



Coping with summer

Heatwaves may become more frequent: good action plans can help prepare for the worst

Torrid summers, when the mercury soars 4°C to 6°C above the average and produces heatwaves in several States between April and June, may become more frequent in coming years. Not only will there be more hot days, the spells of heat stress sweeping across much of India are likely to grow longer. The scientific consensus is that heatwaves will grow stronger and expand their geographical spread in the south, influenced by the sea surface temperature in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. With rising greenhouse gases, their impact can only intensify. Though the number of people dying due to heat stress last year was half of the previous year's toll of 2,040, the need to evolve detailed action plans at the level of States, districts and cities is now critical. It is encouraging that the National Disaster Management Authority is guiding States, in partnership with the India Meteorological Department, to evolve heat action plan protocols. The response to distress caused by excessive heat has to be both speedy and professional. Europe upgraded its preparedness to handle a crisis after a crippling heatwave in 2003 killed thousands of people, over 14,800 of them in France alone. In the Indian context, crop failures and disruption of electricity supply due to sudden peak demand are common. People experience dehydration, heat cramps and deadly heatstroke. The elderly are particularly at risk, since higher temperatures affect blood viscosity and raise the risk of thrombosis.

Better meteorological forecasting can provide an early warning about a coming hot spell during the summer window. This gives the NDMA and the States sufficient opportunity to launch an action protocol: to inform the public as soon as the temperature crosses the threshold fixed by the IMD, advise on precautionary measures, and aid those who are most vulnerable, such as older adults, farm workers and those pursuing outdoor vocations. Ahmedabad, for instance, drew up a city-level action plan in the wake of its 46.8°C heatwave of 2010 with support from public health institutions. Preparing the health system to identify symptoms of heat stress and providing treatment through urban health centres is one intervention it decided upon. Reviewing school timetables, rescheduling work timings to cooler hours, making water widely available and reserving religious sites and libraries as cooling centres were others. European and American policy responses, such as creating green and blue urban spaces to provide tree shade and higher moisture, as well as housing design that cuts heat through the albedo effect of reflected solar energy, hold universal appeal. Some of these passive defences are actually integral to vernacular practices and will serve everyone well. It is essential to study the efficacy of heat action plans and share the results across States to achieve best practices.

Wine and whimper

The Supreme Court order banning sale of liquor along highways is not fully thought out

When courts clarify earlier orders, the understanding is that they would have considered more facts, applied better reasoning, and foreseen later eventualities. But when the Supreme Court last week confirmed its December order on banning sale of liquor near National and State highways, it not only reiterated many of the impractical aspects of the original judgment, but went on to assert that the proscription would cover not just retail outlets but hotels and bars too. What distinguishes, or logically sets apart, the sale of liquor along highways from that along interior roads? Apparently, the order is intended to prevent drunk driving, which is without doubt a contributor to road accidents and fatalities. But if tougher laws can make up for weak enforcement, then judicial officers can just as well replace law-enforcers. The court's clarification goes against the opinion Attorney-General Mukul Rohatgi gave the Kerala government that the December order applied only to retail outlets and not to establishments such as bar-attached hotels, and beer and wine parlours. What was a harsh order is now draconian in its sweep. Retail outlets can perhaps move another 500 m with minimal expense and no great loss of clientele. But established hotels and clubs enjoy no such luxury. All of a sudden, what was a great advantage of location is a major disadvantage. The order does not exempt outlets in cities and towns, where most of the consumers are local residents, nor does it distinguish between hotel guests and passing drivers. If drunk driving along the highways is the provocation for the order, there can be no reason to cover clubs that serve only their members. It is one thing to order the closure of shops dotting the highways, and quite another to target establishments in cities and towns, which cannot move, and which will lose their clientele to others.

State governments face a huge loss in revenue. Smaller administrative units such as Union Territories will be the worst-hit. Such quirky orders have inevitably led to quirky responses. The UT of Chandigarh, for instance, has declared all city roads as urban roads. Puducherry, which includes enclaves such as Mahe, will find relocation of many shops impossible. They are caught between the highway and the sea. Goa, a small State that depends heavily on tourism, is in a similarly difficult situation. The relaxation of the liquor-free zone from 500 m to 220 m from the highways in the case of areas with a population of 20,000 or less might only partly address their concerns. More than a third of the liquor sale and consumption points will be hit. Prohibition as a policy has had a history of failure. While binge-drinking is undoubtedly a health hazard with serious social costs, bans of the sort adopted by courts and State governments such as Bihar are counterproductive. Good intentions do not guarantee good outcomes.

