



Kartarpur focus

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

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

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

Murky swamp

The midnight manoeuvres in post-Parrikar Goa raise disturbing questions

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

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

Seeking the next frontier

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



RAKESH SOOD

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

A crowded space

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

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

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

Patchy international control

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

tary applications.

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

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

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The arrogance of the ignorant

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



ASEEM SHRIVASTAVA & ABHINAV GUPTA

When the tsunami hit the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 2004, thousands perished. However, some of the oldest Adivasi tribes, the Jarawas and the Onges, lost nobody. These communities followed animals to the highlands well before the waves hit. Formal education was of little survival value in a context where you needed swift instincts.

When Western drug and pharmaceutical companies send their scouts to remote regions in India to look for herbs to patent, the scouts do not consult top Indian doctors or scientists first. They smuggle their way into jungles inhabited by Adivasis where, in a moment of weakness, an elderly woman adept in the healing arts may divulge a secret or two. Later, the companies might test the herb in their labs and find that the woman's claims were correct. This has long been the staple of biopiracy.

That those forests inhabited by Adivasis are some of the best conserved in the subcontinent is a long-standing fact contrary to the understanding of supposedly edu-

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

Relationship with nature

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

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

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



RITU RAJ/KONWAR

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

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

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

A dying civilisation

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

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

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

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

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

VVPAT numbers

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

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

HARIDASAN RAJAN, Kozhikode, Kerala

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

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

P.R.V. RAJA, Pandalam, Kerala

Be neutral

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

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

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

UMANG PHOGAT, Hisar, Haryana

Exhaust emissions

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

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

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

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

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