

Pak’s nefarious acts

Frantically trying to keep its agenda of creating disturbances in Jammu and Kashmir alive and to providing oxygen to its sponsored but now fast depleting terror movement and arming the last and residual militants in Kashmir , Pakistan has now resorted to dropping of weapons from its drones. In a swift action , the police arrested two militants who had collected the consignment at Vijaypur in Samba sector and were heading towards Kashmir valley. With this, a sinister plot of the terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) has been exposed and the cache of arms , explosives and ammunition picked up from the spot, has further exposed Pakistan after its evil designs in sending to this side armed infiltrators after burrowing tunnels , again in the same Samba sector surfaced only a week or two before . Not only this,Pakistan's fresh desperate attempt to push its infiltrators into our side giving cover of firing and shelling to them, was thwarted on Monday in Khour sector on the LoC in Akhnoor where 3 infiltrators were killed and our four Army jawan sustained serious bullet injuries. The bodies of the three killed infiltrators not picked up by Pakistan from the LoC site till last reports came in , again shows how it inhumanly exploited those who were motivated to cross over and create disturbances here. The hypocrisy of that country and its continuous hostile ambitions towards India by keeping Jammu and Kashmir in limelight by executing terror activities, can be seen repeatedly with such acts, knowing fully that all those "winds" which it had been thinking were blowing in its favour in Kashmir have since changed their "direction" which is manifest in many developments that took place particularly during the last two to three years in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan was destined to draw flaks after flaks from all forums internationally despite sham sentencing to prison terms, a few top terrorists belonging to that country and active on its soil .

Obviously , Pakistan cannot mislead the leadership of FATF , the global money laundering and terrorists financing watchdog, where it is for the last many years under surveillance for terror financing , just to come out of its increased monitoring and placement under penal grey list by "arresting and putting in jail " some terrorists but actively indulges in all nefarious acts to sustain and arm militants to create violence in Jammu and Kashmir. In fact, these acts of Pakistan need to be adequately exposed internationally so that its double standards get increasingly exposed. Using Jammu region, particularly Samba sector for infiltration and picking up and carrying arms and then attempting to reach the destinations in the valley in the instant case, too having surfaced, indicate that despite their "conventional" routes through mountainous regions being snow laden , Samba sector is used for weapons and infiltration. Both the militants arrested between Batote and Ramban on the National Highway, though a matter of great relief, raises questions as to how they managed to reach this far without being apprehended right from Vijaypur up to a place at between Batote and Ramban . That definitely calls for extra vigil since if they would have managed to give a slip to the Police and pass all "nakas" en-route , these weapons reaching the hideout would have created problems .

Since the handler of the terror outfit of JeM residing in Budgam Kashmir as revealed by the arrested militants , had asked the duo to pick up the consignment from the International Border after, probably he had confirmed about dropping of the arms consignment by the Pakistani Rangers' drones, needs a wider and deep investigation so as to break the chain running between the Pakistani Rangers, handlers and agents on this side and the militants for executing such nefarious and diabolic activities aimed at creating violence in Jammu and Kashmir , especially Kashmir valley which is fast returning to peace, normalcy, no frequent hartals and is poised for massive economic development.

Since we cannot drop our guard in respect of the perpetual hostile behaviour and practical acts of interference and sponsoring of terror activities by Pakistan against us particularly in Jammu and Kashmir , it was still never late for "mainstream politicians " of the UT to take bold initiatives in openly condemning such hostile acts of Pakistan and pool in all their efforts in motivating those misled and mis-informed but highly indoctrinated youth who were falling prey to Pakistan's mischief resulting in taking up arms and ultimately getting killed. They could launch motivating campaigns in respect of preventing recruitments in the militant ranks and thus save their lives so that complete peace returned in the UT.

JCCI elections

Recently, there were elections conducted in the Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) whereby new office bearers,viz President,General Secretary,Vice President etc were elected. While we congratulate the newly elected team of the JCCI, we wish them success in their efforts to serve the genuine cause of Commerce and Industry in Jammu and ensure problems and difficulties, if any, faced by it were resolved .

While due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, all sectors and areas of our daily activities suffered, trade and commerce especially the tourism sector suffered the worst. Though we are gradually but pointedly opening up , it is expected that normal and routine activities of trade and commerce shall see absolute normal sailing .The new team of the JCCI can infuse new vigour, agility and dynamism in the Jammu Chamber and work in the interests of development of industrial culture in Jammu .The new team must keep a proper liaison with all the concerned agencies , in Government and otherwise as also with the public to give new dimensional heights to the fair standards of commerce.