Sharpen the focus on growth

If there has to be investment resurgence, it is necessary to create the climate which promotes this faith



C. RANGARAJAN

Now that the dust and din around the State Assembly elections have settled down, it is time for policymakers to turn their attention to the major task of accelerating economic growth. As of now the prospects are not encouraging. The Central Statistics Office's second advanced estimates indicate that the growth rate of GDP for 2016-17 will be 7.1% as against 7.9% in 2015-16. The growth rate of gross value added at basic prices in 2016-17 will be 6.7% as against 7.8% in 2015-16. The growth rates projected for 2016-17 do not capture the impact of demonetisation, which when taken into account may bring down the projected growth rate by around 0.5%.

The decline in the growth rate is not a recent phenomenon. It started in 2011-12. The persistence of relatively low growth over a five-year period calls for a critical examination. Even though the new numbers on national income give us some comfort, they do not tell the whole story.

Determinants of growth

Ultimately, the growth rate is determined by two factors – the investment rate and the efficiency in the use of capital. As the Harrod-Domar equation puts it, the growth rate is equal to the investment rate divided by the incremental capital-output ratio. The incremental capital-output ratio (ICOR) is the amount of capital required to produce one unit of output. The higher the ICOR, the less efficient we are in the use of capital. There are many caveats to this bald proposition. As we look at the Indian performance in the last five years, two facts stand out. One is a decline in the investment rate and the second is a rise in ICOR; both of



which can only lead to a lower growth rate.

As growth was coming down sharply initially, the investment rate was falling only slowly, implying a rising ICOR. ICOR is a catch-all expression which is determined by a variety of factors including technology, skill of manpower, management competence and also macroeconomic policies. Thus delays in the completion of projects, lack of complementary investments in related sectors and the non-availability of critical inputs can all lead to a rise in ICOR.

The Economic Survey of 2014-15 reported that there were in all 746 stalled projects, with 161 in the public sector and 585 in the private sector of a total value of ₹8.8 lakh crore. As of 2015-16, there were still 404 stalled projects, 162 in the public sector and 242 in the private sector with a total value of ₹5.5 lakh crore. In the short run, the biggest gain in terms of growth will be by getting "stalled projects" moving. Of course some of them may be unviable because of changed conditions. A periodic reporting by the government on the progress of stalled projects will be of great help.

Declining investment rate

India's investment rate reached a peak in 2007-08 at 38.0% of GDP. With an ICOR of 4, it was not surprising that a high growth rate of close to 9.4% was achieved. One sees a steady decline in the invest-

ment rate since then. The decline in the rate was small initially but has been more pronounced in the last two years. According to the latest estimates, the gross fixed capital formation rate fell to as low as 26.9% in 2016-17. With this investment rate, it is simply impossible to achieve a growth rate in the range of 8 to 9%.

The major issue confronting us is: why did the investment rate fall? Why are not new investments forthcoming? In 2011 and 2012, in discussions on the Indian economy, the one phrase that used to be banded about was "policy paralysis", pointing to the inability of the government to take policy decisions because of "coalition compulsions". It is true that around this period, the government was preoccupied with answering many issues connected with graft. But that does not explain the steady fall in the investment rate except for a sense of uncertainty created in the minds of investors.

The external environment was also not encouraging. The growth rate of the advanced economies remained low and the recovery from the crisis of 2008 was tepid which had an adverse impact on exports. However, India benefited by large capital inflows except in 2013. For almost three years beginning 2010, India had to cope with a high level of inflation which also had an adverse impact on investment sentiment. Once the growth rate starts to decline, it sets in motion a vi-

scious cycle of decline in investment and lower growth. The acceleration principle begins to operate. We need to break this chain in order to move on to a higher growth path.

