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comment

## VIPs cannot sit on prime realty

The new law will see people vacate official premises on time

**N**o State approves of squatters or encroachers. The Indian State is no different, but often finds its hands tied when it comes to pushing out the legion of VIP squatters. In other words, it finds it difficult to move VIPs out of official

accommodation, usually located in the tony areas of a city. But now the government is a step away from arming itself with an amended law — the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Amendment Bill, 2017 — which will ensure ministers, members of Parliament and bureaucrats don't overstay in government bungalows once their term is over. Under the rules, a former minister can hold on to his or her official accommodation for a month after demitting office. Once the stipulated time to vacate the house is over, the Union Housing and Urban Affairs ministry takes about two months to initiate eviction proceedings. The amendments will ensure that the ministry starts summary eviction proceedings within three days after the stipulated time given to a former MP or a retired official is over. This will ensure speedy eviction of unauthorised occupants. Also, the clause to approach district court has been removed.

Since it assumed power in May 2014, the NDA has evicted about 1,500 officials and MPs. It is a departure from earlier governments that chose to ignore the transgressions of VIPs holding on to prime real estate in Lutyens' Delhi. The amended eviction law will hopefully end the problem once and for all. These VIPs occupy valuable real estate for years on end, many of them trying to convert the premises into memorials and using every trick in the book to hang on. Around the world, in most democracies, the concept of official accommodation, except for the president or prime minister, is unheard of. In India, on the other hand, not only do politicians and bureaucrats take this perk for granted, they also shamelessly squat on official accommodation long after eviction notices are served.

## Human welfare must be put before that of cows

Chhattisgarh should focus on improving health and education for people first

**T**he Chhattisgarh government has announced its intention to begin an ambulance service for cows. The service will be rolled out in ten districts over the next few months. While any positive step for the care of injured animals is a welcome move, it is unclear if the ambulance service extends to animals beyond the bovine species. It also remains unclear how much setting up this service will cost the state's exchequer.

At a time when so much of the state government's focus has been on the protection of cows (in April, the chief minister had said that anyone found killing cows in Chhattisgarh will be hanged), it is important to keep in mind the state of people in the state. According to the Planning Commission's India Human Development Report 2011, Chhattisgarh with a human development index (HDI) of 0.358 was ranked the lowest of all states in India. The highest ranked state was Kerala with an HDI of 0.790. To put it in perspective, the HDI of Chhattisgarh is lower than that of countries such as South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Burkina Faso (countries grouped under 'low human development'). The health care and education systems also leave much to be desired. According to the State Fact Sheet for Chhattisgarh in the National Family Health Survey (2015-16), against the target of infant mortality rate (IMR) of 27 per 1,000 live births by 2015, Chhattisgarh has an IMR of 54 (the average for India is 39), and an under-five mortality rate of 64. The percentage of women with 10 or more years of schooling is an abysmal 26.5% (in rural Chhattisgarh, the number is as low as 20.1%).

Given that the development indicators (for human beings) is so low, perhaps the Chhattisgarh government would do better to focus on improving the lives of the poorest humans of the state before investing much-needed state resources in the setting up of ambulance services for cows.

## Trump will be tougher on Pakistan

Lisa Curtis' appointment to the National Security Council augurs a more punitive approach



LARRY PRESSLER

**F**rom my perch a few blocks from the State Department and the White House, and just across the river from the Pentagon, I am starting to see the signs that a policy shift is afoot in the US position vis-à-vis its unreliable ally, Pakistan. The Trump Administration appears to be ready to take a much harder line against this rogue nation. The appointment of Lisa Curtis as the senior director for South and Central Asia at the National Security Council augurs a more punitive approach to Pakistan than the Obama Administration, which gave more military and economic aid to Pakistan than any previous administration in an effort to bribe the country into action against the terrorists hiding out in plain sight within its borders. On the contrary, Curtis has recommended that any future aid to Pakistan be calibrated against Pakistan's ending its support to the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network.

In a Hudson Institute report that she co-authored earlier this year with Husain Haqqani, a former Pakistan ambassador to

the United States, the two policy experts recommended that Pakistan be punished swiftly if these milestones are not met: Stripping Pakistan of its major non-Nato ally (MNNA) status and designating it a state sponsor of terrorism. Ambassador Haqqani reiterated these recommendations in a July 6 New York Times editorial. In other words, more sticks and fewer carrots. Now that Curtis is in charge of the US' policy towards South Asia and ostensibly has the ear of the nation's national security adviser and President Trump, she is in a position to initiate and implement these recommendations.

These policy changes are long overdue. As I state emphatically in my newly released book, *Neighbours in Arms: An American Senator's Quest for Disarmament in a Nuclear Subcontinent*, Pakistan should be treated like North Korea — like a rogue state. The only reason Pakistan is not a totally failed State is that countries like China and the United States continue to prop it up with massive amounts of foreign aid. Unless Pakistan changes its ways with respect to terrorism, it should be declared a terrorist state.

