

AN AIR-TIGHT CASE: ON PULWAMA ATTACK CASE CHARGE SHEET

Further clarity emerges on the JeM's and Pakistan's role in the Pulwama attacks

A year and a half after the dastardly terror attack on a Central Reserve Police Force convoy in Pulwama that killed 40 personnel, the National Investigation Agency has filed a charge sheet against 19 people including Maulana Masood Azhar, the leader of the terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammed, for planning the attack. Considering the difficulties in piecing together the minutiae in the case, the agency's painstaking effort must be acknowledged. The identity of the key perpetrators was never in doubt after the JeM claimed responsibility immediately after the attack in February 2019. The charge sheet details the role of the JeM's handlers and its local associates in Kashmir and how the attack was in the works since 2016. The JeM's role was in reconnaissance, training and indoctrination, but the group could not have procured and transported the high-intensity explosives without the involvement of the Pakistani security establishment. The chargesheet's investigation, based on forensic evidence — DNA analysis of the remains of the suicide bomber, IP address tracking of the video released by the JeM claiming responsibility, examination of the battered vehicle that carried the explosives, among others — therefore makes a thorough claim on JeM's and Pakistan's role in the attack. The Pulwama attack was followed by the bombing of a "terror training centre" in Balakot in Pakistan by the Indian Air Force and retaliatory air strikes by Pakistan. These have resulted in a breakdown of diplomatic ties and deterioration of every aspect of relations between the countries. But the Pulwama investigation could present an opportunity for Pakistan to initiate meaningful changes in its approach towards cross-border terror, if indeed the Imran Khan-led government is keen on reforming its deep State.

For the Indian government, the charge sheet presents a case not just for detailing the dastardly role of Pakistan and its proxy actors in Kashmir, but to re-evaluate its strategy. The involvement of a local Kashmiri youth in the attack as a suicide bomber, years after militancy had waned in the Valley, was also a warning about the alienation setting into the Valley. The hollowing out of Jammu and Kashmir's special status, the bifurcation of the State and the demotion of J&K as a Union Territory; the detention of scores of political leaders including mainstream actors; and the continuing restrictions on access to broadband Internet have deepened the alienation. The prevention of terror attacks will entail not only security and diplomatic measures to isolate and destroy terror outfits such as the JeM, but also addressing the roots of alienation that contribute recruits to the cause of terrorism.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **air-tight** (adjective) – indisputable, unquestionable, incontrovertible, undeniable.
- ❖ **charge sheet** (noun) – an official document on which a police officer enters details of the charge against a person.
- ❖ **dastardly** (adjective) – wicked/evil, cruel, heinous, wrongful.
- ❖ **convoy** (noun) – a group of vehicles or ships that are traveling together usually for protection.
- ❖ **personnel** (noun) – staff, employees, workforce.
- ❖ **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** (noun) – The National Investigation Agency is a central agency established by the Indian Government to combat terror in India. It is functioning as the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in the country. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is created following the terror attack in Mumbai on December 26, 2008. It came into being on December 31, 2008, with the passage of the NIA Act of 2008.
- ❖ **piece together** (phrasal verb) – put together/assemble, join, unite.

