



Trump calls

While India opposes third party mediation, it can expect U.S. pressure on Pakistan

The United States views Jammu and Kashmir as a nuclear flashpoint, considering the capabilities of India and Pakistan, and this is a rare point of agreement between U.S. President Donald Trump and the country's professional strategists. He conveyed the importance of reducing tensions and maintaining peace to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan. He also urged Mr. Khan to "moderate rhetoric with India", echoing India's sentiments. He had spoken to Mr. Khan last week too, as relations between the neighbours took a turn for the worse after India's decision to revoke the special status of J&K on August 5. Under Mr. Modi, India has revised its long-held policy on J&K and ruled out any role for Pakistan in New Delhi's ties with the troubled region, while reiterating its claim over Pakistan occupied territory. Pakistan's ruling establishment has flourished by using Kashmir as a trope of Islamic nationalism, even as its society sank in radicalism and violence. With Islamabad crying itself hoarse over the sudden turnaround in India's posture and considering the history of conflicts between the two countries, the U.S. — even under an isolationist President — could not have looked the other way.

Mr. Trump's anxiety about India-Pakistan tensions is also linked to his desperation to disentangle the U.S. from the conflict in Afghanistan — now in its 18th year — before his reelection bid in 2020. In the jihadi world view, Kashmir and Afghanistan are two fronts of the same war, and the Pakistani state has conveniently peddled this idea for long. The U.S. is no longer swayed by Pakistan's argument that the 'road to peace in Afghanistan runs through Kashmir', but it is certainly conscious of Islamabad's proclivity to mischief, most evidently by supporting terror groups launched into Afghanistan and Kashmir. India has always resisted, rightly, any linkage between Afghanistan and Kashmir but it cannot be dismissive of the implications of the U.S.'s inevitable withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S. has gradually but decisively tilted in favour of India on a range of regional strategic questions in recent years, but its search for an Afghan escape route forces it to keep Islamabad in good humour. While Mr. Trump and his administration have been largely sympathetic to India's latest move on J&K, his tweet on Monday projected parity between Mr. Modi and Mr. Khan by terming them "my two good friends." While India opposes any third party mediation, it expects the U.S. to keep Pakistan on a tight leash. India's position that Kashmir is strictly an internal matter can be reinforced only by holding its citizens close and reassured. New Delhi's dealings with J&K must be becoming of the world's largest democracy.

Free fall

No end to the Afghan crisis is in sight as the IS emerges as the third player in the conflict

The suicide attack at a crowded wedding hall in Kabul on Saturday night that killed at least 63 people and injured more than 180 others is yet another tragic reminder of the perilous security situation in Afghanistan. The blast, claimed by the local arm of the Islamic State (IS), occurred at a time when the U.S. and the Taliban are preparing to announce a peace agreement to end the 18-year-long conflict. But if the IS attack is anything to go by, it is that peace will remain elusive to most Afghans irrespective of the agreement reached between the Taliban and the U.S. It's now a three-way conflict in Afghanistan — the government, the Taliban insurgents and the global terrorists. The government in Kabul, backed by the U.S. and the international community, is fighting to preserve the existing system, which despite its faults, at least offers a semblance of democracy. But the government is a failure in ensuring safety and security of the people. The Taliban, which controls the mountainous hinterlands, wants to expand its reach to the urban centres. The IS, which has declared a province (Khorasan) in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar, has emerged as the third player. Attacks against civilians, especially the Shia minority, is the central part of its brutal military tactics. Afghanistan's Hazara Shias were the target of the wedding hall bombing as well. The IS, which released a video of the purported bomber, a Pakistani, said he attacked "polytheistic rejectionists", as the group calls Shia Muslims.

This complex, mutually destructive nature of the conflict is the biggest challenge before any attempt to establish order and stability in Afghanistan. As part of a potential peace deal, the U.S. is ready to pull troops from Afghanistan in return for assurances from the Taliban that they will not allow the Afghan soil to be used by transnational terrorists such as the IS and al-Qaeda. It will be left to the Taliban and the government to have their own peace talks and settle differences. Arguably, a peace deal or at least a ceasefire between the Taliban and the Kabul government would allow both sides to re-channel their resources to fighting terrorist groups. But the Taliban's intentions are hardly clear. What if the Taliban, which ran most of Afghanistan according to its puritanical interpretation of the Islamic law from 1996 to 2001, turns against Kabul once the Americans are out? What if the country plunges into a multi-party civil war as it did after the Soviet Union pulled out in 1989? The IS has demonstrated an ability to survive and strike in Afghanistan despite the U.S.'s heavy air campaign in the east. Ideally, the international community should have strengthened the hands of the Kabul government against all kind of terrorists, before seeking a settlement with the insurgents. They should have helped alter the balance of power in the conflict. But it does not seem likely now. And Afghanistan is in a free fall.

