

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CLEARING THE VIEW

Road fatalities are not caused by drinking, but by drunk driving. Supreme Court has acknowledged the difference

CLARIFYING ITS ORDER requiring liquor vends to be invisible and inaccessible from highways, the Supreme Court has dismissed a petition challenging the denotifications of highways at points where they pass through Chandigarh. This will save urban liquor shops, restaurants and pubs located within 500 metres of highways, whose business was snuffed out by the order which came into effect nationwide on April 1. Earlier, noting that Bengaluru has six national highways passing through the city, Karnataka had urged the Centre to denotify 700 km of national highways and 1,476 km of state highways passing through built-up areas. The Supreme Court's clarification brings relief to several state governments which denotified urban roads to prevent revenue losses following its order.

The court banned the sale of liquor near highways with the best of intentions. India is a global leader in road fatalities and drunk driving contributes significantly to the figure of 1.46 lakh deaths per year. In response to a public interest matter, it was reasoned that the removal of vends and advertising from the vicinity of highways would curb impulse consumption and the pervasive culture of drinking on the road. However, the order was perhaps flawed, conveying the impression that it sought to reduce access to drink, instead of addressing the cause of the high death rate: Drunk driving. There is a significant difference between removing temptation and urging behaviour change. And the loss of livelihoods which the order caused was unwelcome. Now, apart from the dismissal of the petition in the Supreme Court, the Centre has clarified that the order intended to curb drunk driving, and not drinking.

While Karnataka made its case formally, other states like Uttarakhand and Maharashtra had moved to save excise revenues by quietly denotifying state highways where they ran through urban centres, and declining to acknowledge that it was done under the influence of the court order. Now, the Supreme Court's clarification legitimises the arrangement, and it applies to all Indian highways. This is a pragmatic step away from what was clearly an impossible situation. There is now an opportunity to take another significant step, in the direction of nations which have successfully combated drunk driving. Deterrence lies not in the removal of temptation, but the certainty that offenders will be identified and penalised. In the Western countries, deterrence has been based on a fail-safe combination of pervasive traffic cameras, surprise checks and serious punitive measures. While drinking establishments and vends line their highways, drivers are discouraged from going over the limit by the near-certainty of conviction. Rather than harming the hospitality industry by limiting access to alcohol, Indian law must similarly focus on the cause of the problem: Drunk driving, rather than drink.

MUCH ADO

Criticism of Rahul Gandhi's meeting with Chinese envoy, and Congress defence of it, suffers from same narrowness of view

THE AVOIDABLE CONTROVERSY over what should have been a routine, unexceptionable meeting between Rahul Gandhi and China's ambassador to India, Luo Zhaohui, holds many lessons. For the Congress party and its vice president, the incident highlights the need for open lines of communication within the party as well as the perils of a lack of proportion and perspective in its position on complex issues such as India-China relations. The episode also points to the immaturity in India's domestic political conversation when it comes to engagement with countries with whom certain aspects of bilateral ties may be going through a contentious phase.

Leaders across the political spectrum — including chief ministers and those in the opposition — can and do interact with envoys to India. Such meetings often contribute to the depth and width of relations between nations. The meeting between Rahul and Luo, however, became a victim to denials, clarifications and a defensive backlash from India's oldest party. To begin with, the Congress denied that the July 8 meeting took place. Senior party leader and communications department head Randeep Surjewala insinuated that it was "fake news". When the Congress Vice President eventually confirmed the meeting later that same day, he said, quite rightly, that it was his "job to stay informed on critical issues". But, and here's the problem, he also hit out at the government, asking it to explain why three Union ministers were "accepting Chinese hospitality while the border issue is on".

The criticism of Gandhi's meeting with the Chinese ambassador and his defence of it share an underlying assumption: Interactions with the Chinese state and its officials are to be viewed with suspicion in times of turbulence in ties. This has the effect of reducing the broad engagement between two of Asia's oldest civilisations and largest economies to fodder in a game of political one-upmanship guided by short-term considerations. The temptation to see the relationship between India and China — at a time when tensions have been revived on the Sikkim border — through its ruptures rather than its continuities, must be avoided. A glimpse of the maturity that should inform India's ties with China at all moments, and especially in difficult times, can be found in a speech by Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar delivered in Singapore on July 11. "The India-China relationship by now has acquired so many dimensions," said India's top diplomat, "that reducing it to black and white argumentation cannot be a serious proposition." The political class, both in government and opposition, must heed his words.

DON'T PLAY IT AGAIN

Cricket gets a winning combination of coaches. But the selection process points to an unreformed system

After humming and hawing, Indian cricket has hit upon a potentially winning combination of coaches. With the captain- and player-friendly Ravi Shastri as mentor coach, the earnest and legendary Rahul Dravid as batting consultant, and Zaheer Khan who knows more than most about crafty seam bowling, every box has been ticked. The process of arriving at the decision, however, yet again reflects the chaos that governs the system.

Appointing Zaheer and Dravid is a masterstroke that can keep egos in check within the team, and inspire everyone towards the common goal of winning the 2019 world cup. The presence of the well-liked, and well-respected, Dravid can counter fears about the team turning too brash under Shastri. As a coach at India A and U-19, he has earned a formidable reputation. The players cannot but pick up good traits from him. Ditto with Zaheer, who reinvented himself midway through his career as one of the best bowlers of his generation. His skills as mentor have been raved about in the IPL by the likes of Australian Pat Cummins, and his presence would be valuable to the young seamers who look up to him.

But the process of their selection leaves a whiff of unpleasantness behind as it doesn't really show anyone in good light — be it the bumbling BCCI, the cricket advisory committee members, Sourav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar, V.V.S. Laxman, or the Indian captain Virat Kohli, who would have to live with the accusations of being dogmatic and stubborn, or a bully. The good thing is that India embark on a cricket tour of Sri Lanka shortly, and the unsavoury denouement of the Anil Kumble saga can be put behind as Indian cricket moves on.