Farce behind Pak's FATF actions

Harsha Kakar

Pakistan goes into sleep mode on actions against global terrorism immediately after Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meetings. As the next review appears,its courts and security agencies move on an overdrive sentencing terrorists and locating those which it has declared as missing. All these actions, just prior to any FATF meetings are aimed at hoodwinking the global agency. On the contrary, Pak foreign office spokespersons claim they are doing their global duty by detaining global terrorists. What they have never justified is why does this duty come to fore just prior to FATF meetings.

In the past week,Hafiz Saeed, involved in organising the 26/11 Mumbai attacks and his two associates, Yahya Mujahid and Zafar Iqbal were given 15 years jail terms in a terror financing case. Earlier the court had awarded a jail term to Yahya Mujahid in similar cases. Hafiz Saeed's brother-in-law, Abdul Rehman Makki, was also sentenced to six-month jail term on terror financing. A court also sentenced Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi head of the LeT to five years and a fine. They were all directly involved in the 26/11 terror attacks on Mumbai. However, they were sentenced only in terror financing

cases and not abetting terrorism. Dawood Ibrahim has yet to be arrested and only global pressure would ensure he is suddenly discovered in Karachi. The Pak counter terrorism court also tasked its Punjab police to arrest Masood Azhar, chief of the banned JeM, in a terror financing case. The world is aware that Masood Azhar remains the darling of the Pak army and is well protected including with bullet proof vehicles. He was declared missing in Pakistan a few months ago and has suddenly re-emerged as the FATF meeting is round the bend. In 2014, when Lakhvi was released from prison,reports stated that he had fathered a child during his prison term, displaying privileges enjoyed by terrorists in Pakistan's police custody. The sentenced terrorists would challenge their convictions immediately after the FATF meeting. While the cases are being challenged, they would be granted bail. In case, Pak is out of the Grey List, their hearings would continue being postponed. In case they are retained on the same list, it would commence just prior to the next FATF review and they would be rearrested. Pak, with the backing of China, has sought to deceive the global community by claiming it is acting against terrorist groups, whereas the reality is

vastly different. If this is Pakistan's approach, how would the world crack down on terrorism. A total of 146 Pakistani nationals are currently on the United Nations most wanted terrorists list. As FATF meeting looms large, Pak based terrorist groups are moved to Afghanistan. Pakistan employs every trick in the trade to display that it is acting against terrorist groups but fails to admit that its courts and security agencies only find the time to act, just prior to the FATF meeting and award sentences pre-determined by the army and agreed to by the terrorists. This was evident when the Pakistan Sindh High Court overturned the conviction of al Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Sheikh Saeed, a terrorist India was forced to release during the 1999 IC-814 hijacking, for the 2002 murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl. This overturning was done despite Omar having admitted to the killing. US pressure continues on Pakistan to ensure that Omar Sheikh is not released from prison. It would only be a matter of time before Pak succumbs to terrorist group pressures and Omar Sheikh walks free. The Indian foreign office spokesperson Anurag Shrivastava commenting on the recent Pak action

stated, 'The timing of these actions clearly suggests the intention of conveying a sense of compliance ahead of the Asia Pacific Group meeting and next FATF plenary meeting in February 2021.' The Pak foreign office replied, 'India has no locus standi to comment on the independent judicial mechanisms of Pakistan. In this regard the only 'compliance' that interests Pakistan is abiding by its own statutes and fulfilment of its international obligations.' He added, 'it is yet another Indian attempt to politicise FATF and use its processes against Pakistan. Pakistan reiterates its commitment to impartiality, confidentiality and technical nature of the FATF process.' Pak is aware of the pressure of the FATF and the financial impact of remaining on the Grey List.In the last FATF meeting, FATF president, Marcus Pleyer, cautioned Pakistan that they could not take forever to deliver on their commitments and repeated failure to deliver would result in the country being put in the blacklist.To add to pressures, the US has retained the LeT along with seven other groups as terrorist groups. The fact that these terrorist group leaders are only being booked for terrorism financing and not for terrorist activities displays that Pak is not serious in its current actions.

In 2019, SM Qureshi, Pak's foreign minister, had stated that Government has calculated that Pakistan will face \$10 billion loss annually if it remains in the Grey list. The damage would be greater if it moves into the Blacklist. The FATF members must understand that they need to unite if they desire to stem the flow of terrorism globally. Pakistan remains the largest exporter of terrorists and must be taken to task. Indian foreign minister, S Jaishankar, while addressing aUNSC Ministerial Meeting stated,'Terrorists are terrorists; there are no good and bad ones. Those who propagate this distinction have an agenda. And those who cover up for them are just as culpable.' He was referring to China seeking to back Pakistan and protect their terrorists from being globally listed. With China joining hands with Pakistan on terrorism, it would be impossible for the UN to even define a terrorist, rather than act against nations which harbour, support and employ terrorism as an instrument of state policy. The FATF should insist that Pak based terrorists be prosecuted for terrorism and not terrorist funding. Till then it must continue in the Grey List. Pak must be made a global example.