Choppy waters lie ahead

Anger in Kashmir and adverse global opinion are but expected; policymakers must learn from similar world events



M.K. NARAYANAN

In a series of swift moves, New Delhi has effectively altered the character of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, setting certain new terms for engagement. Between August 5 and 7, Parliament passed several resolutions; emasculating the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K); making Article 35A a dead letter; abolishing J&K as a State of the Indian Union and replacing it with two separate Union Territories — the Union Territory of J&K and the Union Territory of Ladakh. These provisions were endorsed by both Houses of Parliament with huge majorities.

The dramatic turn of events, and the swiftness with which they were carried out, stunned the nation. Preceding this, Kashmir had come under a blanket of secrecy. The Amarnath yatra as well as other yatras and similar activities were prematurely called off. All non-J&K personnel were asked to leave the State. Communications with the outside world, including the Internet, were disrupted. An unprecedented number of paramilitary personnel were inducted into the Kashmir Valley and still remain. All combined, it gave the impression of a total lockdown of a kind and on a scale not previously attempted.

A decline and fall

The change in status of J&K from a princely State (under the tutelage of the British from 1846 to 1947) to a Union Territory now with few legislative powers, mirrors the State's decline and fall. No special circumstances were mentioned for removing the special status accorded to J&K, enshrined in Article 370 of the Constitution. Article 35A was a casualty of this step. The decision was merely presented as a "fait accompli". Not explained

again was the need to take the step under such a cloak of secrecy. The Prime Minister has since characterised the decision as 'historic' and as providing a new beginning for J&K and Ladakh. Further steps have been initiated to complete J&K's integration with India so as to transform Kashmir from a 'civilisational backyard' to a modern State.

It would be an error of judgment, however, to believe that "all is well" in J&K. The nation does confront a situation which could have many, and unintended, consequences. Many 'isms' have, no doubt, collapsed during the past half century and more. Today, communism is a pale shadow of what it was in the 20th Century. Humanism is under threat. Liberal ideas face attacks from all sides. Nationalism is the dominant imperative, and comes in many shades and sizes. India had been slow to adopt nationalism as a creed but is now tilting towards majoritarian nationalism. Whether it would dilute India's "diversity", which had always been regarded as the country's greatest virtue remains to be seen.

Federal imperative

The immediate concern in many quarters, even though it is not being publicly articulated at this time, is whether other "Guarantees" enshrined in the Constitution would wilt under the juggernaut of "majoritarian nationalism", with the ruling dispensation having an overwhelming majority in Parliament. Whatever might be the demerits of constitutional guarantees such as Article 370 (which aimed to protect J&K's autonomous status), it cannot be ignored that it was intended to accommodate not only Kashmir's diversity but also to meet prevailing circumstances at the time of accession. Over time, it helped India put at rest speculation, as far as the world was concerned, about the status of J&K within the Indian Union.

It is imperative to recognise that preservation of the asymmetric



character of India's federal structure necessitates effecting several compromises. It also needs to be recognised that the manner in which India had dealt with such asymmetry in the past is what has made India and the Indian Constitution the envy of the rest of world. Every Article in the Indian Constitution has an appropriate role in sustaining India's diverse and asymmetric federalism.

The least of our concerns in the coming days, however, may not be the "dumbing-down" of Article 370 and Article 35A. Equally inconsequential may be the sledgehammer tactics employed to swat remnants of Kashmir's autonomy. There are far weightier issues that India may have to contend with.

For the present, criticism may be muted regarding the manner in which the changeover in Kashmir was effected. Within Kashmir itself, reeling under a veil of secrecy, it is difficult to gauge the depth of anger and the extent of animosity towards New Delhi. When the current measures are relaxed, a recrudescence of violence in the State can be expected.

Global reactions and lessons

International opinion is unlikely — whatever gloss we may apply — to accept at face value our reasons as to why the steps taken in Kashmir were necessary. Already, voices critical of India's actions are beginning to be heard. China made its views clear to India's External Af-

fairs Minister S. Jaishankar on August 12, implicitly rejecting his argument that a bifurcation of J&K and the voiding of Article 370 were India's internal matters. China also did not heed Mr. Jaishankar's caution that "the future of India-China relationship will depend on mutual sensitivity".

Most nations across the world may adopt a similar line, with a few even pontificating that when push comes to shove, India is no different from most other Second and Third World countries, which make and break rules of their own choosing. India could, hence, once again find itself isolated, having to defend its actions in Kashmir in the international fora.

