahideen from coming to Kashmir after the withdrawal of Russia from Afghanistan. And just two days prior, in an AQIS video, Usama Mehmood did some Pakistan bashing for them betraying Kashmiris, but called for attacks on Indian interests. Portraying killed-Kashmiri commanders, such as Zakir Musa and Safdar Ahmed Bhatt, as heroes, the video clearly aimed at radicalising and recruiting cadres not just within Kashmir but also in mainland India and South Asia. Through a clip of Pakistan PM Imran Khan preventing Pakistanis from joining jihad in Kashmir, it tried to show him as a traitor of the Muslim cause.

The principal challenger to security in South Asia has always been the AQ network which includes the Afghan Taliban, factions of the TTP, LeT, JEM, HUJI. On the one hand, the Taliban was posturing to give counter-terror assurance to the US with regards to severing its ties with the AQ. On the other hand, the AQ network has become more aggressive with its propaganda, and is calling for attacks across South Asia, including in Afghanistan. The group has reposted a lot of old propaganda, including those showing the Pakistani army in poor light. This seems to be a design to mask the connections of the group with the deep state in Pakistan.

All recent activities of the AQ and AQIS, especially those focussed on Kashmir, suggest that the group is making all-out efforts to recruit cadres from not just within Kashmir but, using the issue of Kashmir, from across South Asia. The call for a terek from Kashmir unifying the jihadis of South Asia may be an over-reaching construct, but it does have the potential to exploit an emotive issue. It has called for attacks on Indian interests, not just in India, but also beyond India. The intensity of its propaganda and the current strength of the group across many parts of the world, makes it a potent network — with a long history of patient planning of spectacular attacks.

The writer is an IPS Officer. Views expressed are personal.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BEIJING'S CHALLENGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'No zero sum' (IE, October 15). China is trying to ring fence India by reaching out to our neighbours. Its avowed support to Pakistan despite India's displeasure and now its new-found love for Nepal is aimed to hit India on economic front. China has not taken India's spurning of the Belt and Road Initiative well.

Deepak Singhal, Chennai

PRIVACY FIRST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Privacy rights and wrongs' (IE, October 11). The government's move to intercept people's activities and conversations on social media violates the Right to Privacy that was guaranteed by the Supreme Court in 2017. It could make India a surveillance state. The government should not pressure companies to hand over consumer data to them. This measure will impact the freedom of expression of the people who use social media to air their views. Free speech cannot be sacrificed.

Sauro Dasgupta, Kolkata

VIEWS ON QUOTA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'In his company' (IE, October 14). I recall a scene from the British television series, *Yes Minister*, in which a quota for women was put forward to bring gender parity in bureaucracy. The secretary advised the minister to make quotas at

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.

lower levels of the hierarchy so that it doesn't affect the gender ratio at the upper level. The woman secretary, in contrast, advised quotas in the higher bureaucracy.

H Upadhyay via e-mail

STALEMATE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'After Mamallapuram' (IE, October 14). China is known to protect its interests. That is why there has not been much progress in Sino-Indian ties for decades in the problem areas of defence, security and terrorism. China's share in trade between the two countries is almost 75 per cent. This enormous difference should be narrowed.

Subhash Vaid, Noida



VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

EXPLAINING BHAGWAT

BOTH PANCHJANYA AND *Organiser* have reported on RSS supremo Mohan Bhagwat's Vijay Dashami speech in their cover stories. The *Organiser* editorial also discusses Bhagwat's address to the RSS cadre. It notes that "most of the narratives build against Bharat. Especially in English language, create intellectual confusions with the divisive approach, are the direct outcome of not settling our terms right with the cultural context" and adds that Bhagwat's speech "did exactly" that.

The speech, it says, "generally outlines the challenges before the nation and contextualises the role of the organisation to mitigate the same" and "underscores the need for organising the Hindu society for national rejuvenation". It mentions "a set of people" who are "hell-bent on proving Bharat as a 'Lynchistan'". It says that many researchers find the "roots" of the lynching "phenomenon" in Christian Evangelism and Racial War in the US". The US-based media, it says, "applied their experience to the Bharatiya context and some intellectual picked up the narrative for their political agenda".

The editorial also explains Bhagwat's ideas of Swadeshi and the Hindu Rashtra, mentioned in his speech. About the latter, *Organiser* says Bhagwat "provided the most inclusive and clear understanding" of it. It adds that "Hindu is the national identity of Bharat with the essential characteristic of acceptance and respect for all the religious ways, that goes beyond tolerance and everyone should protect and promote the same".