ARUN PRAKASH

THE CURRENT WEEK has seen the waters of the Bay of Bengal roiled by frothy wakes of warships and submarines of three navies as their jets streak across the skies. The 21st edition of exercise "Malabar" has two aircraft-carriers, a helicopter-carrier, nuclear and diesel submarines, cruisers, destroyers and maritime patrol aircraft belonging to the Indian, Japanese and US navies participating. For a week, these units, divided into "Red" and "Blue" forces will be pitted against each other in mock-combat, involving, surface, under-water and aerial warfare. Naval exercises don't get more complex or sophisticated than Malabar-2017.

For the Indian Navy (IN) it has been a long journey from professional isolation of the non-aligned era, to being the belle of the Malabar ball. Soviet patronage and naval hardware had commenced flowing in the 1960s, but since they never undertook professional interaction or exercises at sea, the IN found itself clinging to outdated NATO doctrines. The disintegration of the USSR saw India losing not only its steadfast political ally and sole purveyor of arms, but also the inhibitions that went with non-alignment. The US, perhaps waiting for this moment, lost no time in despatching Pacific Army Commander, General Claude M. Kicklighter, with proposals for military-to-military cooperation in 1991.

Keen to shed its insularity, the IN initiated the first ever Indo-US naval drills in May 1992. These became the precursor for bilateral exercises with the navies of a dozen other nations, which have become an annual feature on the IN calendar. Having got off to a good start, the Indo-US exercises named "Malabar" were interrupted by US sanctions imposed after India's 1998 nuclear tests. Resumed in 2001, these naval interactions have not only provided the IN invaluable insights into the tactics, doctrines, warfare techniques and best practices of the US Navy, but also enabled periodic self-assessment, using the world's most powerful navy as a professional yardstick.

The path of these exercises has neither been smooth nor untroubled. Externally, China has sustained a determined opposition to Malabar because of its paranoid suspicion that India is colluding with the US in

Making waves

Malabar exercise has far-reaching geo-political impact. India-Japan-US triad must be elevated to strategic status

an attempt at "containment". Consequently, when the 2007 edition of this bilateral exercise, held off Okinawa, was enlarged to accommodate Australia, Singapore and Japan, China issued a shrill demarche, conveying its fear and displeasure. It took another eight years before Japan was formally admitted to make Malabar a tri-lateral.

Domestic opposition to Malabar has come from diverse sources. Notwithstanding the steep decline of Communism as a political force, there is a strong residual streak of leftist ideology in many of India's political parties. At the same time, the right wing has its ultra-nationalists and xenophobes. Thus, an accusation of being "pro-American" can still become a damaging political tool. Another factor that sometimes poses an impediment is the public anger about America's continuing economic and military assistance to Pakistan despite its use of jihad as a strategy and its duplicity vis-a-vis anti-India terrorist groups.

However, it is the far-reaching geo-political impact of these exercises that needs to be kept firmly in sight. Although India's traditional strategy of "non-alignment", and its more recent mutation, "strategic autonomy", have served to preserve its freedom of action, India's past leadership did not allow it to come in the way of national interest. The aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian crisis as well as the impending 1971 Indo-Pak War saw our leaders suspend their beliefs in national interest — in the first case, to seek military aid from the West, and in the second, to sign a treaty of friendship with the USSR.

With the 1998 nuclear tests and the 2005 Indo-US nuclear deal having resulted in a fundamental transformation of India's status, PM Modi has also given clear indications that India's foreign policies will be guided by pragmatism and national interest, rather than idealism. As we note the hostility and aggressive posturing by a rising China, both on our land borders and at sea, we need to recall the words of Greek historian, Thucydides. "It was the rise of Athens," he said, "and the fear that this inspired in Sparta, that made war inevitable." Today, realpolitik demands that India take necessary steps to avoid the "Thucydides Trap" by ensuring a

favourable regional balance-of-power, through cooperation and partnerships; striking short-term alliances if necessary.

Apprehensions about the Trump administration's stance on Indo-US naval relations have been set at rest by repeated mentions, in the recent Trump-Modi joint statement, of Indo-Pacific security, of maritime cooperation and of the significance of exercise Malabar. Japan, too, is easing its laws vis-a-vis foreign military relations. The stage is, therefore, set for the three navies to expand their linkages beyond exercises at sea.

In the realm of maritime warfare, the three navies could derive mutual benefit from their diverse operational expertise. Given China's sinister intent in acquiring bases in the Indian Ocean, and increasingly frequent transit of PLA naval units through our waters, cooperation in strategic anti-submarine warfare as well as maritime domain awareness deserve top priority. Equally, amphibious operations, trade-warfare, maritime interception operations, anti-access concepts and, of course, disaster relief, must receive due importance.

Our navy's indigenous warship-building programme is still heavily reliant on key inputs from foreign sources. We must seek help from the advanced US and Japanese military industrial complexes to acquire the competence for designing and building our own weapons and sensors. Heading our wish list should be electric-drive technology for our amphibious-warfare ships and (hold your breath) nuclear reactors to propel our submarines as well as aircraft-carriers.

Indo-US naval cooperation has, for 25 years, formed the sheet-anchor of bilateral relations, stoically weathering political and diplomatic storms. With the invaluable accession of Japan to this partnership, the India-Japan-US triad must, now, be elevated to strategic status. A proposal worthy of contemplation would be the creation of a "maritime-infrastructure and economic initiative" that reaches out to smaller Indian Ocean nations in an endeavour to wean them away from the Dragon's maw.

The writer is a former chief of the Indian Navy



SATYAM VISWANATHAN

A CRISIS OF MALE IDENTITY

Communal and gender violence in India points to the same backlash

INDIA WILL RING in its 70th anniversary of independence as a modern nation-state that frequently makes global news for medieval lynchings and a rape culture. Violence perpetrated by men unable to reconcile with the gradual upturning of a patriarchal status quo, unable to adapt to new demands being made on masculine identity, is threatening the assumption of stability on which our vast and wonderfully heterogeneous country rests.

Identity can be divided into two broad categories: "Achieved" identity derived from individual endeavours (education, work and so on), and "ascribed" identity that is derived from intrinsic characteristics (religion, ethnicity, gender etc.).

The achieved identity of the Indian male is under attack today, in a hyper-competitive country where aspirations are sky-high but economic growth is sluggish and imbalanced. As employment growth slows to a crawl and access to quality education remains the preserve of a tiny sliver, self-esteem and emotional security are more likely to be found in his ascribed identities.