At a time like this, policymakers in India would do well to heed the lessons of history and take suitable prophylactic measures. Without drawing any parallel, one situation that immediately comes to mind is the crisis that ravaged Bosnia in the 1990s, following the break-up of Yugoslavia and the collapse of the post-1945 Communist order. Before the break-up, Muslims, Serbs and Croats lived reasonably amicably in mixed communities. As the war intensified, clashes between different communities increased. Support for, including a supply of arms to, different communities, were forthcoming from nations supporting each group. Pakistan, for instance, was one of the countries that at the time defied the existing United Nations ban on a supply of arms, and airlifted missiles to Bosnian Muslims. What followed was one of the worst carnages in history. We must ensure that nothing of this kind happens here.

Regional concerns

We must also realise that the geopolitical situation in our region at this juncture is not entirely in our favour. The power play in Afghanistan, together with the fact that India has been excluded from the talks to deal with Afghanistan's problems, and that Pakistan and China are playing key roles, has put India on notice. Pakistan is al-

ready using its leverage in Afghanistan to regain greater acceptance internationally, specially with the U.S. The nexus between China and Pakistan has, if anything, become stronger.

We can, hence, anticipate a joint effort by Pakistan and China to muddy the waters as far as Kashmir is concerned. Pakistan will almost certainly intensify terror attacks and whip-up local sentiments inside Kashmir. China, which is already concerned about a "rising nationalist India", is likely to adopt more insidious tactics, aimed at weakening India's influence across the region. Buoyed by the fact that it possesses one of the most powerful militaries in the world and with growing acceptance of the Belt and Road Initiative, China can be expected to raise the ante on both the border and in the Indian Ocean region.

Given the complex nature of the international situation, India also needs to be on its guard on how the situation in Kashmir might encourage radicalist Islam to exploit the situation. Across both Europe and Asia, widespread concerns exist that radicalised Islamist ideas and concepts thrive in conflict situations. Experts warn of the inherent dangers in such situations, and their recipe is that apart from utmost vigilance devising more inclusive and diversified policies is important to achieve positive results. Policy makers in India would do well to heed these concerns.

One final word. The removal of Article 35A should not result in demagogic "aggression" in Kashmir, with outsiders seeking to "colonise" Kashmir. This could be highly counter-productive. It could also induce fears across the entire Northeast, even though Article 371 still holds sway there. In short, authorities must avoid any kind of 'colourable exercise of power' in many other areas as well, including on the language issue.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

A top post, its promise and peril

The post of CDS can lead either to a transformation of the defence forces or it could sink with a middling mandate



ANIT MUKHERJEE

On Independence Day, in his inimitable style, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). Officially, this post was first proposed by the Group of Ministers Report in 2001 but the idea for a CDS can be traced back to Lord Louis Mountbatten, the architect of India's high defence organisation. In many ways then, this is a culmination of a long cherished dream, and Mr. Modi deserves full credit for it. However, implementation is key, something that perhaps he knows all too well, having dealt with the aftermath of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rollout and demonetisation.

The Prime Minister therefore needs to be bold with this initiative and should understand that his military and civilian advisers, institutionally, have an interest in undermining it. So the manner in which this office is set up portends either the greatest, necessary transformation of the Indian military or a *naam-ke-vaastey* appointment with a middling mandate and a middling job.

Currently there are no further details on the proposed powers of the CDS. According to one report, an "implementation committee"

has been established comprising the Defence Secretary, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff and other unnamed officers. This itself is a mistake. The committee should ideally be headed by a political leader and/or a rank outsider, who should have no skin in the game. Indeed, the experience of defence reforms in other countries suggests that it is best to have qualified 'outsiders' involved in the process. Serving officials can of course assist such an individual or a team but expecting them to, if necessary, curtail their own powers is quixotic.

Overcoming resistance

After his first term in office, Mr. Modi must have realised the aversion within the service headquarters to reform. In more than one Combined Commanders Conference, the annual gathering of senior most officers from all three services, Mr. Modi challenged them to come up with a common plan for greater integration. It is still unclear what the modalities of this proposed plan were, submitted sometime in 2018, but according to Admiral Sunil Lanba, till recently the Chief of Naval Staff and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, they recommended creating a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Fortunately, Mr. Modi did not settle upon this term, which perceptually is a step below a CDS. These interactions, however, must have revealed an obvious detail — the service chiefs and their headquarters will bitterly oppose creating



an empowered CDS. India's is perhaps the only large military wherein the service chiefs retain both operational and staff functions. This anomaly cannot continue merely because that is the tradition. If this government wants a "new India" it will have to break decisively from the past and draw up a time-bound road map to divest the chiefs of their operational command.