Organiser has also listed out 20 takeaways from Bhagwat's speech. Some of these are: Nullification of Article 370 will come to fruition only when justice denied under the influence of Article 370 is restored; success of Chandrayaan 2 in its first attempt; surveillance along maritime border and islands has to be increased for national security; "the effort to create disaffection towards civil discipline and law of the land has to be countered"; "lynching is alien to Bharat" and RSS stands against social violence; "Bharat is Hindustan, Hindu Rashtra" and "media shall come out of sensationalism, focus on creating a constructive atmosphere".

GANDHI AND RSS

IN THE BACKDROP of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, an article in *Organiser* speaks about "Gandhi's tryst with RSS" trying to counter the idea that the two were against each other. The article states that "despite concerted malicious attempts to mislead him against the RSS, Mahatma Gandhi firmly reiterated his strong

belief in the organisation's vision and ideals, notwithstanding his differences".

It says that the "available archival sources reveal that the crusader of anti-colonial struggle Mahatma Gandhi was never a stranger" to the RSS and that the organisation "had been well-aligned with some of the constructive programmes of the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji". The article mentions that KB Hedgewar, who founded the RSS "commended that Gandhiji was a man who was always willing to sacrifice everything for his ideals".

There were some misgivings between some members of the Congress and RSS though, the article states, but adds that Gandhi "expressed that he was well impressed by their discipline, complete absence of untouchability and rigorous simplicity".

The piece later adds that "shockingly, Gandhiji revealed that all the misgivings in the recent past had come to him from Congressmen like Dhebar Bhai" and he "understood that the Hindus were not happy as Dhebar Bhai was (trying to) protect the Muslims and their properties". Also, it says that the "repeated allegations by the Congress, and the Muslim League about the RSS shunted Mahatma Gandhi into a state of utter confusion and bewilderment".

LAWLESS BENGAL

THE "BARBARIC KILLING" of RSS volunteer Bandhuprakash Pal along with his eight-year-old son and his pregnant wife in the

Kashiganj area of the Jiaganj thana of Murshidabad district reveals that the "law and administration in West Bengal are out of control," *Panchajanya* writes in its latest editorial. It says that it is not yet clear why the family was murdered, but the attitude of the police shows that even such "heinous incidents" cannot break the laziness of the administration.

A series of such incidents, the editorial says, are witness to the violent intolerance thriving under Mamata Banerjee's government, which starts sharpening its knives at the mention of "Bharat-Bharat Mata, Ram-Durga, Sangh-BJP". It asks if it is a mere coincidence that the state whose chief minister challenges kids who are taking Ram's name, is the same state a 24-year old was killed for shouting "Jai Shree Ram". The editorial then mentions several other incidents in which it alleges that people have been killed for openly wearing Hindu symbols. It says that the local media reports on such incidents with some apprehension, but those "who call themselves the mainstream media" are hesitant to question the deteriorating situation in the state.

The editorial asks that while there are nation-wide protests on mob-lynchings, but when such an incident happens in West Bengal then "why are the lips of the secular community sealed? Why is only that community questioning mob lynching that is continuously victimised by it?"

Compiled by Krishn Kaushik

TELLING NUMBERS

Blindness and visual impairment in India, district by district

THE NATIONAL Blindness & Visual Impairment Survey India 2015-2019, released last week, looks at district-wise prevalence of blindness and visual impairment. The survey randomly identified 31 districts with a sample size of about 93,000, among whom 18,000 were less than 50 years of age. Among those aged 50 and above, the focus of the study, prevalence of blindness is lowest in Thrissur district of Kerala (1.08%) while that of visual impairment is lowest in Thoubal in Manipur (7.3%). Bijnor in Uttar Pradesh has the highest prevalence in both categories, at 3.67% and 21.82%, respectively. In low prevalence of blindness, Thrissur is followed by North Goa, Khera (Punjab) and Virudhunagar (Tamil Nadu).

The report found that the prevalence of blindness is highest among those who are at least 80 years old (11.6%). Untreated cataract is the main cause of blindness, at 66.2%, and also the foremost cause of severe visual impairment, at 80.7% of all cases. Corneal opacity, cataract surgical complications and some posterior segment disorders are some of the other causes of blindness. As per the survey, prevalence of blindness has reduced by 47.1% compared to the baseline levels of 2010.