Meanwhile, as women and historically subjugated communities have (just about) started to gain a toehold into the mainstream through affirmative action and political representation, male anxiety has been further exacerbated. Faced with increased competition and impossible odds in the job market, their ticket to an achieved identity based on

work and material markers is severely threatened. The sense of letdown is heightened by the contrast between the promised abundance of a new era of growth and their harsh lived realities. The increase in violence against women and minorities, rampant moral policing, and attempts to criminalise alternate sexualities are all part of a backlash against perceived threats to male supremacy.

In this environment, speaking to ascribed identity is a winning formula for any political party. Hindu male privilege is vastly under-appreciated by its main beneficiaries. It is the privilege of having, by virtue of a majority share of the population, one's customs, appearances and lifestyle choices as the default norm. It is the privilege of not being defined as the "other". For debatable historical reasons (rooted in perceived emasculation by Mughals and the British), the modern Indian nation-state inherited a dangerous privileged Hindu male psychology of victimhood. Atal Bihari Vajpayee referred to it as the mindset of "a majority community with a minority complex".

By speaking with a forked tongue about *vikas* and *Hindutva* at the same time, our ruling party ensures it finds resonance with India's male population (through their frustrated aspirations). When achieved identity is not being validated, ascribed identity is the panacea. The cow protection narrative being pushed today is part of a larger attempt to restore the supposedly lost glory of a mus-

cular Hindu India. In tandem with the deliberate conflation of nationalistic sentiment with unquestioned support for the ruling party, these narratives serve to legitimise Hindu male control of the levers of power.

The cold math and ends-justify-means logic of democratic elections enables such targeting of minorities. Republicans in America realised more than 50 years ago that when a population (black Americans) has representation in the low teens, there is no need to appease them. The Southern Strategy designed to target and alienate minorities ensued and its consequences can be felt until today. Despite the election of a black president in 2008, Donald Trump came to power on the back of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim stances, and endorsement by the Ku Klux Klan. The challenges of racism continue to bedevil America despite tremendous social progress in the last half century.

A similar strategy has been acted upon in India since 2014. Unlike America which saw 40 years of continuous economic growth between the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and the election of Barack Obama, India operates from a context of mass poverty and huge institutional obstacles to consistent growth. The lure of ascribed identity, of targeting the "other" will not diminish in our context, unless purposefully countered.

The writer is a consumer researcher

JULY 13, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

JP TO BIHAR MEDICOS
JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN TOLD the students in Bihar to withdraw their agitational means and settle disputes through negotiations. In an appeal to Bihar students, JP said out that he is pained to learn about the strike of the medical students in Bihar. Whatever be the grievances of the medical students, they owe a special responsibility, unlike other students, to the sick and the diseased, he said.

TOP COP SURRENDERS
THE FORMER DIG (Range), Delhi. P.S. Bhinder surrendered himself before the chief metropolitan magistrate, Mohammed Shamim. A warrant was issued following an application

by the CBI that he was wanted in connection with the alleged police conspiracy to murder Sundar dacoit and was evading arrest. Shamim remanded Bhinder to two-days judicial custody.

EMERGENCY ROMANCE
A YOUNG MAN who proposed to a woman magistrate found himself in jail in Alwar district of Rajasthan during the Emergency. The young man had proposed to the woman magistrate in a "perfectly honourable fashion". Unfortunately, his proposal coincided with the proclamation of internal emergency which empowered any magistrate to detain a person on grounds of threat to the security

of the state under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). The magistrate complained about the young man to a police friend of hers who in turn hauled him away to jail. This particular detention has been referred to the Shah Commission by the dejected young man who wants to know if his "marriage proposal to magistrate" really constituted a threat to the security of the state.

SOVIET SKYJACKERS
THE SOVIET UNION officially asked Finland for the extradition of two Soviet skyjackers, 19-year-old Alexander and Gennady Selushko, 20, who forced an Aeroflot flight bound for Leningrad to fly to Helsinki.



THE IDEAS PAGE

And everyone lost the game

The selection of India's cricket coach played out as a roast that lampooned the stalwarts of the game and the system they are a part of



SANDEEP DWIVEDI

Q: How many men does it take to sack an India cricket coach?
A: One, in case the man is Virat Kohli.
Q: How many men does it take to pick an India cricket coach?
A: Officially nine: A three-member committee of administrators, the BCCI CEO, secretary, manager cricket operations and a high-profile advisory committee of Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and V.V.S. Laxman. Actually, one — Virat Kohli.

WHEN A SIMPLE variation of the light bulb joke sums up Indian cricket's farcical state of affairs, while getting dragged for a month and half, it ceases to be funny. It was in the last week of May that the BCCI, when pressed by Kohli to replace coach Anil Kumble, asked former players to post their CVs at coachappointment@bcci.tv.

Trust the charmingly acerbic Farokh Engineer to foresee the satirical drama that was to follow. Engineer disdained the coach selection process, saying greats of the game need to be invited for an interview and not made to apply like clerks or purchase officers. Even Engineer wouldn't have anticipated that in the days to come the search for the next India coach would end up as some grand diabolical roast that lampooned the stalwarts of the game and the system they were part of.

In hindsight, had the petulant skipper been indulged early by putting sugary sweet Ravi Shastri in a cone or on a stick — depending on his preference of course — and handing it to him in May itself and not as late as mid-July, the sun would have continued to shine brightly from the rainbow-hued skies of cricketopia. A few tears would have been shed for the outgoing coach but remember, at the end of the day, Anil Kumble was a bowler. The 619 wickets are fine, thanks for the effort, but he wasn't the Fab Four, was he?

As for Tendulkar, Ganguly and Laxman, with their halos glowing ever so brightly, they would have continued to wave and smile at fans through their retirement years. The BCCI suits would have strained their hands patting their own backs. The Committee of Administrators, for overseeing the quick coach switch, would have expected to get a "very good" from the bright red pen of Supreme Court in the margins of their homework book. All they needed to do was give Shastri to Kohli the moment he made a face. It was as simple as giving a candy to a child.