Solutions

What are the solutions, given the current situation? The standard prescription, whenever private investment is weak, is to raise public investment which can take a longer term view. This standard suggestion is very much appropriate in the present context as well. In the best of times, public investment has been 8% of GDP. The Central government's capital expenditures even after some increase in the last two years, is only 1.8% of GDP. About 3 to 4% of GDP comes from public sector undertakings and the balance from State governments. What is needed now is for public sector undertakings to come out with an explicit statement indicating the extent of investment they intend to make during the current fiscal. And this intention must be monitored every quarter. This will inspire confidence among prospective private investors.

However, it is also necessary to enhance private investment, and that too private corporate investment. During the high growth phase, corporate investment reached the level of 14% of GDP. Since then it has fallen. In fact, a recent study shows that the total cost of projects initiated by the corporate sector has come down from ₹5,560 billion in 2009-10 to ₹954 billion in 2015-16. This continuing trend must be reversed.

Three things need attention. First, reforms to simplify procedures, speed up the delivery system and enlarge competition must be pursued vigorously. Some significant steps have been taken in this regard in recent years such as moving forward on the GST Bill, passing of the Bankruptcy Act, and enlarging the scope of foreign direct investment.

Second, all viable "stalled" projects must be brought to comple-

tion. Third, financial bottlenecks need to be cleared. The banking system is under stress. The non-performing loans of the system have risen and are rising. This has squeezed the profitability of banks with some showing loss. More distressing is the minimal flow of new credit. The problem is often referred to as the twin balance sheet problem. If corporate balance sheets are weak, automatically the banks' balance sheets also become weak. Really speaking, it is two sides of the same coin.

The solution to clean up the balance sheet of banks lies in taking some "haircuts". At least some part of the accumulation of bad debts has been due to the slowdown of the economy. The old saying is "bad loans are sown in good times". Even though a haircut cannot be avoided, wilful defaulters must not go unpunished. Asset restructuring companies are part of the solution and we have some experience of them.

Long-term lending

This is also the appropriate time to revive an idea which had withered away during the reform process and that is to have institutions focussed on long-term lending such as IDBI and ICICI as they were before 1998. The details can be worked out. But the idea needs a rethink.

Investment, as they say, is an act of faith in the future. If there has to be investment resurgence, it is necessary to create the climate which promotes this faith. We have already outlined the actions that can be taken in the purely economic arena. But "animal spirits" are also influenced by what happens in the polity and society. Avoidance of divisive issues is paramount in this context. Undiluted attention to development is the need of the hour.

C. Rangarajan is former Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and former Governor, Reserve Bank of India

Digital push must be disability-inclusive

As India catapults towards a digital economy, making ICT accessible to the disabled is a must



JAVED ABIDI

Around 8-10% of India's population lives with disabilities, with an equal number constituting the aged. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have the potential to significantly impact the lives of these groups, facilitating access of services available to them and allowing them to handle a wide range of activities independently, enhancing their social, cultural, political and economic participation. Making ICT accessible no longer remains an option but has become a necessity.

Poor accessibility due to lack of focussed information and political will has led to social exclusion of people with disabilities, exacerbating the negative impact of the existing digital divide. The new call for action of disability rights activists now is "Cause No Harm", thus ensuring future generations are not excluded from mainstream activities due to a hostile infrastructure.

This assumes a greater thrust given the unprecedented developmental activity in the country under the various missions launched by the present government, such as the Smart Cities Mission and Digital

India. Accessibility for disabled people is a cross-cutting theme across all of these and care must be taken to ensure disability-inclusive development.

Accessibility as a link

Incorporation of accessibility principles across all new developments will also complement the Accessible India Campaign, the flagship campaign launched by the Prime Minister on World Disability Day which aims at achieving universal accessibility for all citizens and creating an enabling and barrier-free environment. India was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The recently passed Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 mandates adherence to standards of accessibility for physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including appropriate technologies and systems, and other facilities and services provided to the public in urban and rural areas. These include government and private developments. The Act also mandates incorporation of Universal Design principles while designing new infrastructure, electronic and digital media, consumer goods and services. Most importantly, the Act sets timelines to ensure implementation of the above and punitive action in the event of non-compliance.