The survey, planned by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, was released by Health Minister Harsh Vardhan. The Dr Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, New Delhi, planned and executed the field work, analysis and report writing.

PREVALENCE OF BLINDNESS, AGE 50 OR MORE

LOWEST 5

Thrissur (Kerala)	1.08
North Goa	1.13
Khera (Punjab)	1.15
Virudhunagar (TN)	1.18
Thoubal (Manipur)	1.23

HIGHEST 5

Bijnor (UP)	3.67
Warangal (Telangana)	3.47
Nalbari (Assam)	3.03
Guna (MP)	2.98
Sikar (Rajasthan)	2.81

PREVALENCE OF VISUAL IMPAIRMENT, AGE 50 OR MORE

LOWEST 5

Thoubal (Manipur)	7.30
North Goa	8.91
Thrissur (Kerala)	9.88
Chikmagalur (Karnataka)	10.19
Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh)	10.36

HIGHEST 5

Bijnor (UP)	21.82
Warangal (Kerala)	20.31
Nayagarh (Odisha)	17.88
Birbhum (W Bengal)	17.39
Janjgir-Champa (Chhattisgarh)	17.05

All figures in per cent.
Source: National Blindness & Visual Impairment Survey India 2015-2019

THIS WORD MEANS

MICROBIAL FUEL CELLS

The technology that enabled a fern at London Zoo to take its own selfies. How does it work?

AT THE London Zoo, a fern has started taking its own selfies, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) announced on Tuesday. ZSL scientists had laid the groundwork for the feat earlier this year, with the ultimate aim of using plants to power camera traps and sensors in the wild. This they achieved by installing microbial fuel cells in Pete, a maidenhair fern.



Pete the fern with equipment installed.
Source: Zoological Society of London

Microbial fuel cells are devices that use bacteria as the catalysts to oxidise organic and inorganic matter and generate current. A research paper from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology earlier this year explained that electrons produced by the bacteria are transferred to the negative terminal and flow to the positive terminal. In a statement on the ZSL website, Conservation Technology Specialist Al Davies explained: "Plants naturally deposit biomatter as they grow, which in turn feeds the natural bacteria present in the soil, creating energy that can be harnessed by fuel cells and used to power a wide range of vital conservation tools remotely, including sensors, monitoring platforms and camera traps."

Among conventional power sources, batteries must be replaced while solar panels rely on a source of sunlight. On the

other hand, plants can survive in the shade, naturally moving into position to maximise the potential of absorbing sunlight.

The ground-breaking solution was enabled by ultra low-powered technology created by US AI company Xnor.ai. It works around the clock on any device while consuming such low energy that it can be powered by a small plant.

Pete's delicate leaves and shiny stalks are clearly visible in the images. "Pete has surpassed our expectations and is currently taking a photo every 20 seconds - he's been working so well we've even accidentally photobombed him a few times!" Davies said.

SIMPLY PUT

In Syria, the Kurdish question

Who are the Kurds, and why is Turkey attacking them in northern Syria? What role did Kurdish fighters play in the complex war in Syria, and what are the ramifications of US troops' withdrawal from the conflict?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 15

ON SUNDAY, Kurdish forces who had until recently been America's allies against both the Islamic State and President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, announced an agreement with the Damascus regime, which is backed by Moscow and Tehran, the United States' two great rivals in the region. This happened after President Donald Trump abruptly pulled US forces out of Syria, leaving Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to simply cross the border into Syria, pummel Kurdish positions, and take over Kurdish-held territory.

The developments mark a remarkable turn in the long-running conflict in Syria. Trump's action, seemingly an effort to end America's overseas wars ahead of his 2020 re-election bid, greatly helps Turkey, Assad, Russia and Iran — and possibly, the battered but still-potent Islamic State. With the US out of the picture, the Kremlin is now seen to be the major player in negotiations between the Kurds, Assad, and Erdogan.