Indeed, the first Bush administration seriously considered doing so in 1992. Pakistan's leaders have essentially blackmailed us into providing aid for the war on terror with threats to cease assistance in rooting out terrorists in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, we know fully well that Pakistan harbours terrorists, and many military leaders believe terrorists have infiltrated Pakistan's ranks. We let Pak-



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REUTERS

istan use US taxpayer money to build their nuclear weapons programme. Why do we now let them use US taxpayer money to harbour terrorists? Without our money and military supplies, Pakistan would be powerless. Why do we continue to call Pakistan an ally? Why do we continue to be blackmailed?

The Pressler Amendment is also wrongly blamed for political instability in Pakistan during its enforcement period. That is just nonsense — there was just as much instability in Pakistan before the Pressler Amendment. Critics will say that, during that time, Iran and Saudi Arabia started fuelling sectarianism in Pakistan. The truth of the mat-

ter is that the Pressler amendment did slow down Pakistan's nuclear ambitions, and I think the public attention forced Pakistan to be much more careful and transparent. The underlying policy objectives at the heart of the Pressler Amendment clearly have had a long-lasting impact, even if inconsistently enforced.

The US Congress is tired of Pakistan's lies and games. It cut off \$300 million in aid and blocked government funding for the transfer of F-16 aircraft last year. Congress knows squeezing them financially is the only leverage that really works. Curtis and Ambassador Haqqani understand this as well. They are old enough to remember the Pressler Amendment and its impact on Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Named after me, it was enforced under President George HW Bush in 1990 when he could not certify that Pakistan did not have a nuclear weapon. As a result, all aid to Pakistan was immediately cut off. It was the ultimate diplomatic "stick."

Unfortunately, the generals in the Pentagon continued to find ways to fund the generals in Islamabad and the Pressler Amendment's effectiveness and enforcement withered. Today, another type of Pressler Amendment is needed to force Pakistan to reject the terrorists in its midst. Hopefully, the new regime at the White House and in Congress will make it happen. Oddly enough, the election of Donald Trump as president might be the best thing for the relationship between the world's two largest democracies.

Larry Pressler served in the United States Congress for 22 years  
The views expressed are personal

### DEEPWATERS



A view of the Hambantota port. Sri Lanka on July 25 approved the sale of a 70% stake in the loss-making but strategically-placed deep sea harbour to China for \$1.12 billion

AFP

## How to counter China's expansionist plans in Asia

Beijing pumping money into Sri Lanka's Hambantota port and neighbouring countries has raised India's hackles



AMNA MIRZA

**C**hina and Sri Lanka recently signed the Hambantota port deal which is being called a "win-win situation" for both. But what is really behind China's purchase of a port in Sri Lanka?

Critics have been vocal about the fact that Sri Lanka has fallen prey to the economic-diplomatic moves that are seen as China's "give loan and in return grab land" policy. Can Sri Lanka bear the debt burden and repay the \$5 billion loan which was given in order to get a 99-year lease on the port given its internal compulsions?

Giving China majority control of the port raises concerns about Sri Lanka's national security and relations with neighbours like India. It is well known that China is adept at manufacturing low cost products and tends to lend to commodity-exporting countries with highly competitive manufacturing sectors. This is what has happened in Sri Lanka.

China pumping money into South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka has raised India's hackles. But the question is why can't India give soft loans to Sri Lanka to pay off China loan and get the Hambantota port released? Will Pak-

istan be able to repay the CPEC loans?

What makes China's grand plans click is that there is no other prominent economic power in the region which has such an expansionist focus. With the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in choppy waters, there are fears that the US is no longer a reliable ally in the region. This ironically applies to the Southeast Asian nations as well; looking at the case of the Philippines. With doubts over US credibility in the region, what China offers is a new sort of economic mentoring.

By making use of its huge economic clout, China is able to get what it wants in many parts of the world. India has long been obsessed with China's military might. We are seeing that in Doklam. But of far greater danger is its economic hegemony which is now established in several areas, including in our neighbourhood. India needs to come up with a proactive response to this.

Financial might can be used as a tool to depict the confidence and purpose of a global superpower. Economic power is what fuels China's assertive foreign policy. The dragon is ready to take risks and go where the West has been reluctant to venture. However, China's replacement of western influence brings with it Beijing's territorial ambitions and aggression. The only way to counter this is if nations in a particular region act in concert. But in South Asia, that seems hardly likely at the moment.