They eventually did that — late night on July 11 — but long after the ceiling fan at Indian cricket's Hall of Fame had thrown the fertiliser around. It was ugly from the start. The initial cast was: Kumble, the conniving autocratic alpha male; Sehwal, the establishment candidate; Shastri, the yes man. It's easy to blame the media for this name-calling and ridicule them for trusting their sources but they were merely being messengers. There were insiders ready to express their angst, or on some occasions, pedal their agenda.

After the three protagonists came the perpetual optimists — Tom Moody and Richard Pybus. You wondered what chance



CR Sasikumar

these outsiders had in this reunion of men who had spent their entire youth together. How could Paaji, Dada and Lachhubhai pick Moody or Pybus over Viru or Ravibhai? A more representative panel than the one that had three close buddies from the same generation would have been more suited for this job. More so in this season of revamp, when the howling winds of change were carrying words like conflict-of-interest and good governance from the rooms of the Supreme Court to the cricket maidans.

Once Kohli remained stubborn and rejected his one-time seniors' call to sort out his differences with Kumble, the spotlight was on Ganguly. That's because Shastri had re-applied. Just a year ago, Ganguly had rejected Shastri, even humiliated him, by not turning up to interview him and asking Kumble to apply. Till a day before the eventual announcement, Ganguly seemed to be hinting it was anybody but Shastri.

It all changed overnight. Surprisingly, Ganguly hasn't yet thrown a fit, a tantrum or a resignation letter. Had Shastri improved as a coach in a year's time or has Ganguly mellowed? What happened to the man who had kept Steve Waugh waiting? Where was the prince who took on the establishment? By all accounts, Ganguly too loves being in the commentary box and sitting on the Bengal cricket chief's throne at Eden Gardens. He is also an expert on a news channel. It so happens that the same media group that has Ganguly on its rolls first broke the stories about Kumble quitting and Shastri's selection. Someone needs to run a fine comb into Ganguly's media contracts to see if he, along with giving expert comments, also needs to break stories.

Then there's V.V.S. Laxman who shares the dug-out with Moody during the IPL season — the latter was among the coaching aspirants. Laxman is said to have recused him-

A few tears would have been shed for the outgoing coach but remember, at the end of the day, Anil Kumble was a bowler. The 619 wickets are fine, thanks for the effort, but he wasn't Fab Four, was he? As for Tendulkar, Ganguly and Laxman, with their magnificent halos glowing ever so brightly they would have continued to wave and smile at fans through their retirement years. The BCCI suits would have strained their hands patting their own backs. The Committee of Administrators, for overseeing the quick coach switch, would have expected to get a 'very good' from the bright red pen of Supreme Court. All they needed to do was give Shastri to Kohli the moment he made a face. It was as simple as giving a candy to a child.

self during Moody's presentation. Thankfully, no one from the Mumbai Indians dressing room applied or else Tendulkar too would be doing the same. The meeting room would have needed a revolving door.

Such situations arise since these are not paid panelists. Unpaid part-timers on ad-hoc committees can't be held accountable. While most sporting bodies globally are embracing professional sports administration, cricket's superpower believes in honorary roles. They still want the world to believe that India's former greats live on air and adulation. Our superheroes can't have salary slips tucked in the pockets of their thighs.

The BCCI officials too came across as bungling figures. They first failed to smell the dressing room rift, they later brazened it out and eventually got beaten by the media in announcing the name of the new coach. At the end of it all, the SC-appointed administrators were sporting a forced smile, exposing their lack of teeth. They weren't informed when the BCCI, in a bid to accommodate Shastri, extended the deadline to apply for the coach's job. It didn't disturb them that the cricketers' committee was in a conflict of interest situation.

A day after the coach saga ended, they sent out a statement. Defining the role of a coach they said, "A coach is a mentor ... a friend and an elder buddy. The coach has to provide backroom support." They could have just said the coach has to be Ravi Shastri. They go on to conclude that they wanted to put the "immediate past to rest" and hoped that the sun shone brightly from the rainbow hued skies of cricketopia.

Postscript: Those who bought that dream also bought flying pigs and walking fishes.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"There now be no doubt: The Russia meddling story is not just smoke but fire. Donald Trump Jr.'s interactions with Russians during last year's presidential campaign were abnormal and alarming."

— THE WASHINGTON POST

ABC of autonomy

Questions about the transparency and accountability of autonomous bodies must be answered



BIBEK DEBROY

THERE IS A Committee for Review of Autonomous Bodies (ABs), chaired by Ratan Watal. The committee's interim report is not in the public domain. Media reports and comments on what the committee has recommended, even in the interim, are therefore premature. They are uninformed and misinformed. This choice of words should remind you of a quote ascribed to Mark Twain. "If you don't read the newspaper, you're uninformed. If you read the newspaper, you're misinformed." The choice of quote is deliberate, since there is no evidence Twain ever said, or wrote, anything of the kind. The quote itself is uninformed and misinformed.

Instinctively, everyone understands the word "autonomy" and hence, "autonomous body". However, private enterprise is also self-governing and independent of direct government influence or control. Therefore, if a review is being contemplated, there must be something beyond notions of self-governance and self-rule. The Right to Information Act's definition of "public authority" provides some inkling of what one is after. "Public authority means any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted (a) by or under the Constitution; (b) by any other law made by Parliament; (c) by any other law made by State Legislature; (d) by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any (i) body owned, controlled or substantially financed; (ii) non-government organisation substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate government".

If we leave out NGOs, we have ingredients of a definition. First, an AB is set up by the government for a specific purpose. Second, it is independent in day-to-day functioning, but the government has some control over ABs. Third, the government funds ABs in some way — revenue expenditure, capital expenditure, or both. In 2012, the CAG Compliance Report for ABs, Report No. 33 of 2011-12, stated: "During 2010-11, the ministries of the Union Government released grants/loans aggregating Rs 46,449.48 crore to 496 autonomous bodies." Note that these are 2010-11 figures. Incidentally, we are talking about Union government-level ABs and the Ratan Watal Committee is also about such outfits. There are other ABs at the state government level.