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Dr Ashwani Mahajan

Some time back it came to be known that a data analysis company named Cambridge Analytica worked in the election campaign of US President Donald Trump based on Facebook data of 87 million people and this company played an important role in Trump's victory. The question is, from where did Cambridge Analytica get Facebook's data, it is clear that it was obtained from the Facebook company itself. While there is evidence of the Facebook company's representatives selling its data, and although Facebook owner Mark Zuckerberg also apologized in this regard, there is no guarantee that such acts will not be repeated in the future. In the year 2018, it was revealed that this same Cambridge Analytica company proposed to work for the Indian National Congress using Facebook and Twitter data to change the trend of voters for the 2019 elections. The website of the company also claimed that this company worked for the winning party in the Bihar elections in the 2010 elections. Misuse of data of social media companies for political parties, is becoming a common practice from the point of view of elections. But the interference of these

Increasing interference in politics

social media companies became more visible in the recent US presidential elections. Almost all the tweets by President Donald Trump had Twitter company's comment, questioning his statement. This naturally played a major role in creating suspicion about all the statements of President Trump. Twitter company has become the centre of unembellished controversy as President Donald Trump's Twitter account was suspended following recent violent demonstrations in the United States.Although it is being argued that Twitter company suspended the account of President Donald Trump because Donald Trump's statements were posing a threat to a peaceful transfer of power in United States, some time ago, the non-suspension of his Twitter account, despite the tweet of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, justifying and instigating violence by a religious group, is raising questions about fairness of Twitter in dealing with similar situations. There is no doubt that these social media companies have a large amount of personal information about the customers using these platforms. These companies

have access and practically right to use all types of data including their social relationships, caste, community, economic status, their locations and movements, their purchases and they can use this data in the interest of political parties of their choice or who pay for the same. In such a situation, they can affect democracy in a wrong way. Although there is no harm if social media is used honestly, but if these social media companies start doing business of influencing politics, then not only democracy and democratic systems in the world but even social fabric will be in danger. Huge power of tech companies

Significantly, in India alone, Facebook has more than 33.6 crore accounts, while the messaging, voice and video call application WhatsApp, operated by this company has more than 40 crore subscribers. Apart from this, Facebook also owns the Instagram app, which is a popular application for photo and video sharing. From this, it can be clearly seen that this company has private, economic and social information (data) of a large population of India. Similarly, Twitter has around 7 crore accounts in India and 33 crore accounts in the world. Although, Social Media apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. provide their services for free, but they use their huge database to increase their income. Similarly, Google company running search engine and many other services, has also been found guilty of misusing its logarithm for unethical profiteering, many times. Today in India, Google and Facebook have become the largest revenue earning companies in terms of advertising. Similarly, other tech companies also have their own business models. No doubt these companies are providing great satisfaction to consumers, due to which their popularity is increasing continuously; however, due to their increasing popularity and the absence of any kind of restraint on these companies, apprehensions are being expressed that they may affect the democratic structure, by disturbing the social fabric and wrongful use of data by impacting opinion for profit. Significantly, there is a complete lack of transparency in the activities and logarithms of tech platforms

run by these companies. And it is also clear that these companies work for profit motive and continue to maximise profit for their shareholders. Therefore, naturally, despite even staying within the purview of the law, these companies can do anything to make a profit. Since electronic social media has come into existence recently, the legal systems of various countries are finding it difficult to control them. In such a situation, in the absence of any legal obligation, these companies can hurt the social and political fabric and democracy. Recently, a very important issue came, when some of the China's mobile apps were engaged in inhuman and anti-social acts, yet it took a long time for the government to ban them. Although such apps have been banned in large number, primarily due to increasing public anger towards China, it will not be an easy task to curb apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter etc. In such a situation, there will always be a danger of these companies influencing democratic systems. What could be the solution? In view of the potential threats of these companies, China doesn't allow Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc, in their country from the very beginning and Chinese apps have been developed as alternatives to Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter etc. India can also try to provide alternatives to these tech platforms, while continuing the existing social media apps. It's notable that after banning a large number of Chinese apps, many types of apps have been developed in the country through Indian start-ups. Similarly, the government can force these companies to keep their data in India in a transparent manner by enacting a law for data sovereignty and data privacy, in order to prevent misuse of data by social media apps. Even by discouraging data mining by these companies, misuse of personal data of people can be reduced. In this era of technology, it is the responsibility of the government to protect people's privacy and country's democratic systems and discourage efforts of these tech companies to destroy the social fabric. In this regard, government cannot escape its responsibility to make laws for effective control of these social media and tech companies. (The author is Associate Professor, Department of Economics, PGD.A.V. College (University of Delhi) feedbackexcelsior@gmail.com

