

## VALLEY OF FLAWS

New Delhi will have to engage with all stakeholders in finding a solution in Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir State government's decision to abruptly end the Amarnath pilgrimage, at least a fortnight ahead of schedule, citing terror threats, is intriguing. The announcement came close on the heels of an unexplained troop surge in the State, already one of the most militarised regions of the world. Governments usually tend to be miserly with information, and on questions related to national security they are more stridently so. By the very nature of the security apparatus, it is impossible for Parliament, the media or the general public to access information that is not voluntarily provided by the executive. Hence, it is imperative to accept the State government's position that the decision on curtailment of the yatra season was taken "keeping in view the latest intelligence inputs of terror threats, with specific targeting of the Amarnath Yatra, and given the prevailing security situation in the Kashmir Valley". There could be valid professional and tactical reasons for the limited transparency in security management. But the Narendra Modi government has stretched this principle to intolerance to request for transparency in general, often questioning the patriotism of those seeking meaningful information.

This government has been unequivocal and outspoken about its intentions to push forward with annulling the special status that Jammu and Kashmir is accorded in the Constitution through Articles 370 and 35A. The government is clear that there is nothing to negotiate with anyone in the Valley or about the Valley with anyone. An interlocutor appointed by the Centre is defunct. The BJP and the Centre have also been pursuing a policy of undermining the mainstream political parties in the State through administrative measures and political rhetoric. True, the governance track record of the Peoples Democratic Party and the National Conference falls far short of inspiring; nevertheless, these parties have been integral to the ways in which New Delhi engaged with the Valley. Pakistan may be puppeteering the separatist Hurriyat, but New Delhi will have to engage with all stakeholders in resolving the conflict in the Valley. Unfortunately, the first BJP government with a majority of its own in the Lok Sabha has instead upended the policy of the first Vajpayee-led BJP government which sought to strengthen the regional parties, engage the separatists and Pakistan to make progress towards peace. In recent years, the situation in the Valley has

worsened and tensions between India and Pakistan have become aggravated. New Delhi quite rightly rebuffed U.S. President Donald Trump who, evidently in search of an arena for peacemaking after failing to make headway with North Korea, offered to mediate. But while dealing directly with the challenge in Kashmir, it must realise any misstep can be costly.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Flaws		Defect, blemish, fault, imperfection, deficiency
Abrupt		Sudden, immediate, instantaneous, hasty
Cite		Quote, reproduce / praise, commend
Intrigue		Plot, conspire, manoeuvre, connive
Announcement		Declaration, pronouncement, aver
Troop		Soldiers, armed forces, service meal
Surge		Gush, rush, outpouring, stream, flow
Strident		Harsh, raucous, rough, grating, rasping
Apparatus		Equipment, gear, paraphernalia
Imperative		Vitality, important, all important, vital
Curtailment		Reduction, cut, cutback, decrease
Patriotism		Nationalism, patriotic, chauvinism
Unequivocal		Unclear, ambiguous, incoherent, downright
Outspoken		Straight forward, forthright, down right
Annul		Void, invalidate
Interlocutor		A person who takes part in conversation
Defunct		Passe, out dated, antediluvial, anachronistic
Mainstream (adj.)		Traditional, conservative, orthodox
Rhetoric		Oratory, eloquence, expression, diction
Puppeteer		One who operates puppets.
Resolve		Settle, sort out, solve, rectify, reconcile
Upend		Turn upside down
Aggravate		Worsen, annoy, exacerbate, antagonize
Integral		Essential, fundamental, basic, intrinsic
Rebuff		Reject, repudiate, turn down, jettison
Arena		Stadium, area, scene, sphere, realm
Pursue		Chase , follow

### AT A CROSSROADS

India's transport sector needs reform; changes to the Motor Vehicles Act are a start

India's Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 has remained in hibernation, unable to meet the needs of a large economy that is witnessing rising travel demand, fast-paced motorisation, major shifts in technology and deteriorating road safety. The amendments to the Act voted by Parliament seek to address some of these challenges, notably in forming a National Transportation Policy and a National Road Safety Board, providing for stiffer penalties for violation of rules, and orderly operation of new-generation mobility services that use mobile phone applications. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has countered the charge that the changes are anti-federal in character — the proposed amendments were reviewed by 18 State Transport Ministers, and the Bill reflects the modifications they suggested. Also, the Rajya Sabha introduced last-minute changes, making concurrence of, rather than consultation with States necessary when issuing fresh schemes for national, multimodal, and inter-State transport. This new provision also includes last mile connectivity, accessibility, mobility as a whole and rural transport. There is a dire need for reform in these areas, and State governments have tended to ignore these aspects. During the previous NDA government, Mr. Gadkari blamed obstruction by a 'corrupt' Regional Transport Office system for the delay in amending the MV Act. An amendment in the Rajya Sabha allows for RTOs to visit dealerships to register vehicles. This is not much of a change over the practice of dealers taking vehicles to RTO offices. The onus is on States to show that the purchaser will not have to pay a bribe.

Going forward, the Centre must deliver on its promise that the amended Act will help reduce dependence on personal vehicles, and present its National Transport Policy without delay. States must be incentivised to provide clean, comfortable and affordable services for all users, including people with disabilities. It is relevant to point out that the National Urban Transport Policy of the UPA failed to achieve this. Mr. Gadkari's emphasis is on structural reform and an upgrade to subsidised electric buses for low-cost air-conditioned travel. But State Transport Corporations must adopt modern management practices. New regulation can certainly shake up the status quo, facilitating transparent investment by any intending operator and removing vested interests, particularly in inter-State and multi-State coach services. But some of the other amendments are less promising. A sharp increase in fines has

little chance of improving safety. Studies show that sustained, zero tolerance enforcement of even small fines reduces violations, while stringent penalties are either not enforced or lead to more bribery.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Crossroad		A point at which a crucial decision is made
Deteriorate		Worsen, get worse, decline, degenerate
Amendments		Change, transmogrification, metamorphosis
Stiffer		Rigid, hard, hardened, inelastic
Orderly		Near, tidy, well ordered, trim, spick and span
Counter		Oppose, combat
Concurrence		Agreement, consensus, consistency
Accessibility		Comprehensibility, intelligibility, penetrability
Dire		Terrible, dreadful, appalling, frightful
Obstruction		Impediment, hindrance
Onus		Burden, responsibility, liability, obligation
Incentivise		Motivate, encourage, prod, persuade
Shake up		Reorganization, rearrangement, reshuffle
Status quo		State of affairs
Transparent		Clear, explicit, pellucid, limpid, crystalline
Sustained		Continuous, prolonged, without interruption
Stringent		Strict, exacting, draconian