



Risky, ill-considered

Pakistan's announcement on Kulbhushan Jadhav threatens to escalate bilateral tensions

Pakistan's sudden announcement on Monday that former Indian naval officer Kulbhushan Jadhav has been sentenced to death by a Field General Court Martial is a development fraught with danger. It could lead to a rapid escalation in bilateral tensions that the region can ill afford. The trial, sentencing, and its confirmation by the Pakistan Army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, were carried out so secretly that the news took many in Pakistan as well by surprise. There are glaring holes in the procedures followed by Pakistan's government and military in the investigation and trial of Mr. Jadhav. His recorded confession that was broadcast at a press conference within weeks of his arrest in March 2016 appeared to have been spliced. At various points in the tape, and in the transcript of the confession made available, Mr. Jadhav contradicts his own statements, suggesting that he had been tutored. Even if the confession was admissible in a court of law, little by way of corroborative evidence has been offered by Pakistan to back up the claim that Mr. Jadhav, who was allegedly arrested in Balochistan last year, had been plotting operations against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's statement in Parliament detailing 13 requests by the government for consular access, and replies from the Pakistan government that made the access conditional on India cooperating in the investigation, further casts the procedures followed in a rather poor light. International human rights agencies too have criticised them. Mr. Jadhav must be allowed a retrial, preferably in a civil court and with recourse to appeal.

New Delhi must step up its responses in the matter, as it seems to have kept it on the backburner, confining itself to fruitless, repeated representations. India must also pursue the issue with Iran, where Mr. Jadhav is believed to have been based for more than a decade, and investigate how he was brought, by force or otherwise, into Pakistan. The timing of the announcement of the death sentence is also being seen in a spy versus spy context, with the recent disappearance of a former Pakistan Army officer in Nepal. These are matters best left to security agencies at the highest level, but the questions around Mr. Jadhav's arrest need to be dispelled. Moreover, this escalation highlights the consequences of the breakdown in the India-Pakistan dialogue process, limiting the channels of communication between the two governments to sort out matters in a sober manner. The government has stood fast on its decision to not hold bilateral talks after the Pathankot attack in January 2016, but this policy is hardly likely to bring the desired results when a man's life hangs in the balance. The Jadhav case requires a proactive three-pronged response from India: impressing on Pakistan that the death sentence must not be carried out, explaining to the international community the flawed trial process, and sending interlocutors to open backchannels for diplomacy for Mr. Jadhav's safe return home.

A prolonged protest

The by-elections in Kashmir were marked by a mix of indifference and violent anger

An election that isn't free is not fair either. With violence by political protesters marring the by-election in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency, resulting in the lowest-ever voter turnout of around 7%, the Election Commission was left with no choice but to put off the by-election in Anantnag. After ignoring the advice of the Union Home Ministry against the conduct of elections in the Kashmir Valley, the EC had to perforce go by the report of the State administration that the law and order situation in Anantnag constituency was not conducive to holding of polls on April 12. Certainly, the EC is right in maintaining that it was not bound to consult the Union Home Ministry before deciding to conduct elections, but as demonstrated by subsequent events, the Centre had called this matter correctly. The security forces were unprepared for the scale of violence, and failed to ensure conditions for free, unrestricted polling. Whatever the reasons or provocations for the violence in Srinagar, which left eight people dead and more than 170 injured, the end result was that most voters chose to stay away from polling stations. One polling station was set afire; many were temporarily shut following attacks. Unlike a general election, where a change of government is possible, a by-election does not interest voters to any great degree. And, unlike in a general election protesters find it easier to disrupt the polling process in a by-election. For voters, the political stakes are low and the physical risks high. Whether they were too scared to vote or they heeded the calls for a boycott of the poll process, the by-election appeared like an elaborate farcical exercise that was robbed of all political legitimacy.

After the higher voter participation in recent years in the Valley, the way the Srinagar by-election unfolded is indicative of a dramatic slide in the political situation. The killing of Burhan Wani, a 'commander' of the Hizbul Mujahideen, by security forces in July last year set off a new cycle of violence in Kashmir that does not seem to have ended to this day as stone-pelting is met with pellet guns. In these circumstances, by-elections may have no political meaning. In any case, without free re-polling in all the booths that witnessed violence, the result in this election counts for little. Ideally, re-polling in Srinagar too should be put off by a few weeks. But Kashmiris will also need a larger political motivation to go to the polling booths, a belief that they are in charge of their own lives and that their vote will count for something. Otherwise staying at home might seem the better option to facing the stones of protesters and the guns of security forces. Time alone will not heal wounds.