- ❖ **minutiae** (noun) – details, niceties/finer points, particulars.
- ❖ **painstaking** (adjective) – careful, thorough, meticulous.
- ❖ **acknowledge** (verb) – appreciate, recognize, realize; praise.
- ❖ **perpetrator** (noun) – someone who does immoral, harmful and illegal activity; offender, criminal, wrongdoer/evil-doer, culprit.
- ❖ **in the works** (phrase) – being planned, being done, under way.
- ❖ **reconnaissance** (noun) – examination, observation, preliminary survey, research/probe.
- ❖ **indoctrination** (noun) – the process of inculcating/teaching a person or a group of people a set of ideas/beliefs until they accept them without questioning.
- ❖ **procure** (verb) – obtain, acquire, get; buy/purchase.
- ❖ **explosives** (noun) – bombs.
- ❖ **the establishment** (noun) – the authorities, the system, the regime, bureaucracy.
- ❖ **forensic** (adjective) – relating to the application of scientific knowledge & methods to legal problems and legal proceeding.
- ❖ **DNA analysis** (noun) – it is an extremely powerful investigative technique that has become, in many ways, the standard by which other forensic sciences are measured.
- ❖ **remains** (noun) – corpse, dead body.
- ❖ **battered** (adjective) – damaged.
- ❖ **thorough** (adjective) – complete, total, out-and-out.
- ❖ **retaliatory** (adjective) – revenging, vengeful, avenging.
- ❖ **breakdown** (noun) – failure, collapse, disintegration.
- ❖ **diplomatic** (adjective) – (delicate & sensitive) consular, foreign-policy.
- ❖ **ties** (noun) – bond, association, relationship.
- ❖ **deterioration** (noun) – decline, collapse/failure degradation/breakdown.
- ❖ **cross-border** (adjective) – across a border between two countries.
- ❖ **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually.
- ❖ **keen on** (adjective) – enthusiastic about, interested in, passionate about.
- ❖ **deep state** (noun) – shadow government; influential decision-making bodies believed to be within government and it can be any agencies (e.g., military or any other).
- ❖ **proxy conflict/war/strike** (noun) – a conflict/war/strike between two (countries/groups) instigated by opposing powers (powerful countries) who do not fight against each other directly.
- ❖ **militancy** (noun) – belligerency, combativeness, contentiousness/defiance (usually to support a cause).
- ❖ **wane** (verb) – decrease, decline, diminish/dwindle gradually.
- ❖ **Valley** (noun) – a low area between hills or mountains typically with a river running through it. Valley is a metonym of Jammu & Kashmir in this context (Metonym is used as an alternative for something else with which it is closely related/associated).
- ❖ **alienation** (noun) – isolation, detachment, estrangement/separation.
- ❖ **set in** (phrasal verb) – (of something unpleasant) begin, start, develop gradually.
- ❖ **hollow out** (verb) – remove, undermine, make pointless/useless, weaken/erode.
- ❖ **bifurcation** (noun) – division of something into two branches or parts.
- ❖ **demotion** (noun) – reduction, overthrow, overturning (status/rank).
- ❖ **detention** (noun) – custody, house arrest, restraint; imprisonment, confinement, incarceration.
- ❖ **mainstream** (noun) – something (certain beliefs/ideas/activities) which are accepted or recognized by most people as a normal or typical.
- ❖ **deepen** (verb) – increase/intensify; exacerbate, aggravate, inflame, worsen.
- ❖ **entail** (verb) – necessitate, make necessary, require.
- ❖ **outfit** (noun) – group, organisation.
- ❖ **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
- ❖ **root** (noun) – source, origin.
- ❖ **recruit** (noun) – new member, new entrant, newcomer.

A NO-WIN SITUATION: ON JEE-NEET DURING THE PANDEMIC

Conducting JEE and NEET amid a pandemic is not easy, but options are limited

A pandemic and the resultant delay in commencing admission to professional courses have put the Union Education Ministry in an unenviable position. It is under compulsion to strike a balance between ensuring physical and emotional well-being of aspirants and sustaining a merit-based admission process, while seeking to limit the academic disruption. The NEET is the only gateway for MBBS/BDS admissions in the country. In respect of engineering admissions, the JEE is not mandatory for State government-run and private institutions. Citing the Supreme Court's recent order declining to interfere with the conduct of the two common entrance tests, Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank has contended that the issue is being politicised. His argument is that a "silent majority" favours the exams as an overwhelming number of registered candidates have downloaded their admit cards. From an academic perspective, the Supreme Court has rightly observed that the career of students "cannot be put in peril for long". Mr. Pokhriyal is apprehensive that further delay could lead to a "zero academic year", a concern shared by many academics.

Ground realities reflect the concerns from the other side. More than the fear of contracting COVID-19 from examination centres, aspirants face practical limitations. The NEET will be conducted in 3,843 centres across 155 cities, whereas the number of applicants is about 15.97 lakh. For an estimated 8.58 lakh aspirants, the JEE will be held in 660 centres in 12 shifts. With many States not resuming public transport services and hotels remaining closed, travel and accommodation for candidates from interior regions is a major challenge. Social and cultural pressures are such that girls from villages and tier-3 towns are likely to face hurdles as travelling alone would not be encouraged under these unusual circumstances. Even if hotels are opened at short notice, the fear of the pandemic might deter a section of aspirants from staying there. Delay in admission to the IITs and medical colleges would also have an adverse bearing on BE/BTech seats in leading institutions including deemed universities as eventually they may go vacant when students opt out. Given this background, the government must explore alternatives such as allowing States to conduct medical admissions based on Class XII Board marks using standard normalisation. NEET could be limited to central institutions. Likewise, instead of the JEE, a nationwide marks normalisation could be examined but IIT Directors have argued that doing away with JEE would dilute the quality of education. Extraordinary circumstances may require extraordinary solutions. Perhaps the examination slots could be staggered and the number of centres increased drastically. Pragmatic compromises are inevitable.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **no-win situation** (adjective) – a situation in which each party will gain nothing.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **amid** (preposition) – in the middle of, surrounded by; during.
- ❖ **resultant** (adjective) – occurring as a result of (something just mentioned).
- ❖ **commence** (verb) – begin, start, embark on, initiate.
- ❖ **unenviable** (adjective) – difficult, undesirable, unpleasant.
- ❖ **compulsion** (noun) – necessity, need/urge; obligation, necessary condition.
- ❖ **strike a balance** (phrase) – find a fair & reasonable line of action between two contrasting things.
- ❖ **well-being** (noun) – healthy state/condition.
- ❖ **aspirant** (noun) – candidate, applicant, entrant.
- ❖ **sustain** (verb) – maintain, keep, carry on; support, validate.