Accessibility therefore forms the



common thread weaving together the Accessible India Campaign, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the Smart Cities Mission and the Digital India campaign to achieve the combined goal of creating an inclusive society that will allow for a better quality of life for all citizens, including persons with disabilities.

Beyond the social implications, accessibility makes for business and economic sense too. If principles of Universal Design are incorporated at the design stage, cost implications are negligible. Retrofitting, on the other hand, has huge cost implications.

Exclusion of persons with disabilities from education, employment and participation on account of a hostile infrastructure and inaccess-

ible technology has huge economic implications. UN agencies put this cost at around 7% of national GDP. On the other hand, accessible services and business premises can broaden the customer base, increasing turnover and positively impacting the financial health and social brand of the company. Recent research pegged the market size of different product categories needed by persons with disabilities in India at a whopping ₹4,500 crore.

Disability is not an isolated issue. It is cross-cutting and can impact everyone irrespective of caste, gender, age and nationality. Thus ensuring a disability-sensitive development agenda across all ministries, sectors and causes becomes critical if growth has to be truly inclusive. 'Nothing about us without us' assumes even greater significance in the current context.

The importance of synergy

As India catapults towards a cashless and digital economy and as human interface between service providers and end users gives way to digital, it becomes imperative to ensure accessibility for inclusion. The need is for representation of persons with disabilities in all ministries and key missions, commissions and committees to advise and ensure inclusion in all policies, programmes and developments. The government's procurement policy too must mandate accessibility as a key criterion. Adherence to the

latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines should be made mandatory while developing websites and mobile applications.

Also important is the synergy between various arms of the government. The Smart Cities Mission focusses on comprehensive development leading to the convergence of other ongoing government programmes such as Make In India, Digital India, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), etc. but the Accessible India Campaign does not even find a mention! This is so when as many as 39 cities out of the 50 cities of the Accessible India Campaign are also among the shortlisted Smart Cities.

Much after Independence, there has been minimal change in the fortunes of India's disabled population. It becomes our collective responsibility to ensure inclusive development, one that engages all stakeholders through a pragmatic and judicious combination of interventions while effectively leveraging technology to ensure truly inclusive and sustainable development.

Javed Abidi was instrumental in the setting up of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP). He is also the Global Chair of Disabled People's International

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

There are graver issues

The competitive streak seen in BJP-ruled States to somehow hog the limelight on the issue of banning the consumption of meat makes one wonder whether there are no other issues of livelihood importance there to tackle in these States. It is disgusting to see State machinery being utilised for trivial matters such as a crackdown on slaughterhouses, harassment of youth in the garb of 'anti-Romeo squads' and to curb the chewing of paan. If the BJP thinks that it was voted to power only for such matters then it is sadly mistaken. The party should concentrate on finding solutions to graver issues – unprecedented drought and a deepening agrarian crisis.

J. ANANTHA PADMANABHAN, Tiruchirappalli

Weakening the system

The newfound ways of the NDA government in governance are increasingly getting mapped away from the precincts of the Rajya Sabha. It has navigated a new course away from the Upper House, by moves such as legislating Aadhaar to demonetisation to GST enabling bills in this manner. It is packaging contentious proposals in 'Money Bill' packages and even shifting the scene of indoor action scene from the floor of the House, to the doorstep of the Governor, forgetting how the makers of our Constitution had carefully thought of checks and balances by placing the centrality of the Upper House in the political ecosystem. This government's

misplaced emphasis on short-term political/economic/social objectives are perhaps being insidiously allowed to come into effect at the expense of eroding the foundations of nation's well laid down political tenets and philosophy.

R. NARAYANAN, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

Above the law?

It is with deep shock that one reads of how former Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary Rama Mohana Rao, who faced various serious charges after the Income Tax department raided his residence and his official chambers in the Secretariat, has been reinstated and appointed as the Director of the EDI, Chennai! Why he has been safeguarded is a mystery. It is expected that

the IT department which went the extra mile to carry out action against him comes up with an explanation.