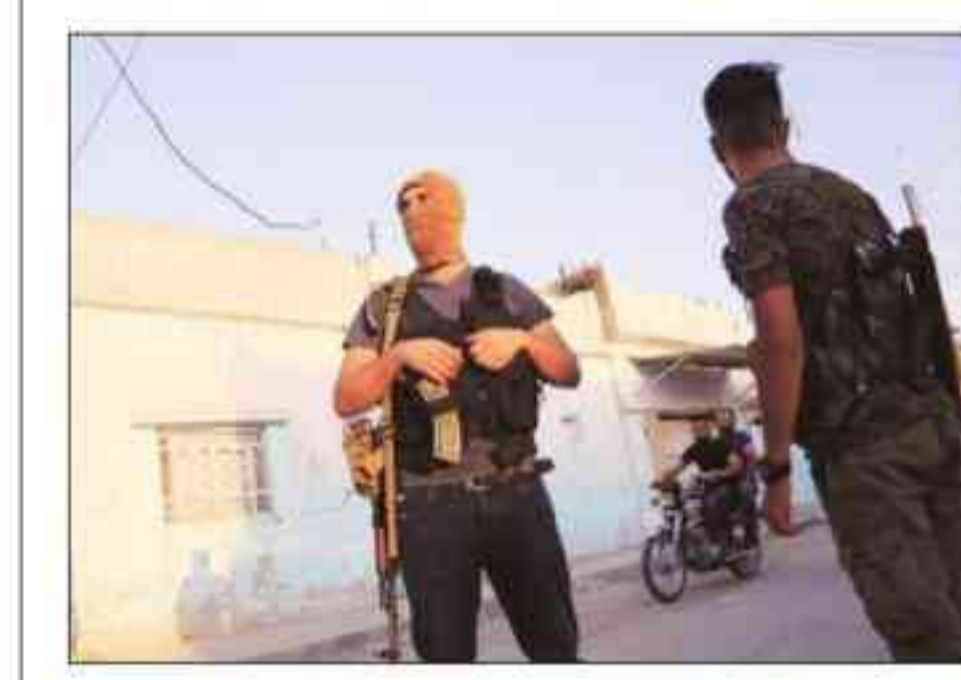
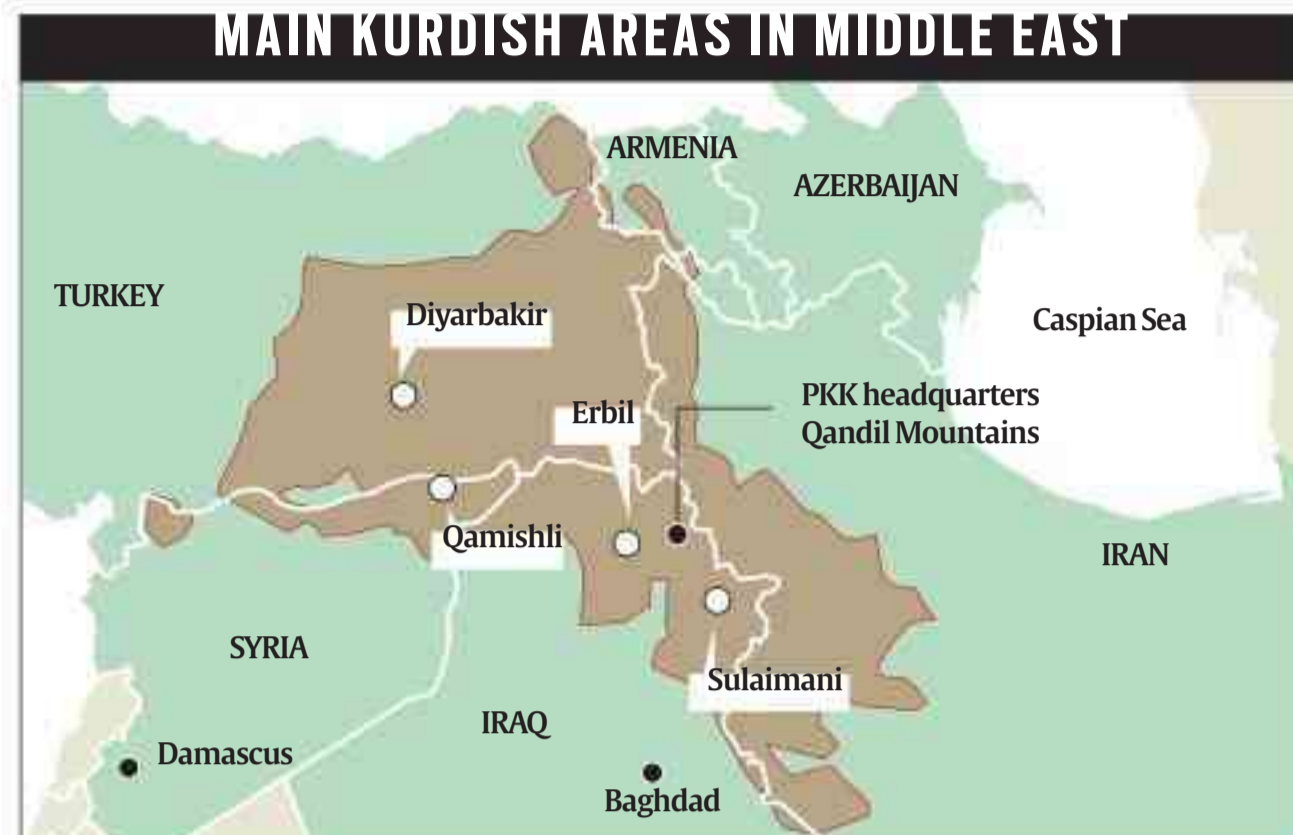
Why is Turkey attacking the Syrian Kurds? Who are the Kurds to begin with, and why are the crucial to this complex war?