- ❖ **seek** (verb) – try, aim, attempt.
- ❖ **disruption** (noun) – disturbance, confusion, disordering/unsettling.
- ❖ **gateway** (noun) – a means of achieving something.
- ❖ **in respect of** (phrase) – in regard to, concerning, relating to.
- ❖ **cite** (verb) – refer to, adduce, make reference to, invoke.
- ❖ **interfere** (verb) – handle, meddle, intervene (unwanted).
- ❖ **contend** (verb) – claim, argue, state.
- ❖ **politicise** (verb) – to make something into a political issue.
- ❖ **silent majority** (noun) – an unspecified large group of people in a country or group who do not express their opinions publicly.
- ❖ **favour** (verb) – support, back, champion
- ❖ **overwhelming** (adjective) – very great/large, huge, enormous.
- ❖ **perspective** (noun) – outlook, viewpoint, approach.
- ❖ **peril** (noun) – dangers, difficulties, risks.
- ❖ **apprehensive** (adjective) – anxious, worried, concerned.
- ❖ **lead to** (verb) – cause, result in, bring on.
- ❖ **zero academic year** (noun) – a zero academic year is one during which no academic activities are conducted, including exams and classes.
- ❖ **academic** (noun) – scholar, educator, professor/teacher.
- ❖ **ground reality** (noun) – practical condition/situation.
- ❖ **reflect** (verb) – indicate, show, reveal, exhibit.
- ❖ **contract** (verb) – become infected with, develop, catch (a disease).
- ❖ **resume** (verb) – restart, recommence, begin again, start again.
- ❖ **accommodation** (noun) – temporary stay in a hotel room/lodge.
- ❖ **tier** (noun) – grade, level.
- ❖ **hurdle** (noun) – obstacle, difficulty, problem, impediment.
- ❖ **circumstances** (noun) – situation, conditions, state of affairs.
- ❖ **deter** (verb) – prevent, stop, put off/discourage.
- ❖ **adverse** (adjective) – unfavourable, disadvantageous, bad.
- ❖ **have a bearing on** (phrase) – have a relevance/relation to something.
- ❖ **deemed university** (noun) – an Institution of Higher Education, other than universities, working at a very high standard in specific area of study, can be declared by the Central Government on the advice of the UGC as an Institution Deemed-to-be-university. The status of deemed-to-be-university is awarded in accordance with the Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956.
- ❖ **eventually** (adverb) – in the end, in due course, after some time.
- ❖ **opt out** (phrasal verb) – decide not to participate in something.
- ❖ **given** (preposition) – considering, taking into account, bearing in mind.
- ❖ **background** (noun) – circumstances, context, conditions, situation, scenario.
- ❖ **explore** (verb) – examine, evaluate, look into, consider (options).
- ❖ **normalisation** (noun) – the process of bringing something back to a normal condition.
- ❖ **likewise** (adverb) – similarly.
- ❖ **do away with** (phrasal verb) – cancel, discard, get rid of, quash.
- ❖ **dilute** (verb) – diminish, reduce, decrease, lessen.
- ❖ **extraordinary** (adjective) – out of the ordinary, unusual, uncommon.
- ❖ **perhaps** (adverb) – maybe, possibly.
- ❖ **staggered** (adjective) – phased; relating to something carried out/performed/pursued in stages; timed at intervals (of something as they don't happen at the same time).
- ❖ **drastically** (adverb) – extremely; seriously, desperately, substantially.
- ❖ **pragmatic** (adjective) – empirical, realistic/actual, practical.
- ❖ **compromise** (noun) – agreement, understanding, settlement, deal.
- ❖ **inevitable** (adjective) – unavoidable, sure to happen, unpreventable.