Perhaps one of the best approaches is to focus squarely on the powers and capacity of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), which will serve (or served) as the secretariat to the CDS. The IDS is the joint staff, created in 2001, and comprises around 270 officers. The services have viewed it with a mix of irritation bordering on contempt. It is usually treated as a career backwaters and perhaps the Prime Minister should examine how many recent chiefs have served in this institution. Going forward, civilians should emphasise joint staff experience as an important consideration for senior officer promotions. On another

count, one of the aspects worth looking into is the physical location of the IDS and the office of the CDS. According to some reports, an IDS headquarters is proposed to be built somewhere in Delhi Cantonment. Instead of being shunted, officers in the IDS should occupy prime offices in South Block and the office of the CDS should be located right next to that of the Defence Minister.

Zeroing in

One of the most closely watched decisions will be on appointing the first CDS. The government need not go with the seniority rule and should instead consider a "deep selection" from current pool of flag officers. To begin with, and to assuage the fears of the smaller services, it may be wise to not let an Army officer to first tenet this post. Moreover, it is not necessary, or perhaps even desirable, for a former service chief to be appointed as the CDS. As a fulcrum for future defence transformation and armed with a possible mandate to examine inter-services prioritisation, long-term planning, officer education (including the perennially-imminent Indian National Defence University) and jointness, the CDS can emerge as the biggest "game changer". But if the service chiefs have their way then this will be just another glorified post, without much effective powers.

Finally, an important aspect of any reorganisation should look at the inter-se relations between the military and the Ministry of Defence. This needs to focus on ca-

capacity, expertise, decision-making powers and aligning responsibility and accountability. The relations between the civilian bureaucracy and the military are among the biggest fault-lines in the defence apparatus and remedial actions are required, on both sides, to create a professional, well-developed and qualified bureaucracy which integrates both civilian-military expertise.

With this announcement, Mr. Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh have an opportunity to finish a project which Lord Mountbatten was so passionate about. But this is not just about dead Englishmen. Arun Singh, one of the most forward looking quasi-defence ministers, was, according to those who worked closely with him (Mr. Singh), was keen to establish theatre commands back in 2001. However, he was unsure if political leaders at that time would fully support such a transformation. Eventually they did not and the Indian strategic community has been complaining about reforms which "failed to deliver". Over the next few months, this government has an opportunity to usher in a revolution in defence management — whether they realise this dream or not is up to question.

Anit Mukherjee is Assistant Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and the author of the forthcoming book, "The Absent Dialogue: Politicians, Bureaucrats and the Military in India"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The govt. we deserve?

The adage that people get the government they deserve rings true in today's India. The electorate has voted Bharatiya Janata Party to power and literally give it a mandate to lord over the people. What is happening in the name of governance, especially in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), amounts to a subversion of the very principles of democracy. Further, as the author has pointed out in the article "Democracy under siege," (Editorial page, Aug. 20),

the judiciary has failed time and again in checking the executive's powers.

R. PRABHU RAJ,
Bengaluru

■ Any number of write-ups condemning the manner of abrogation of Article 370 will fail to appeal to the common man. Successive governments could not bring peace to the Valley and the people there were not treated on par with the people of other States. This disparity was a stumbling block for any growth. Contrary to what the author

argues, there was no disrespect meant to the Indian Constitution. The situation was extraordinary and called for an unconventional measure.

V. LAKSHMANAN,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

A far-fetched view

The writer is taking a far-fetched view by saying that the rest of India has never integrated itself with Kashmir ("The idea of India is failing," Aug. 19). Appreciating the beauty of a State or visiting it during holidays by itself does not

reduce its value in people's eyes. Rather, it is the provisions of Article 370, which do not carry the same meaning as special status given to other States like Mizoram and Nagaland, that kept J&K and its citizens aloof from the rest of India. Simply because these provisions were necessary at the time of J&K's accession to India does not mean that they hold relevance and use even after 72 years of Independence of the country.

DAMINI MEHTA,
New Delhi

Unifying the forces

A synergy between the forces is necessary and a Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) can provide the best answer to this problem (Editorial, "Soldier Number One," Aug. 20). At a time when India is struggling to deal with the potentially destabilising tactics of Pakistan and China, the need for a CDS is imminent. Also, the response-time gap is a major problem when either two or all three forces are needed. A CDS can bridge this gap.

VISHWJEET SINGH,
Chandigarh

Farewell Khayyam

A long-standing link with the 'golden era' of Hindi film music was snapped in the death of the famous music maestro Khayyam. Though he composed music for a limited number of films, his songs are quite memorable and have a lilting appeal about them. The song 'sham-e-gham ki qasam' from *Foot Path*, rendered in the velvety voice of Talat Mahmood, will linger in our ears forever.

SESHAGIRI ROW KARRY,
Hyderabad

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