An old culture, stateless people

The Kurds are the world's largest stateless ethnic group. There are an estimated 25 million to 35 million of them — numbers that are broadly comparable to those of Assam, Jharkhand, Kerala, and Telangana, as well as of Canada and Australia. They live in the highlands of southern and eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, the northeastern Syria, northwestern Iran, and parts of south Armenia, and are a minority in each of these countries. Small communities live in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, and eastern Iran as well.

Kurdish nationalists claim a history going back 2,500 years, but they became identifiable as a distinct community only in the 7th century, when most tribes in the area adopted Islam. The majority among the Kurdish people today are Sunni Muslim, but there are adherents of other faiths too, including Sufism and other mystical practices.

They speak a language that is related to Persian and Pashto, although local dialects differ. Kurmanji, which most Kurds in Turkey speak, uses the Latin script; the other widely spoken Kurdish dialect, Sorani, is written in the Arabic script. Kurds have long had a reputation for being fearless fighters, and they



Syrian Democratic Forces fighters stand guard in Qamishli, Syria. Turkish forces have pushing into northeastern Syria. AP

have served as mercenaries in many armies over the centuries. The mediaeval warrior Saladin, founder of the Ayyubid dynasty that replaced the Fatimids in Egypt and ruled over large parts of the Middle East in the 12th and 13th centuries, was of Kurdish ethnicity.

Quest for an elusive homeland

Their numbers, and distinct cultural and ethnic identity notwithstanding, the Kurdish people have never had their independent national homeland. At the Versailles peace conference after World War I, the Kurdish Ottoman diplomat Mehmed Sherif Pasha proposed borders of a new Kurdistan that covered parts of modern Turkey, Iraq, and Iran; however, the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which partitioned the old Ottoman domin-

ions, marked out a much smaller territory, entirely in what is now Turkey. Turkey negotiated with the Allied powers and, in 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne overtook Sèvres and ended the idea of a self-governing Kurdistan.

Over the decades that followed, the Kurds made repeated attempts at establishing a *de facto* Kurdistan with defined national borders — and in the process attracted massive Turkish repression, including bans on the Kurdish language, names, songs, and dress. In Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Chemical Ali attacked them with chemical weapons, and in Iran, their uprisings of the 1980s and 1990s were crushed.

In 1978, the Marxist revolutionary Abdullah Öcalan formed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê or PKK in Kurdish) with the aim of setting up an

independent Kurdistan. PKK guerrillas fought the Turkish army from 1984 until Öcalan's capture in 1999, during which some 40,000 Kurdish civilians were killed. Sporadic terrorist attacks continued until 2013, when the PKK declared a ceasefire. This collapsed when Turkey joined the war against the Islamic State in 2015 and started to bomb PKK targets in Iraq.

Islamic State, Assad, the US

As the Islamic State swept across Syria and Iraq, the only fighters who were able to resist the onslaught were the Syrian Kurdish militias, the most powerful of which was the People's Protection Units, known by its Kurdish initials, YPG. The Kurds, who lived mostly along Syria's border with Turkey, had begun an armed defence of their areas after the civil war started in 2011-12. In 2014, as the US joined the war against Da'esh, it found in the YPG a helpful regional ally. From the US perspective, the Kurds also served as a military counterpoint against the Iranians and Russians, and provided some leverage in a future deal to end the war.