No place for scholarship

New guidelines cutting the number of MPhil and PhD students a professor can supervise will kill research



MARY E. JOHN

The claim that something as innocuous as the number of MPhil students that a university teacher is allowed to supervise will determine the future of research in Indian universities must seem far fetched. However, the drastic cuts mandated by the latest (2016) University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines on MPhil and PhD are indeed alarming, and it is worrisome that they have not received the attention they demand.

A three-tier balance

For those unfamiliar with it, research in Indian universities is located at the top rung of a three-tiered structure. The bottom rung is made of undergraduates who account for the vast majority of students in higher education, and are enrolled in a range of disciplines in the arts, social sciences, sciences, technology, and so on. The second rung is expectedly much smaller and consists of student enrolled for two-year post-graduate degrees. The third tier, much the smallest, is that of research students who may either enrol directly in the PhD degree, or opt to do an MPhil degree (usually of two years duration) before eventually going on to the PhD.

The two-stage option is designed to address the need that master's students often feel for additional training and skills before taking on the challenge of conducting original research for several years. This is a common requirement because in India master's level courses do not involve ori-



DEEPAK RICHANDAN

ginal research – they emphasise the assimilation and reproduction of existing knowledge. The MPhil helps to orient students towards the new and entirely different activity of research aimed at adding to current knowledge by asking and answering new questions. Moreover, an MPhil degree makes one eligible for a full-time teaching position at the university and college level, and is thus critical for expanding faculty strength.

Many commentators have remarked on the extraordinary expansion of Indian higher education in recent years. Official statistics show that enrolment has doubled over the past decade, placing us among the largest such systems in the world. Equally remarkable is the restructuring that has accompanied and enabled expansion. Increasing privatisation has meant that the majority of colleges today are privately managed (though many may also receive some government aid).

The oxygen of access

There has also been a widening of access to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are the first from their families to enter higher education. Apart from the very poor who have little chance of going beyond school, the presence

(albeit to varying degrees) of students from rural areas, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Muslims is transforming what until recently was an elite structure. Moreover, women from all these groups are also present in numbers large enough to approach parity with men (official figures for 2015-16 place the share of female enrolment at 46.2%). Even more unprecedented is the fact that this kind of diverse student body is found not just at the lowest rungs of higher education but also at the top. Thanks to the implementation of reservations and the willingness of parents from vulnerable backgrounds to invest in higher education for their children, this transformation is also visible in postgraduate and research level classrooms.

There is, therefore, a tremendous sense of promise associated with this historical moment. Indian higher education is poised to produce new generations of students at all levels, including young researchers from hitherto under- or un-represented groups who can expand and transform the knowledge base of society. They will also form the next generation of university and college faculty. However, instead of enabling and strength-

ening this surge, the UGC's 2016 guidelines (which are mandatory for all institutions from the 2017-18 academic year) appear to be bent on halting and reversing it.

The "vision" of these guidelines, embedded in its various clauses, is to severely curtail the number of MPhil students, perhaps with the intention of doing away with the degree altogether. The previous guidelines of 2009 allowed faculty to supervise up to eight PhD and five MPhil students, with the overall cap intended to regulate faculty workload. Surprisingly and inexplicably, the 2016 guidelines now say that an assistant professor can have just one MPhil and four PhD students; an associate professor two MPhil and six PhD students; and a full professor three MPhil and eight PhD students at a given point of time. Moreover, it has been further decided that only full-time regular faculty of a given department can be supervisors; that arrangements across departments (for interdisciplinary research) would require co-supervisors; and that supervisors from affiliating colleges must have at least two publications in refereed journals to be eligible to supervise.

Keeping in mind that the MPhil is a two-year degree, with supervisors being allotted during the course of the first year itself, these guidelines amount to cutting down on student intake every other year, leading to unviably small cohorts at best. If anything, the significance of the MPhil has only grown in recent times. Today, more than ever before, State universities have been starting MPhil programmes in the pure sciences, social sciences and humanities, and in various interdisciplinary fields such as development studies, human rights programmes and women's studies, and large numbers of students are entering this programme

across the country. Given the transformation in the student body with more and more first generation students making it to this level, there is an acute need for adequate training in undertaking research, including more inventive and rigorous ways of imbuing research methodologies. Several institutions are currently engaged in planning new modes of teaching the kinds of reading, writing and research skills necessary to aid this process. Besides, younger faculty also need new training. Supervising an MPhil student is one of the best ways for an assistant professor to grow as a researcher and teacher, so much so that junior faculty should be encouraged to have more such students, at least initially.