In 1955, there were 35 ABs. Today, there are at least 679 ABs. I used the expression "at least" deliberately. We have information about 679 ABs. The actual number of ABs could be marginally more. The oldest is clearly The Asiatic Society, established in 1784 by William Jones. In those days, even if the objectives were laudable, one didn't look to the government for money. At best,

one asked for land and even as late as the 1960s, sought financial assistance for constructing buildings. The Asiatic Society probably started taking recourse to government funding in 1984, when it became an institution of national importance. Of the 679 ABs, half were set up between 1984 and 1989.

Joseph Nye coined the expression "soft power" a bit later, in 1990. Several ABs are supposed to provide content that can feed into India's soft power aspirations. Perhaps that's why, until recently, they constantly faced soft budget constraints. They obtained nearly Rs 46,500 crore in 2010-11. In 2017-18, 679 ABs obtained Rs 72,200 crore. Other than the 2016 Report of Expenditure Management Commission (Chaired by Bimal Jalan), consider Rule 229 in General Financial Rules, 2016. This is on general principles for setting up ABs and I will quote only one clause. "Peer review of autonomous organisations — Ministry shall put in place a system of external or peer review of autonomous organisations every three or five years depending on the size and nature of activity. Such a review should be the responsibility of the concerned administrative division of the ministry/department and should focus, *inter alia*, on: (a) the objective for which the autonomous organisation was set up and whether these objectives have been or are being achieved; (b) whether the activities should be continued at all, either because they are no longer relevant or have been completed or if there has been a substantial failure in achievement of objectives; (c) whether the nature of the activities is such that these need to be performed only by an autonomous organisation; (d) whether similar functions are also being undertaken by other organisations, be it in the central government or state governments or the private sector, and if so, whether there is scope for merging or winding up the organisations under review; (e) whether the total staff complement, particularly at the support level, is kept at a minimum, whether the enormous strides in information technology and communication facilities as also facilities for outsourcing of work on a contract basis, have been taken into account in determining staff strength; and whether scientific or technical personnel are being deployed on functions which could well be carried out by non-scientific or non-technical personnel etc. (f) whether user charges including overhead/institutional charges/management fee in respect of sponsored projects, wherever the output or benefit of services are utilised by others, are levied at appropriate rates; and (g) the scope for maximising internal resources generation in the organisation so that the dependence upon government budgetary support is minimised".

Since public resources are involved, and all resources have trade-offs, I think these questions are entirely justified and no, they wouldn't have been asked between 1984 and 1989. Part of the resentment about the Ratan Watal Committee seems to be because questions are being raised about transparency and accountability of ABs. Culpability (C) has been added to AB. That's the ABC of it.

The writer is member, Niti Aayog. Views are personal



TELESCOPE

BY SHAILAJA BAJPAI

A yatra, a blind alley

After Amarnath attack, a question: Is it only politicians who play politics?

"THERE ARE TWO Indias," said the anchor on Tuesday evening — one that stands in "solidarity" against terrorism; the other which spreads "fear" and "mistrust" (Republic). Which India do you choose?

On the one hand, there was the India represented by a composed Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh who, on Tuesday, lauded Kashmiris for condemning the terrorist attack on a bus of Amarnath yatis with a "salute" and said he believed in "Kashmiriyat". On the other hand, there was Major General G. D. Bakshi, red-faced and swollen with anger and outrage over alleged inaction: "Kaam keejije... (those responsible for the attack) should be hunted down in two or three days".

On the one hand, leaders across the political spectrum, on TV news, denounced the terrorist attack and offered condolences to the families of the bereaved — Rajnath Singh, other Union ministers, J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, NC leader Omar Abdullah, Ghulam Nabi Azad (Congress), Lalu Prasad (BJD), etc. In the headlines, condemnations and sympathy from President Pranab Mukherjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress President Sonia Gandhi, CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury,

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee (TMC) indicated that "India stands united" (Republic).

On the other hand, News X, Zee News, Times Now and Republic went after what the latter in its promo called, "bleeding hearts", "Pak terror proxies". Times Now claimed, "The Opposition won't take a stand. Even now RaGa and Co appease..." In the evening, it flashed photos of Omar Abdullah and Ghulam Nabi Azad, suggesting their condemnations were mere lip service. News X derided "Netas (who) bicker", asked them to "Put India First. Show maturity" and proclaimed, "What a time for politics!"

But who was playing politics here — the politicians or the news channels? Why did there seem to be a determination to divide even when everyone across the board united against terror?

Zee News and Zee Hindustan talked of the blame game and wanted immediate retaliation: "Desh maange jawab", "Badla lo" — something that was echoed by families of those bereaved. But they also had questions. In Mumbai, Nirmala's family was in tears. Her husband wondered why no one was there to help the people in the bus; a female relative wailed — what kind of security was

in place? (Zee Hindustan).

India Today said that there were "serious deviations" by the bus from the norms set out for yatri buses. News 9 wondered if there had been a security lapse while News X asked BJP's Ram Madhav, in charge of party affairs in Kashmir how, in spite of intelligence alerts, could such an attack take place? Legitimate questions. And the same questions were raised by some opposition leaders who were promptly accused of playing politics by the channels mentioned above. Do you think that perhaps some news channels suffer from selective hearing? Whether or not they do, some certainly appear to practise selective questioning. It is by no means anyone's case that politicians should not be cross-questioned; by all means ask questions but ask them of all politicians. And should questions be put to those who govern and are therefore, in a position to take decisions or should questions be asked of politicians out of power? What is more in the public interest?

If there was one thing all news channels agreed upon, however, it was Salim Sheikh, the driver of the ill-fated bus who continued to drive through the welter of bullet shots — he was hailed as a hero, or in the words of

CNN News 18, "India salutes Salim". There couldn't have been a channel which didn't interview him and herald his courage under fire.

For the rest, the coverage was more sober than it was when the Uri attack took place last autumn or even during the recent lynching of police officer Mohammed Ayub Pandit. Monday night, the terrorist attack took precedence over the bickering on channel debates and through Tuesday morning, the coverage was about developments on the ground — news more than views.