Amna Mirza is assistant professor of political science at the University of Delhi  
The views expressed are personal

## Why this unnecessary outrage over Article 35A?

Mehbooba feels the question is how much the idea of Kashmir can find a place within the idea of India



VINOD SHARMA

**T**he divisive issue of Kashmir is canon fodder for a section of the electronic media thriving on uber-nationalism. Forever on the lookout for sensation, they either miss the wood for the trees or consciously conjure up smoke suggesting a forest fire where none exists.

A case in point is Mehbooba Mufti's July 28 speech at a seminar in Delhi where she spoke after I introduced the subject — Understanding Kashmir: a composite dialogue on peace, stability and the way forward. Organised by the Bureau of Research on Industry and Economic Fundamentals (BRIEF), the event had in attendance experts and scholars from think tanks such as the Vivekananda Foundation, India Foundation and the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses.

The ensuing electronic media debates based on a selective reading of the PDP leader's speech were a study in illiteracy. The big message she sought to convey was lost in the cacophony over her comment on the political consequences in Kashmir of any tinkering with Article 35A of the Constitution.

The Article defines Kashmir's 'permanent residents' besides detailing their special rights and privileges. It is currently under the Supreme Court's scrutiny on a petition that challenges as violative of fundamental rights a state subject's loss of privileges if she married a non-state subject.

Mehbooba did not comment on the constitutionality or otherwise of the said Article vis-à-vis fundamental rights. Her focus was on the political fallout from any dilution or change in the provision aimed at securing the State's demographic composition. Pointing to PDP, Congress and National Conference (NC) leaders in the audience, she said: "Supreme Court mein 35A abhi bhii chal raha hai. In the event of it being tinkered

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with, there'll be nobody left to lend shoulder to the national flag we carry (in Kashmir)."

The media driven by its predilections interpreted her remarks as being disrespectful of the national standard. But their political underpinnings were unmistakable for the better informed.

The PDP leader's message rang loud and genuine: there'd be no political space left in Kashmir for those who swore by the Indian Constitution if the State's special status was mutated in any which way. She rounded it off, in fact, on an emotional note, insisting she wanted to see an India that felt Kashmir's angst; the India that accepted "us on our terms (humei hamari sharton par kabul karia)."

The state subject provision has its genesis in Article 370 that accords a special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Votaries of its abrogation question its sanctity (in constitutional terms). They consider it a hindrance in Kashmir's economic development and integration with the rest of India. Mehbooba flagged the 'incongruity' of such demands in the context of the Centre's insistence that talks on Kashmir be held within the four walls of the Constitution. "How can we talk in the same breath about scrapping the state's special status under the Constitution while insisting that talks with stakeholders in Kashmir have to be within the constitutional framework."

The speech she made as chief minister of the PDP-BJP coalition was part of her efforts to reach Kashmir's voice to mainland India. Her posers highlighting the flip side to the largely mono-dimensional media discourse were valid and needed more popular attention.

In fact, the question to be addressed in any earnest discourse on the issue is the one she raised at the very outset: How much can the idea of Kashmir be accommodated by the idea of India? On that premise she wondered whether weapons and laws (read: pellet guns and AFSPA) that are exclusive to the State have "helped offer Kashmiris a better choice than what they're asking."

Mehbooba made no reference to the NC's autonomy or the PDP's self-rule formulation. She was certain nevertheless that the way forward for the Centre was to present the people an option better than azaad: "We have to keep the diversity... The idea of India isn't complete without the idea of Kashmir." The chief minister's was a persuasive case for a political initiative in Kashmir without disturbing the constitutionally mandated rules of engagement. It deserved reciprocity, not the kind of belligerent media response or partisan political reaction it got. It is about time India lent an attentive ear to its integral part.

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**innervoice**

IF WE DON'T LAUGH AT THE SAME JOKE, WHY CRY OVER THE SAME PROBLEM?

Rameshinder Singh Sandhu

A young man took his group of friends on a grand laughter ride with one of his jokes. Seeing their high spirits, he shared the same joke again and again, till the sounds of laughter began to subside. After a while, he finally asked them: "So, no more laughter because it's the same joke, right?"

He went on, "If we do not want to laugh on the same joke again, and again, then why do we cry on the same problems day after day?" I came across this simple, but very inspiring

scene in a video on my Facebook feed. It certainly packs a lot of message in it.

Does constantly thinking about a problem, or crying over it help to resolve the issue? Definitely not. Rather, by going over the problem again and again, we disturb the tranquility of our heart and mind.

Remember what the wise have said and left behind to guide us: "Don't cry over spilled milk."

The best solution could be 'learning a lesson' from the problem we are facing and to move on. If we choose to sit on it, we end up

trying ourselves to one issue and that in turn will not let us move ahead in life. It will also keep us away from finding true happiness — an important ingredient for a peaceful life.

American actress Valerie Bertinelli once said, "Happiness is a choice. You can choose to be happy. There is going to be stress in life, but it is your choice whether you let it affect you or not."

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers  
The views expressed are personal)

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