Reforms are part of Budget and beyond

Prakash Chawla

Reforms' are not one-off event but always work in progress, aimed at improving the quality of governance. In the sequence of 'Reform, Perform, Transform', the last word - 'Transform' is most critical because it clearly sets the objective. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had this task cut out for his government right from his first day in office. The target was and is -Transform while Reform and Perform are the means towards it. The Union Budget is one of the most important means of setting specific milestones and reaching there. Again, Within a set of specific milestones, the ones that relate to the overall public good must be reached fast. Government has a huge annual budget of about Rs 30 lakh crore to spend and must choose the expenditure heads diligently, but the choice spells out its policy direction. In his 2014-15 Budget speech, the then Finance Minister late Arun Jaitley had said so: " In the first Budget of this NDA government that I am presenting before the august House,my aim is to lay down a broad policy indicator of the direction in which we wish to take this country". In so much din around us, we would have lost messaging of several key reforms embarked upon by the Modi Government between presentation of its first Budget by Jaitley on July 10, 2014 and the one to be unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1,2021. There have been a slew of transformational and life-changing reforms in the last six and half years , but the work is still in progress and must be so. After all, aspirations of 135 crore Indians cannot be met without 'Reforming, Performing and Transforming' on a continuous basis. Right from its first Budget when hike in foreign direct investment cap in Defence manufacturing from 26 per cent to 49 per cent along with a similar dispensation in the insurance sector was announced, the NDA Government has been only accelerating the reforms. FDI in Defence sector has

now been opened through automatic route up to 74 per cent and even beyond wherever it could result in access to modern technology. While disinvestment road map for the current financial year is not going as per the roadmap, delayed by Covid 19 outbreak, what stands out in the policy dispensation is the decision to go in for outright strategic sale of blue chip PSUs like BPCL, CONCOR and SCI. Such strategic sale could betaken up only during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government in firms like Maruti Udyog and BALCO among others. A decision of far-reaching reforms is the approval given by the Modi Cabinet for monetisation of non-core assets. Importantly, the PSU banks which have now been merged into 12 also fall into the non-core areas. In fact, at a time when the fiscal situation is under stress given the commitments required for healthcare , including the Covid vaccine rollout and Rs 29.87 lakh crore Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, there is a strong case for the quick sale of non-core government assets, including real estate in major metros. The Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, announced in three tranches, as per official estimates, equalled 15 per cent of GDP and it combined measures like job support, easy financing of MSMEs, food relief and a helping hand to the stressed sector. The impact has started showing in terms of a sharper economic recovery; but all this had a huge financial commitment and resources for the same must now be raised through innovative and bold measures. Market conditions are perfectly favourable; the bias against PSU stocks in the secondary market is now giving way to optimism on account of their attractive valuations. Time to go for the kill. Setting a disinvestment target of Rs 3 lakh crore and raking up the funds from abundant liquidity should be eminently achievable. Foreign flows are gushing into our financial markets as India figures quite high in the pecking order of the Emerging Markets (EMs). Buoyed by prospects of V-shaped recovery in the FY'22, the Sensex is in the kissing range of the psychological-

ly important 50,000 mark. As the largest recipient among the EMs, India received USD 23 billion in the calendar year of 2020 in equities alone and the gush continues in the new year. Investors, brushing aside the high valuations, remain bullish on the Indian companies on their top line and bottom line prospects. The great India Story is prominently flashing on stock indices. If you happen to be amongst those who consider the equity market speculative, there is another data that explains how global investors want to go long on the India Story. As much as USD 30 billion FDI (foreign direct investment) was pumped into greenfield and brownfield projects in the first six months of the financial year 2020-21. Even on a most conservative estimate, the FDI inflows for the full FY'21 would easily cross USD 50 billion. Given the geo-political factors at play and the fact the incoming Joe Biden Presidency would not go soft on China, India is being considered as a serious alternative for the global manufacturing giants. As the Prime Minister had recently advised India Inc, we must remain vigilant and become nimble to respond to the fast moving global geo-political scenario. With China, the major manufacturing hub, being in the eye of the storm the job becomes even compelling. After slashing corporate taxes to 22 per cent for existing companies and 15 per cent for new investment, India ranks amongst tax jurisdictions with the lowest rates in the world. It should be projected and promoted as the key pillar of the government's Make in India programme. Returning to the domestic landscape, introduction of Goods and Services Tax was certainly the most important and life-changing reform of the Modi government. The GST rollout had its share of initial problems, but the stakeholders have got a good hang of it by now. The defining contribution of the GST would be to bring in most of the Indian economy into a formal tax structure with consumers and intermediaries, accepting the dispensation as part of life. Realisation that being tax-compliant makes life easier and even less expensive is more