Once the Kurds, backed by the Americans, had forced Daesh out of northern Syria, they took over the re-captured land along the Syria-Turkey border, home mainly to ethnic Kurds, Arabs, and some other groups. The YPG has close links with the PKK, and for Erdogan's regime, this seemed like a serious security threat. For the US, the problem was of balancing decades-old hostilities and suspicion between its two allies — Turkey was part of NATO and an ally against Assad; the Kurds had just helped defeat the Islamic State at the cost of losing over 11,000 fighters.

On the nudging of the Obama administration, the Syrian Kurdish militia sought to cover its links with the Turkish guerrillas, changed its name to Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and started to enlist larger numbers of non-Kurdish fighters. By 2016, the Americans were guessing that some 40% of SDF fighters belonged to non-Kurd ethnicities. The US also worked to keep the peace on the Turkish border, carrying out patrols both on its own, and jointly with the Turkish army.

But earlier this month, Trump decided to withdraw forces from Syria — an idea he had had in 2018 as well, but had been thwarted. He informed Erdogan on October 6, and within three days, on October 9, Turkey and its Syrian Arab allies launched an assault on Kurdish-held territory in Syria. Americans troops are now on the way out, and even though Trump has issued dramatic warnings to Erdogan, the Turkish attacks on the Kurds continue.

The link ED alleges between Praful Patel, Mirchi

KHUSHBOO NARAYAN
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 15

THE ENFORCEMENT Directorate (ED) has alleged financial links between the family of Dawood Ibrahim aide Iqbal Mohammed Memon (popularly known as Iqbal Mirchi) and NCP leader Praful Patel.

What is the link alleged by the ED?

Patel's firm Millennium Developers Pvt Ltd developed Ceejay House in Worli, Mumbai, in 2006-07. The ED has alleged that the third and fourth floors, about 14,000 sq ft, were transferred to Iqbal Mirchi's wife Hazra Iqbal Memon in 2007 "towards beneficial interest of Mirchi in the land". It has alleged that the sale of the land to Millennium was "through dubious means" and the proceeds were "laundered" by Mirchi through "fake" bank accounts. Praful Patel and his wife Varsha Patel are shareholders in Millennium. On Tuesday, Praful Patel denied any deal with Mirchi.

How did Hazra Iqbal Memon come to own the property?

In the early 1970s, a person named M K



Ceejay House in Mumbai. Nirmal Harindran

Mohammed had illegally occupied about 1,799.36 sq yards (1,504 sq m) out of the 1,823.53 sq m land — Ceejay House was earlier known as Shriniketan — and built a restaurant called Gurukripa, records show. In 1980,

the co-owners of the land filed a case against Mohammed in the Bombay High Court, which appointed D B Khade as the court receiver to institute a suit against Mohammed, seeking the title and possession of the land. In 1988, Mohammed and the receiver reached a settlement. Mohammed was ordered to pay Rs 7 lakh to the co-owners as full and final payment for the property. In return he was to be declared sole owner of the disputed portion of 1,504 sq m. Interestingly, even as the case was on, Mohammed in 1986 sold the rights to the land to Hazra Iqbal for Rs 9 lakh.

While the ED suspects that Mohammed had links to Mirchi, it has not been established yet. The ED is investigating this and officers said they are in the process of obtaining documents and witness statements.

What happened after the settlement?

In 1999, one of the co-owners of the land, Lalben M Patel, filed a case against Hazra Iqbal Memon, challenging the High Court order that had made Mohammed the owner of the disputed portion. Subsequently, a settlement was reached between Lalben M Patel and Hazra Iqbal Memon, who paid Rs 7 lakh to the court receiver as per the High Court or-

der of 1988 and gave an undertaking to vacate the property. In return, the co-owners agreed to create a tenancy in favour of Hazra Iqbal Memon for 14,000 sq ft carpet area on the third and fourth floors, at a monthly rent of Rs 10,000. The co-owners also agreed before the court that if the building was ever converted to ownership after the formation of a co-operative society, Hazra Iqbal Memon's tenancy would be converted into ownership too, as applicable with other existing tenants.

In 2006, the co-owners of Shriniketan Building entered into a development agreement with Millennium Developers. Millennium accepted the liability of the co-owners to give 14,000 sq ft carpet area including parking spaces in Ceejay House to Hazra Iqbal Memon. In February 2007, Millennium executed a registered deed of confirmation with Hazra Iqbal Memon and her sons. For payment of stamp duty and registration charges, the valuation of the 14,000 sq ft, which was transferred to Hazra Iqbal Memon, was shown as Rs 1.13 crore.