Lastly, a word about DD Sports coverage of the 22nd Asian Athletics Championships. Poor. The commentary was often not professional: Commentators didn't always know who had won, got the names of the winners wrong — Lili Das instead of Archana Adhav in the 800 metres (she was disqualified later), for instance. The cameras could not capture all angles of the track so you could only follow the leaders and the studio chat was idle: "As you see people are pouring into the stadium," said one presenter when you could clearly see the almost completely empty stands behind him.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DIVISIVE POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Coming together' (IE, July 12). The fabric of the syncretic culture in Kashmir is deteriorating due to dirty games played by power hungry politicians. Instead of integrating the people of the state, bringing the regions nearer, creating harmony among communities and fulfilling the aspirations of the youth, our leaders are busy in negative criticism of their counterparts. The low standard of politics was exhibited within an hour of the Amarnath attack when the blame game started.

Subhash Vaid, Noida

ABSURD COMPARISON

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A midnight pledge, 70 years later' (IE, July 12). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's has excellent oratorical skills, but to declare him a statesman is absurd. Seventy years after Independence, evoking Jawaharlal Nehru's speech to praise the GST speech is ridiculous. The GST era has just begun; we are still miles away from an ideal, low and single rate tax regime. There are concerns relating to developing technologically-enabled compliance systems.

Kush Mehndiratta, New Delhi

RESTRAINT NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO article, 'The Demons of Aadhaar' (IE, July 12). Only the UIDAI can complain against

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

the misuse of Aadhaar, which is also its implementing agency — hence, there is a conflict of interest. How Aadhaar sits with privacy and the need for a privacy law is another issue. Such issues are with a constitutional bench of the Supreme Court. It would be prudent if the government restrains its zealotry on Aadhaar till the case is decided.

Chandan Pandey, via email



SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

We are all a little broken. But last time I checked broken crayons still color the same.

BANKSY (@therealbanksy), 1.6 million followers on Twitter. Banksy is an elusive Britain-based graffiti artist and political activist whose identity remains unverified. The Twitter bio says "fan account"; it's uncertain who manages it.

A long, up-and-down journey

The Amarnath Yatra symbolises the best of Kashmir's old syncretic ethos. It has had its moments of crisis, but a militant attack on pilgrims remains unacceptable to the Valley at large. BASHAARAT MASOOD and MUZAMIL JALEEL tell the story.

The Discovery

Legend has it that when Lord Shiva decided to tell Parvati the secret of his immortality (Amar Katha), he chose the Amarnath cave deep in the Himalayas in south Kashmir. The cave, 3,888 m above sea level, can be reached only on foot or by pony, travelling 46 km from Pahalgam or 16 km from Baltal along a steep, winding mountain trail.

According to lore, the cave was discovered by a Muslim shepherd, Buta Malik, in 1850. Malik was high up in the mountains with his herd when a Sufi saint gave him a bagful of coal. Opening the bag after returning home, Malik found it to be full of gold. The ecstatic shepherd ran to thank the saint but couldn't find him — instead, he found the cave and the ice lingam.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims make the trek up to the shrine. There is no official record of when the Yatra began. According to the Purohit Sabha Mattan, which organised the Yatra until 2000, the pilgrimage was initially for 15 days or a month. In 2005, the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, which took over from the Sabha, decided to extend the pilgrimage over nearly two months.

The ice lingam is formed by a trickle of water from a cleft in the cave's roof. The water freezes as it drips, forming, over time, a tall, smooth ice stalagmite. The Shiva lingam gets its full shape in May, after which it begins to melt — by August, it is just a few feet in height. On the left of the Shiva lingam are two smaller ice stalagmites, representing Parvati and Lord Ganesh.

The Shrine Board

The family of Buta Malik remained the traditional custodian of the shrine, along with Hindu priests from the Dashnami Akhara and Purohit Sabha Mattan. This unique ensemble of faiths turned Amarnath into a symbol of Kashmir's centuries-old communal harmony and composite culture. In 2000, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah's government intervened, saying facilities for the Yatra needed to be improved. The Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board was formed with the Governor at its head, and Malik's family and the Hindu organisations were evicted. Streamlining of the Yatra came at the cost of destroying perhaps its most unique aspect.

Crises and calm

The first security threat to the pilgrimage came in 1993, when the Pakistan-based Harkat-ul-Ansar announced a ban on the Yatra — ostensibly to protest the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and to demand the removal of bunkers at the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar. There was widespread condemnation of the dictate, local militant groups did not buy into it, and the Yatra progressed unhindered through the years of peak militancy.

In 2000, 25 people, including 17 pilgrims, were killed in a massive militant attack on the Pahalgam base camp. This was the first direct militant attack on pilgrims; over the next two years, several yatras were killed in big and small attacks.

As the gun took the backseat in Kashmir and public protests came to define the separatist struggle, the Yatra became conflict-neutral. There were no major incidents after 2002; even during the massive protests against the transfer of government land to the Amarnath Shrine Board in 2008, the Yatra remained unaffected. Even as the Valley and Jammu's Hindu majority areas were sharply divided along communal lines, mohalla committees organised langars for yatris in Srinagar and Ganderbal districts. This situation remained unchanged during the 2010 and 2016 summer uprisings.

Political controversy

Tensions between Governor Lt Gen S K Sinha and Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's coalition government escalated sharply after the Governor, as chairman of the Shrine Board, unilaterally extended the duration of the Yatra. The Chief Minister rejected the extension on grounds of the additional burden it would put on the security forces and the administration, as well as concerns over the weather. Sinha's Principal Secretary, Arun Kumar, wrote to Forest Secretary Sonali Kumar — who was also his wife — and got around 4,000 kanals of forest land transferred to the Shrine Board.



THE YATRA



THE CAVE



THE SHRINE

est land transferred to the Shrine Board. The government struck down the order and slapped a show-cause notice on Sonali Kumar for stepping out of line.

After Ghulam Nabi Azad took over as CM, Sinha wrote to Deputy Chief Minister Muzaffar Hussain Beig, seeking forest land in Nunwan, Pahalgam and Baltal, and the setting up of an independent development authority run by the Raj Bhawan. The government didn't agree to the second proposal, but did divert 800 kanals of forest land to the Shrine Board.