SHALINI GERALD, Chennai

Liquor ban

It is hoped that restricted or non-availability of alcohol will reduce the mortality and morbidity associated with driving under the influence of alcohol ("Restaurants, bars go dry as highway liquor ban kicks in", April 2). However, the restriction on availability of alcohol on highways in itself will not lead to safer conditions on roads. Alcohol, though an important factor, is not the only reason why Indian roads are considered among the worst in the world. Road accidents constitute more

than 40% of all un-natural accidental deaths in India, which in absolute terms comes to be nearly two lakh per year. Most victims are young people, causing a great burden not only to their families but also to the society and the nation. Among those who survive, a large number of them lead a miserable life due to multiple physical and neurological handicaps. If our courts and the governments are serious about the menace of road

traffic accidents, roads need to be safer, the driving habits of people have to be improved, and the availability and accessibility of medical care need to increase in number. India is also a country which still does not have a national alcohol policy. Just banning the sale of alcohol in certain regions, States or on some roads and highways will not yield results.

PROF. SUDHIR K. KHANDELWAL, New Delhi

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The Business page headline – "Small savings interest rates cut by 0.1%" – is wrong: the rate cut is 10 basis points or 0.1 percentage point and not 0.1%

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India must reaffirm its Paris pledge

This will make a difference to global climate outcomes in the context of U.S. recalcitrance under Trump



NAVROZ K. DUBASH

In March, U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order, ostensibly promoting U.S. energy independence and economic growth, but with potential collateral damage to global efforts to limit climate change. What exactly did he authorise, what are its implications, and what does it mean for India's strategic interests in energy and climate change?

The executive order defines America's interest narrowly in terms of developing the country's energy resources. It establishes a time-bound process to review several Obama-era regulatory actions that might "burden" their development, and revokes certain actions. A centrepiece is a review of the U.S. Clean Power Plan, which aims at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the American electricity sector. This was a key element in President Barack Obama's plans to meet America's climate pledge under the Paris Agreement.

Other actions lift a moratorium on leasing federal land for coal mining, and revisit rules to limit methane emissions. Yet another withdraws estimates of the "social cost of carbon", an economic approach that sets a dollar value to the gains from reducing carbon, providing a basis for further regulatory action. In brief, the aim is to invigorate domestic energy production but by setting the clock back to an era before any climate-focused regulation, thereby giving a boost to coal, oil and gas production.

From a virtuous to vicious cycle
Despite green advocates in the U.S. putting on a brave face, the cumulative effects of these actions undoubtedly have implications for the trajectory of America's greenhouse gas emissions. They are correct in arguing that efforts to boost the coal industry are likely fruitless. Even without the Clean Power Plan, the falling price of wind and solar energy and the availability of cheap gas could signal the end of coal in the U.S. But the same cannot be said for efforts to limit methane. And the removal of the single agreed social cost of carbon as a basis for regulatory efforts hamstrings the effectiveness of



In deep water: "History will likely judge the Trump order an own goal." The artwork 'Where the Tides ebb and flow' by Pedro Marzorati at COP21. ■ REUTERS

other regulations. These orders set back climate mitigation efforts in the U.S. The only question is how much, and whether America's Paris Agreement pledge is still within reach.

But the deeper significance of the order rests in the political signal it sends to the world, and the reactions it may elicit. The Paris Agreement is, at the core, a confidence game. Each country is required to submit a national "pledge" to limit emissions growth, which is to be reviewed internationally, and updated and enhanced every five years. The intent is to generate a virtuous cycle of enhanced actions over time, as countries gain confidence in each other's commitment to climate action.

Mr. Trump's order risks turning a fragile global virtuous cycle into a vicious one; with global confidence punctured, other countries may follow the U.S. lead and dilute their national actions too. While the order is silent on America's formal commitment to the Paris Agreement for now, an explicit announcement on this is expected in May, when the G7 leaders are scheduled to meet. A formal withdrawal, though complex and time-consuming, could further dent appetite for collective action.

For veteran climate watchers, what makes this order particularly galling is that the Paris Agreement was, in substantial measure, written to accommodate the U.S. and enable its participation. And this is not the first time the U.S. has pulled the rug out from under the global community. In the mid-1990s, it notably walked away from the Kyoto Protocol, which requires developed countries to take the lead. With this

order, as a senior U.S. government official put it: "The U.S. is going to pursue its interests as it sees fit" based on "an America First energy policy."