wide-spread now. The government on its part, has cited several examples how GST has made things of everyday use cheaper. For instance, the tax incidence on TV sets, washing machines, water heaters, detergents and cosmetics stands reduced to 18 per cent from 28 per cent in the pre-GST times. The financial inclusion programme, the PM Jandhan Yojana was enabled by the Digital India initiative resulting in reforms which are truly inclusive in nature. Opening 35.27 Jandhan accounts between August,2014 and August, 2019 , of which a large number are linked to UPI (Unified Payment Interface) is something that has transformed the Indian society and consumers at the bottom of the pyramid. Emergence of a large number of Fintech companies with ambitions to go well beyond payment wallets has seeds in the technology-enabled financial inclusion, billed to be largest in the world. As many as 2649 crore financial transactions valued at Rs 161 lakh crore were done on digital platforms. Needless to say, the digital platforms are ready with all the building blocks for a much bigger leap, creating a perfect example of 'creative disruption', if you will. Labour reforms, confused with the 'Hire and Fire', have been ushered in without much fuss. The codification of 29 different and archaic labour laws into four unified code has largely been welcomed, with states like Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan showing alacrity in adopting labour reforms, aligning with their own investment policies. The ensuing Budget is going to be vastly different from the past. The Finance Minister, no doubt, is hard pressed for resources, but she would not be under a scanner for crossing the FRBM Lakhshman Rekha on fiscal deficit. It may be other way round; too much of financial conservatism on expenditure may not go down well with a vast majority of analysts. Besides, this Budget coming as it does in the middle of a global health emergency, would need to build on the reforms of the past six years. The process of transformation has to be never-ending. (The author is a Delhi-based independent journalist) feedbackexcelsior@gmail.com

(The views expressed by the authors are their personal)

Student counselling

Sir,

It is chilly winter in kashmir, and for a student, it is a time to wake up early and rush towards coaching centers. Kashmir is one among the beautiful places on the earth, but, taking its youth into cognizance, they have made this wonderful heaven a wandering one. In kashmir, after passing class 10th examinations, students get a welcome in different coaching centers to opt their streams. But, this time they have to be careful because what ever they will be in future is purely reflected by the subjects they opt. A student must understand and know that why he is opting a particular stream. Consistency, sticking to goals, inquisitiveness, time management and dedication is the key to success. And proper strategy, clear perspective and motivation are three basic factors they need to work upon. I see a number of students wandering in coaching centers. They go in almost every coaching center but, they are still in a dilemma and confusion. I have seen a number of students getting admission in coaching centers without consulting their parents or elders.

Parents, have to give freedom and independence to their children but, to some limits. Parents are known as the best counsellors of a child, but, if they become misers to give right opinions and decisions to their children, then they are responsible for their arrogance. Home is the best school for a child and a child should get proper nourishment here or else he will become unsuccessful in his goals. Parents sometimes force their children to choose medical stream: a notion typical of our society. Children have the right to choose their subject of interest. Parents must encourage them and appreciate their choice and support them fully, this will lead them to achieve their goals easily because if a person has not any sort of interest in studies he can never achieve his goal in life. When parents send their children to outside places far from home to study, they should keep in consideration that their children should not become victims of evils of our society like drug abuse etc that can set a blot on a student's character. Hina Jaan AIIMS Handwara

Sir,

When the farmers are agitating against the recent laws passed by the Central Government, why PM Modi is adamant to continue with these laws against the wishes of the farmers. Why he is favouring Gujaratis, such as Ambani, and others because he is not the Prime Minister of Gujarat only but whole of the country. He should immediately take remedial measures as already more than seventy farmers have lost their lives during the agitation. He is not the monarch but elected by the people's representatives. The delay may cause more anger among the farmers. To avoid further confrontations Prime Minister should immediately repeal the laws as the farmers are the backbone of the society and people as a whole. Rigidity always leads to devastation which create hindrances and affect peace and prosperity of the country. Moreover, laws are always framed for the benefit of the people and if such laws are opposed Government should not make any prestige while withdrawing laws. Narinder Singh Director Information (Retd) J&K Government

Repeal Farm Laws

Readers Write