Route to unviability

But the precise opposite is being made to happen. MPhil classes will turn unviable because of low numbers. More students will try to get into PhDs straight from an MA degree and being ill-prepared for the challenges they will face, they are more likely to sink than swim. Faculty will be less equipped to develop as research supervisors. And most important of all, the necessary expansion in faculty strength – both to meet existing severe shortages, particularly in faculty from disadvantaged sections, and to meet the growth in students – will not only be halted but also reversed under the new conditions.

The UGC, under the direction of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, appears in fact to be bent not just on quietly killing the research potential of India's universities, but on diminishing higher education altogether.

Mary E. John is with the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi

Pivot to the Indo-Pacific

Cooperation with like-minded countries gives India more space to emerge as a key regional interlocutor



HARSH V. PANT

At a time when India finds itself consumed once again by its obsession with Pakistan in light of the death sentence pronounced on Kulbhushan Jadhav by a Pakistani military court, two recent visits to India by foreign dignitaries underscore the gradually evolving foreign policy priorities of Indian diplomacy. The visits of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to India this week exemplify not only the country's rising global profile but also its growing stakes in the larger Indo-Pacific.

Positive trajectory

There are now new demands being made on India. And New Delhi seems ready to play ball. Its role as a security provider is visible in the Delhi-Dhaka joint statement which has stressed the need for greater military-to-military training and exchanges, and complimented the armed forces for their professional conduct during joint search and rescue operations in the Bay of Bengal leading to the rescue of a large number of fishermen from

both sides. The defence relationship was the highlight of Ms. Hasina's visit to Delhi this time as it included a memorandum of understanding on a defence framework, and a \$500 million line of credit (LoC) for defence procurement by the Bangladesh military forces, the largest such LoC India has extended to any country so far. What makes this line of credit more significant is that Bangladesh will not be bound to use it to source its supplies only from Indian companies. This is India's way to reposing confidence in the Hasina government that it will not challenge New Delhi's vital interests.

India is also ready to demonstrate its keenness to share its economic growth with its regional partners. It is also extending a \$4.5 billion line of credit to Bangladesh, over and above the existing \$2.8 billion line, to fund around 17 infrastructure projects which includes port upgradation work at the Mongla, Chittagong and Payra ports. Given the critical need for enhancing connectivity in South Asia, India is pushing for early implementation of the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement, aimed at facilitating seamless transport of goods over land customs stations. Bus and train services between Kolkata and Khulna have been started, and there are plans to revive inland waterway channels.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

and Ms. Hasina have both been instrumental in shaping the positive trajectory of this important bilateral relationship. Mr. Modi used his political capital to push through the land boundary agreement (LBA), to swap enclaves India and Bangladesh held in each other's territory, in 2015 and is working towards mitigating differences on the critical Teesta water sharing pact. Ms. Hasina has been equally responsive to Indian concerns. Bangladesh is taking serious steps to deal a decisive blow to separatist Indian insurgent organisations such as ULFA and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland. There is now greater convergence between India and Bangladesh on dealing with fundamentalist forces such as the Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh

and Harkat-ul-Ansar.

For her commitment to strong Delhi-Dhaka ties, Ms. Hasina has faced a lot of opposition at home. Soon after New Delhi and Dhaka signed 22 pacts in key sectors, Bangladesh's Opposition leader, Khaleda Zia, accused Ms. Hasina of "selling out" the country to India to translate into reality her "dream of staying in power for life". Given the size and scale of India, it inevitably becomes part of the domestic political milieu in its neighbouring states. So it will always have to tread cautiously in South Asia where suspicions about New Delhi's intentions run high. But the more India is seen to be reciprocating its neighbours grievances, the better chances it will have of mitigating these tensions.

For a larger Indian role

The other way out for India is to enhance its engagements in the larger Indo-Pacific, thereby getting out of the straitjacket of being a "mere" South Asian power. New Delhi's success in engaging countries such as Japan, Australia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia in recent years is testament to the growing demand in the region for a larger Indian role and presence. Mr. Turnbull's visit to Delhi this week once again showed that India is now widely perceived to be a strong and credible regional force. The two countries pledged to enhance maritime cooperation as they underlined "the importance of

freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, as well as resolving maritime disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)".