Implications for India

In this context, what are India's interests, and how best can it pursue them? It is certainly the case that the developed world has consistently taken on less leadership than it should have, and the global climate regime could be better moored in principles of equity in addressing climate change. It would be tempting to conclude that India could use the U.S. retreat to stage one of its own, go slow on its own obligations, and adopt an approach of benign neglect towards the Paris Agreement.

However, this would be flawed and incomplete thinking. India's interests are best served by buttressing the Paris Agreement, using its mechanisms to hold to account the developed world, and maintaining its own pledges.

India has a lot to gain from a virtuous cycle because it is extremely vulnerable to climate impacts. While the ability of the Paris Agreement to slow warming may be more modest than is ideal, it will certainly have more effect than no agreement at all.

Moreover, India has little to gain from going slow on implementing its own pledge. India's greenhouse gas limitation pledge is appropriately cautious and, in key areas such as renewable energy promotion, existing domestic policy targets are more ambitious than India's Paris pledge. Its approach is based on accelerating a transition to renewable energy, which would bring gains in terms of

energy security and air pollution. But in doing so, India importantly retains the right to meet its energy access needs and energy for development through fossil fuel use, particularly coal, if needed. The Paris Agreement does not constrain this approach, which is based on Indian interests.

Should the Paris Agreement unravel, there will almost certainly be a push to re-negotiate a new agreement when political conditions in the U.S. change. At that time, developed country emissions will be lower, India's emissions will likely be rising faster than any other country, and it will have considerably more pressure to take on more ambitious pledges that could, in fact, risk constraining its energy choices.

Could India's stance actually make a difference to global climate outcomes in the context of U.S. recalcitrance? Unambiguously yes. India is emerging as a swing player in global climate politics. With the U.S. adopting the role of the leading naysayer, the Chinese have skilfully stepped into the role of climate champions, reaffirming their own commitment to the Paris Agreement. As a large emerging country, whose yearly emissions follow only these two nations, India has enormous leverage as a deciding factor in the future of the Paris Agreement. It should insist that Western countries maintain their obligations, including financial. Indeed, the Trump order provides an opening to enhance India's global standing. Skilfully executed, such a climate position could even be useful in a larger foreign policy sense, serving as a soothing element in an otherwise fraught relationship with China, and signalling independent pursuit of interests to the Americans.

History will likely judge the Trump order an own goal, born of the poisoned politics that prevails in the U.S. today. It will likely hurt the interests of the U.S. in the long run because it postpones an inevitable but complex readjustment of energy systems around renewable energy, undermines confidence in the U.S. as a reliable global partner, and even revokes preparation for climate policy meant to safeguard American citizens. Fortunately, India is in a position to think and act more clearly. It should do so by re-affirming its Paris pledge and placing its weight behind implementing the Paris Agreement.

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Second principles do not negate the first principle

Responding to the missives about the editorial pages



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

I have not stopped marvelling at this newspaper's uniqueness ever since I became its Readers' Editor nearly five years ago. While my fellow news ombudsmen in the Organisation of News Ombudsmen talk about the complaints they receive about their news coverage, I have the distinction of getting the maximum missives about the editorial pages. At a deeper level, this repudiates the assumption of some that our attention spans have reduced in the age of digital platforms.

Using Rawls to explain EVMs

On March 27, 2017, this newspaper carried a lead article titled "Poor vote-getters blame the tools" by the former Chief Election Commissioner, N. Gopalaswami. He explained that criticisms of the reliability of electronic voting machines (EVMs) were unwarranted, and explained the technical details that make these machines tamper-proof. It was a straightforward argument against some political leaders who have questioned the reliability of these machines.

M.G. Devasahayam, a retired bureaucrat, felt that the article was limited in its scope, making it only a technical and party issue. He wanted other aspects of a democracy explored in an article that would go beyond the arguments put forth by two former Chief Election Commissioners: N. Gopalaswami in this newspaper and M.S. Gill in another newspaper. When *The Hindu* wrote a subsequent editorial, "Trust the EVMs: allegations by politicians have no real basis" (March 28, 2017), he felt that the newspaper was toeing the official line without really exploring the issue fully.