Currently, while Hazra Iqbal Memon owns 60 per cent rights in this area, she has given 20 per cent each to her sons Asif Iqbal Memon and Junaid Iqbal Memon. All of them live abroad.

Why is there no mathematics Nobel? The theories, the facts, the myths

KABIR FIRAQUE
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 15

EVERY NOBEL season, which has just ended with the award of the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, one question keeps popping up. Why is there no Nobel Prize for mathematics?

Researchers have looked for answers, and the generally accepted theory is that the idea of such a prize never occurred to Alfred Nobel. One popular myth they discount is that Nobel disliked mathematicians because one of them had an affair with his wife — for, Nobel never married. Others claim that Nobel kept mathematics away from his list for fear that it would be awarded to the Swedish mathematician Gösta Mittag-Leffler, who allegedly had an affair with Sophie Hess, a Viennese with whom Nobel himself had a relationship. Scholars dismiss

this too; the evidence does not add up.

How he chose the five fields

In 1888, a French obituary described Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, him as the "Merchant of Death". The newspaper had made a mistake: the man who had died was Ludvig Nobel, brother of Alfred (1833-1896). It upset Alfred Nobel, who hoped his real obituary would not include the words "Merchant of Death" — and thus the idea of setting up the Prizes. University of Michigan mathematician Lizhen Ji wrote in the journal *Notices of the International Congress of Chinese Mathematicians* in 2013. Nobel chose Physics and Chemistry because he was a scientist himself. Physiology or Medicine, because he was a healthy man and valued progress in medicine. Ji wrote. Literature, because he himself had written plays and poems in his youth. And Peace, because, according to Ji, he hoped the Prize

would one day be awarded to the Baroness Bertha von Suttner, another woman with whom Nobel once had a relationship. Eventually, she did win the Peace Nobel for her novel *Lay Down Your Arms* — in 1905, some years after Nobel's death.

Awards for maths

"For natural reasons, the thought of a prize in mathematics never entered Nobel's mind," wrote the mathematicians Lars Gårding and Lars Hörmander in one of the definitive research works on the subject, published in *Mathematical Intelligence* in 1985. Ji referred to their findings that Nobel did not use much mathematics in his work or business, and did not enjoy mathematics either.



Alfred Nobel

There are other prizes that honour achievements in mathematics. The Fields Medal, named after a Canadian mathematician, is awarded by the International Mathematical Union to mathematicians under age 40. The Abel Prize, named after the genius Neils Henrik Abel, is awarded by the Norwegian government. Other awards, such as the Shaw Prize, King Faisal International Prize, and Wolf Prize, include mathematics alongside other fields. The Nobel Prize in various fields has recognised mathematicians and mathematics-related work on some occasions. Bertrand Russell won it for Literature in 1950, Max Born and Walter Bothe won the Physics

Prize in 1954 for statistical work in quantum mechanics, and the legendary mathematician John Nash shared the 1994 Economics Prize for his work on game theory.

Busting the myth

Ian Stewart, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the University of Warwick, writing of theories about the absence of a mathematics Nobel in *Professor Stewart's Cabinet of Mathematical Curiosities*, noted that there is no evidence to connect the mathematician Mittag-Leffler with Sophie Hess. "Other suggested reasons for enmity between the two men (Nobel and Mittag-Leffler) also fall apart when confronted with reality," Stewart told *The Indian Express*, by email. In his book, he referred to the work of Gårding and Hörmander, who had noted that in 1965, when Nobel left Sweden to live in Paris, Mittag-Leffler was a young student, which would mean that there was little op-

portunity for the two men to interact. "The truth is that although Mittag-Leffler was a competent mathematician, he wasn't good enough to have a chance of winning such a prize. He would have been competing against a star-studded field. Nobel might not have known that, but his advisors would surely have told him," Stewart told *The Indian Express*. "In any case, it's a silly question. Nobel didn't set up a prize for geology, archaeology, engineering, painting, sculpture, music — or football, for that matter. Not to mention hundreds of other areas of human activity. It would have bankrupted even him to cover everything," he said. Stockholm has an institute for mathematical research named after Mittag-Leffler. One of its first employees was the Russian Sonya Kowalevski who, according to Ji's paper, had many admirers, including Alfred Nobel. She happened to be a mathematician.