Defence cooperation once again is at the centre of this relationship with the decision to hold a bilateral maritime exercise named AUSIN-DEX in 2018. A bilateral exercise of the Special Forces will be held later this year, while the first bilateral army-to-army exercise will also take place in 2018. The two countries should now prioritise the conclusion of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) at the earliest to give economic heft to their growing security interactions.

Despite the hype about the possibility of India emerging as the guarantor of the liberal economic and security order in Asia, there are now new possibilities for reimagining New Delhi's regional and global role. Greater cooperation with like-minded countries in the region and beyond will give it greater space to emerge as a credible regional interlocutor at a time when Washington's policies remain far from clear and Beijing is challenging the foundations of the extant order.

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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.

Save Kulbhushan

News of a Pakistani military court having awarded the death penalty to Indian national Kulbhushan Jadhav on the grounds that he was involved in "espionage and terror activities" is shocking. There is no truth in this. Pakistan's act of denying him a fair trial and failing to provide him a lawyer to defend himself violates the basic norms of law. It is not only a miscarriage of justice but also makes a mockery of the law. Pakistan needs to rethink and reconsider its stand, which can severely damage India-Pakistan ties.

K.R. SRINIVASAN,
Secunderabad

■ The development is reprehensible and diabolical, and there are many loose ends in this case. Most sources say that Mr. Jadhav was on a business visit to Iran, from where he was abducted by Pakistani authorities. If this is so, why are the Iranian

authorities not objecting to the act of abduction conducted on their soil? How can a military court in Pakistan try a civilian who belongs to another country? The trial itself has been conducted in a deceitful manner, without giving the hapless man any opportunity to defend himself. India must try all means possible to ensure that the penalty is not carried out.

K.R. JAYAPRAKASH RAO,
Mysuru

■ Pakistan's decision is a clear indication that it will go to any extent to ensure that India dilutes its tough stance on Balochistan. India should mobilise world opinion against the sentence. New Delhi should also take up the matter at the United Nations at the earliest as a prisoner's rights guaranteed under the Geneva Convention have also been breached.

C.V. ARAVIND,
Bengaluru

Blot on democracy

The Election Commission has done a commendable job in cancelling the R.K. Nagar by-election but it is a well-known fact that this malady is not confined to R.K. Nagar alone (Editorial - "A damning indictment", April 11). The practice of bribing voters through various means and thus influencing them is alive and kicking throughout the length and breadth of the country. While we may proclaim ourselves to be the 'world's largest democracy', it is an open secret that serious malpractices continue unabated during elections, which undermine the legitimacy of the entire process. The EC must leave no stone unturned in punishing the offenders regardless of their political affiliations.

N. VENKATA SAI PRAVEEN,
Punggol, Singaperetale

■ There was plenty of evidence that voters were being bribed – indeed being

showered – with large sums of money in order to vote in favour of the ruling AIADMK (Ammu). Given that the constituency was the centre of attraction right from the beginning, ruling party functionaries were said to be distributing money without any fear. One hopes that once the election is held again, people will be represented by an upright representative who will deliver the goods fairly.

MANI NATARAJAN,
Chennai

Farmers' plight

Prime Minister Narendra Modi appears to have forgotten the relevance of Gandhiji's struggle for the cause of exploited farmers. This is evident from the continuing neglect towards farmers from Tamil Nadu who have been protesting in New Delhi for over two weeks now ("TN farmers spring a surprise", April 11). Though many politicians have extended their support towards their cause, no

action seems to have been taken so far. They have failed those who voted for them. A blind eye towards these desperate farmers at a time when huge tax concessions are given to corporates clearly shows the priorities of our "people's representatives".

ALISHA ABRAHAM,
Hyderabad

■ A large-scale waiver of agricultural loans, involving huge financial deprivation to the nation, cannot be

ordered overnight. Such a decision requires deep deliberation with the ministry concerned and financial experts. Our farmers must realise that going at the issue hammer and tongs will only result in disappointment. The delegation must realise that the powers-that-be will not cower down to such idiosyncrasies.

V. LAKSHMANAN,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A sentence in "Transformative visit" (Editorial, April 11, 2017) read: "Both governments would do well to understand the advice hidden in Sheikh Hasina's message during a speech where she praised 'all parties and all politicians' for coming together and clearing the land boundary agreement, to swap enclaves India and Pakistan held in each other's territory, in 2015. It should have been the enclaves held by India and Bangladesh."

A wrong illustration accompanied the Business page story headlined "Demonetisation resulted in 60% surge in tax filers using our service: ClearTax" (April 9, 2017).

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-2818297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com