Mr. Devasahayam would have found an answer in a new section on the Oped page called Conceptual, in the one that appeared on March 27, 2017. Titled "The difference principle", it explained the second part of the second principle of John Rawls's theory of justice. Rawls's first principle guarantees the right of each person to have the most extensive basic liberty compatible with the liberty of others. However, in the difference principle, Rawls argues that inequalities are legitimate so long as they are designed to yield the maximum benefit to the least advantaged members of a society. However, the difference principle shall remain subordinate to the first principle. The arguments in favour of the EVMs are akin to Rawls's

second principle. They do not take away the other components of democratic practices, which is the first principle.

Editorial on Aadhaar

Another reader, Dr. V. Visvanathan, felt that the editorial "Unique distinction" (March 29, 2017) was misleading in its suggestion that the Supreme Court observed that "the government is free to 'press' for Aadhaar for 'non-welfare' transactions or activities." He recollected the October 15, 2015 order of a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, which is categorical that the UID can be used, only voluntarily, in six schemes, and nowhere else. Dr. Visvanathan's contention was that the oral observation by the Chief Justice's Bench comprising three judges cannot override the order passed by a five-member Bench. He wrote: "*The Hindu* is certainly entitled to its opinion regarding Aadhaar, but it should not mislead the reader on the legality of the recent barrage of government orders making Aadhaar mandatory."



There are two issues here. First, the editorial did observe that the oral observations by the judges are not judicial orders: "While the Supreme Court's observations do not amount to a judicial order, they dispel some of the ambiguity relating to the scope, even future, of Aadhaar. In its interim order in October 2015 the court made it clear that the Aadhaar scheme cannot be made mandatory till the matter is finally decided 'one way or the other'." The second is the inference: "But it has set the stage for the 12-digit Unique Identification (UID) numbers being used as the basic identity proof for all residents."

I think Dr. Visvanathan has a valid point. The editorial should have waited for the final orders to arrive at a conclusion rather than inferring that the stage has been set for the UID to be used as the basic identity proof for all residents. As a reporter, I was witness to many a stunning open court observation by learned judges. But in most cases, the conclusions one drew from them proved wrong when the final judgment was delivered.

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SINGLE FILE

The age of digital cinema

Cinema is waiting to tear out of the confines of a fixed space and rigid duration

K. HARIHARAN



Despite being derided as a lowbrow art form by most intellectuals, the cinematic form has surfed incredibly well on the international waves of popular culture. Cinema has collapsed political borders, challenged traditional vestiges of morality, and

drawn new boundaries on many issues. But the business of cinema is being seriously eroded by digital technology and the Internet. More than 75% of films produced in the U.S. and India are struggling to recover their investments. Despite Netflix and Amazon Prime setting off the fire alarms in giant Hollywood studios by offering almost unlimited access to movies at throwaway prices, corporate moguls still waltz on the red carpets hoping that Swarovski and L'Oreal will be there to pick up the tabs for all the champagne and hors d'oeuvres.

Popular cinema and democracy

The time has come to take a cold look at issues behind the impending doom. First, if democracy was the mother of cinema, then consumerism was surely the midwife of this singing/dancing/gun-swinging baby. It has now been proven that the best popular films emerge only from democracies. While film jury-chairing intellectuals doubt the 'progressive' nature of popular films, they have also slowly come to realise the 'faked' aesthetic nature of many a film emerging from fatwa-issuing dictatorial nations. Democratic forces have proved that the practice of cinematic art means very little without the dynamic participation of 'consuming' spectators (eg: *Baahubali*).

Second, the film form was inscribed within the sacrosanct tenets of a fixed format and a finite duration. However, when it started, films lasted from a few minutes to a couple of hours in various compositional formats. Today the monopolistic digital exhibition sector has got all filmmakers to conform to the HD aspect ratio of 16:9 and 140 minutes performance-cum-intermission time. And with the mindless introduction of 5.1 sound and surround systems, the location of a single-source projecting visuals onscreen in front now stands fully compromised.