A continuing goodwill

An attack on Hindu pilgrims has always faced mass public disapproval in Kashmir. This time too, no militant outfit has taken responsibility for the attack — rather, every militant organisation has issued statements condemning it. Last June, Hizbul commander Burhan Wani had issued a video statement saying the Amarnath Yatra would never be attacked. The separatist leadership has strongly condemned Monday's attack. The militants are seen to have breached a red line, and it is clear that the larger Kashmiri society resents it.

The involvement of a Muslim family with a Hindu pilgrimage in Kashmir isn't, in fact, restricted to Amarnath. Chhota Amarnath in Bandipore for generations had a chowkidar from a local Muslim family, who were also the neighbours of the Hindu priest's family. Many shrines, both Hindu and Muslim, are revered by both communities. The Amarnath pilgrimage has existed in a larger narrative in which Shaivite and Sufi practices were fused together in a composite culture and tradition. Though this age-old syncretic ethos received a serious blow by the circumstances that led to the migration of Kashmiri pandits in 1990, the Amarnath Yatra remained a signifier of the Hindu-Muslim bond.

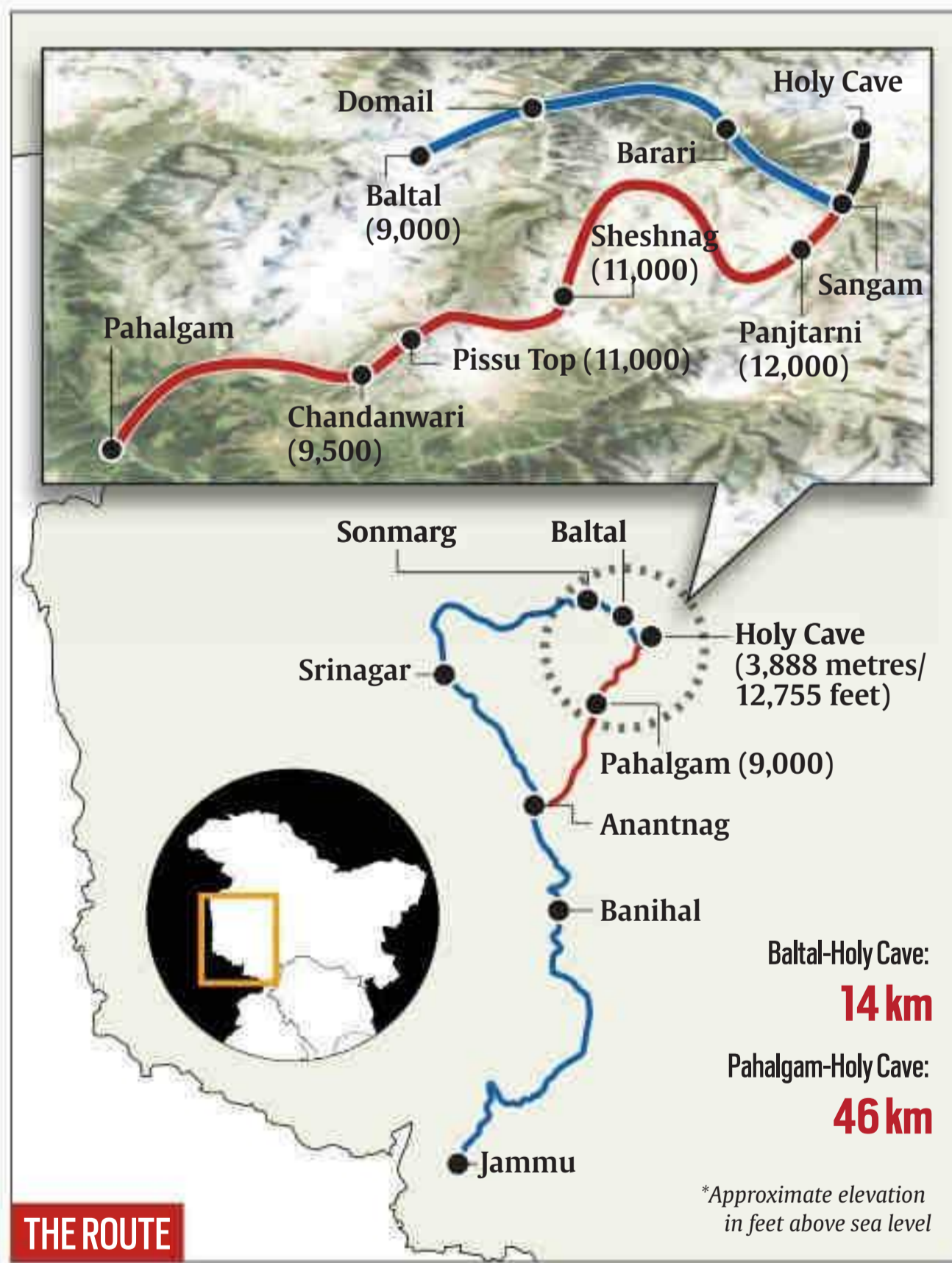
PAST ATTACKS

PAHALGAM, AUG 1, 2000
25 KILLED
Militants tossed hand grenades and fired indiscriminately at the Pahalgam base camp. 25 people were killed, including 17 pilgrims, six local people and two security personnel, apart from the two militants. 36 people were injured.

SHESHNAG, JULY 20, 2001
13 KILLED
Late night, a militant threw two grenades at the pilgrims' camp, killing two policemen. An exchange of fire between the militant and security personnel followed, at the end of which the militant killed himself. 13, including the two policemen, were killed.

NUNWAN, AUG 6, 2002
9 KILLED
Three militants fired on yatris and CRPF personnel guarding their camp near Pahalgam. Nine people were killed and 30 were injured. There were several other attacks on pilgrims in the weeks leading up to this attack.

BIGGEST KILLER: WEATHER
In September 1996, over 200 pilgrims had died and thousands fallen ill after freezing rain and snow lashed the route for three continuous days.



THE ROUTE

Don Jr met a Russian offering dirt on Hillary. Is that collusion?

CHARLIE SAVAGE

WASHINGTON, JULY 12

THE REVELATION that President Donald Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, agreed to meet with a Kremlin-linked lawyer in June 2016 after being promised damaging information about Hillary Clinton has escalated discussion about whether the Trump campaign colluded with Russia's interference in the election.

An intermediary promised the younger Trump that a "Russian government attorney" would provide "very high level" dirt on Clinton as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr Trump". The President's son replied: "If it's what you say I love it."

Trump Jr, his father's campaign chairman at the time, Paul Manafort, and Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law and adviser, met

with the Russian lawyer on June 9, 2016. Special Counsel Robert S Mueller III is currently investigating the Trump-Russia affair.

So, what exactly is collusion?

In general parlance, "collusion" means working together, usually in secret, to do something illicit. But the term has no defined legal meaning. Lawyers instead talk about the offence of "conspiracy", which, in criminal law, is generally understood as an agreement by two or more people to commit a crime — it does not matter whether they actually do it. Each conspirator can be held responsible for the illegal acts committed by others in the arrangement.

Is the June 9, 2016 meeting enough to prove conspiracy?

The events made public in the past few days are not enough to charge conspiracy, said



Donald Trump Jr defended himself on conservative media personality Sean Hannity's talk show on July 11. AP

Renato Mariotti, a former federal prosecutor. Still, he said, the revelations are important because if further evidence of coordination

emerges, the contents of the emails and the fact of the meeting would help establish an intent to work with Russia on influencing the election. "What this email string establishes is that Don Jr was aware that the Russian government wanted to help the Trump campaign, and he welcomed support from the Russian government," Mariotti said.

What else is needed to establish conspiracy?

Evidence of an agreement to violate a specific criminal statute, i.e., to commit a crime. "Anytime you are talking about coordinating or collusion, you are talking about the possibility of conspiracy charges," said Samuel W Buell, a former federal prosecutor who teaches criminal law at Duke University. "But conspiracy is not a crime that floats by itself in the air. There has to be an underlying federal offence that is being con-

spired to be committed."

Was election law violated?

Section 30121 of Title 52 makes it a crime for a foreigner to contribute or donate money or some "other thing of value" in connection with an American election, or for anyone to solicit a foreigner to do so. Legal experts struggled to identify a precedent for prosecutions under that statute, but that phrase is common in other federal criminal statutes covering such crimes as bribery and threats, said Richard L. Hasen, an election-law professor at the University of California, Irvine. In other contexts, courts have held that a "thing of value" can be something intangible, like information.

Robert Bauer, an election-law specialist who served as White House counsel in the Obama administration, argued that this statute covers the Russian government's paying its spies and hackers to collect and dis-

Shadow over tourism: 30% pilgrims visit other sites too

FOLLOWING A dismal summer, people in the tourism business in the Valley had pinned their hopes on the Amarnath pilgrimage. The militant attack on Monday that killed seven and wounded 19 has also riddled their hopes.

More than three and a half lakh people went on the pilgrimage every year from 2013 to 2015 and those in the tourism trade estimate that around 30% of pilgrims end up also visiting other destinations in the Valley.

"The Amarnath pilgrimage affects our tourist season in a positive way," said Rauf Trambo, president, Adventure Tour Operators Association of Kashmir. "We don't know the exact economics of the Yatra as there's been no study of it. But certainly 25-30 per cent of these pilgrims would double as tourists."

Kashmir's Director, Tourism, Mehmoed Ahmad Shah, concurred. "We don't know exactly, but at least 30% of the pilgrims visit different tourist destinations after completing the pilgrimage," he said.

Last year, when protests rocked Kashmir in the aftermath of Burhan Wani's killing, relatively fewer numbers — 2.2 lakh — went on the Yatra. But more than 1.5 lakh pilgrims visited the Holy Cave in the first 13 days of this year's Yatra. The numbers were very high in 2011 and 2012 — 6.2 lakh and 6.3 lakh respectively.

According to Trambo, the larger chunk of pilgrims goes only to the shrine, using their own transport, and relying on social organisations or charities for food. "But the other group, which makes up almost a third of the total, spends time in the Valley. They book hotels and houseboats, hire local taxis, and travel around. This group adds to our economy. Our rough estimates are that pilgrims contribute around 20% to the tourist economy," Trambo said. Since the Yatra began on June 29, deserted tourist destinations have seen the "return of some hustle and bustle", he said.

Until July 8 last year — the day the Hizbul's Wani was killed, triggering a spiral of protests and shutdowns — more than six lakh tourists had visited the Valley. This year, the corresponding number is less than two lakh, say tourism officials.

"The night this (Amarnath) attack happened, at least 100 of our taxis returned empty from Jammu fearing violence," said Ghulam Nabi Pandav, chairman of the Kashmir Tourist Taxi Operators Association. "At least 75% of our taxis are standing idle," he said.

Pilgrims who fly in to Srinagar typically hire local taxis, Pandav said. "I think at least 20% of these pilgrims avail of our services," he said. The worst affected, however, would probably be the ponywallas, small-time shopkeepers and labourers at Baltal and Pahalgam, the two base camps for the Yatra. A Baltal ponywalla typically makes around Rs 2,000 for a daylong trek to the shrine and back; on the longer Pahalgam route, they charge around Rs 5,000 for one way.

A shopkeeper in Baltal said the Yatra had not been seriously impacted yet. "But we are worried. We are paying large rents, and we may not be able to even cover that," the shopkeeper said over the phone on Wednesday.

PILGRIM NUMBERS

2013 (Jun 28-Aug 21)	3,53,969
2014 (Jun 28-Aug 10)	3,72,909
2015 (July 2-Aug 29)	3,52,771
2016 (July 2-Aug 18)	2,20,490
2017 (Jun 29-July 11*)	1,57,618

*Yatra will continue until Aug 7
Source: Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board. The Board does not give out a statewide break-up of pilgrim numbers.

seminate negative information about Clinton to help Trump win. But Orin S Kerr, a George Washington University professor and former federal prosecutor, felt that this would be a bit of a stretch.

What about illegal hacking?

There is no public evidence so far of any clandestine discussions between Russian officials or surrogates and the Trump campaign about disseminating the emails of Democrats that US intelligence officials say Russia hacked. In July 2016, however, Trump publicly urged Russia to hack Clinton's emails; his spokesman later said he was joking.

But the investigation is still unfolding, and if it were to come to light that Russian officials did consult Trump campaign officials about the timing or tactics of the release of the stolen emails, that could raise the possibility of conspiracy charges. **THE NYT**