While digital media technology is striding forward in the world of virtual, augmented, and immersive realities, the blinkered film industry would like to hold that its well-oiled mechanism will serve forever. Cinema is waiting to tear out of these confines of a fixed space and rigid duration. Spectators are waiting to interact with all the entertainment provided. Young filmmakers across the world crowd-fund their films and put it on cyberspace for viewing, virtually forever. Cinema is poised to function more like an installation where film narrators can help navigate their spectators through a multiplicity of film feeds and recreate their entertainment in highly individualised ways. Yet, the same cinema can also be accessed by viewers from multiple perspectives to create a new 'collective' participation. Quite like the way that Wikipedia helps Web surfers access 'unlimited' knowledge through hyperlinks, tomorrow's 'Wikicinema' will allow discrete visuals to work like hyperlinks and help transport spectators across narratives and in the process strengthen the roots of democracy. After all, was that not the purpose of cinema in the first place?

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CONCEPTUAL Sanskritisation SOCIOLOGY

Described by sociologist M.N. Srinivas in his study of the Coorgs of south India, Sanskritisation refers to a process of upward social mobility in the caste system wherein 'lower' castes or tribes or other groups adopt the customs, beliefs, rituals, and practices of upper castes or the 'twice-born' caste (by converting to vegetarianism, becoming teetotalers, etc.) and expose themselves to new ideas and values (of karma and dharma through Sanskrit myths and stories). Sanskritisation reduces the "structural distance" between castes. Sanskritisation of 'lower' castes/groups/tribes coexisted with the process of Westernisation and explains the resilience of caste even today.

MORE ON THE WEB

'What a night that was' <http://bit.ly/twbk2011>

SHELF HELP

The many tales of a city

A guide on Delhi's relationship with Bombay cinema

HARI NARAYAN

Delhi's Regal Cinema, a favourite of the film cognoscenti, the political elite, industry insiders as well as the hoi polloi, signified the national capital's relationship with Bombay cinema. The 85-year-old theatre's closure could act as a trigger for cinephiles connected to Delhi to understand the city's import for Hindi cinema. Mihir Pandya's *Shahar aur Cinema: Via Dilli* is a significant study. Looking at 16 films that have Delhi as a live character, and by giving a list of nearly 90 more, Pandya sees Delhi through different protagonists who form part of its cinema.

The categorisation he uses - seeing Delhi either as a power centre, or as a city of struggles and the aspirations of the common man - is not watertight. Journalist Vikas Pandey of *New Delhi Times*, for instance, is as much a chronicler of the

subaltern as he is a powerless witness to the power-mongering among politicians. It is not far-fetched to consider the idealistic Pandey as a grown-up version of Rattan from *Ab Dilli Dur Nahin*, a Raj Kapoor-produced idealistic paean to Nehruvian India; it is a country where the poor believe they have access to justice. The disillusioned hippies of *Hazaaroon Khwaishein Aisi* are as much a part of Delhi as the indifferently yuppies of *Rang De Basanti*.

The Delhi of the first part of Pandya's book represents a microcosm of post-Independence India, with all its imperfections; the ideas of Nehru loom large in a lot of these films. *Aadhi Haqeeqat*, *Aadha Fasana*, a tribute to Raj Kapoor's cinema, which Pandya references, provides another useful tool to connect the idealism in Kapoor's cinema to Delhi's, and Nehru's role in the nation-building project.

Pandya then moves to places inhabited by the masses. Filmmakers like Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra and Dibakar Banerjee, with strong Delhi connections, show the happiness derived by the middle class and the subaltern amid their daily struggles. The wannabe social climbers in the Karol Bagh of Banerjee's *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* and the content inhabitants of Chantani Chowk in Mehra's *Delhi-6* inhabit the two ends of the spectrum here. The happy-go-lucky Delhi University students of *Chashme Budoor* make up the middle.

Pandya is authoritative in his referencing, taking help from books like Sunil Khilnani's *The Idea of India*, Ranjani Mazumdar's *Bombay Cinema* and Ranjana Sengupta's *Delhi Metropolitan*. In doing so, he creates a connect between an average cinephile and her city and also inspires her to look at it through a more empathetic lens.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 3, 1967

Union Cabinet: Reforms panel's suggestions

Restricting the size of the Union Cabinet to 12 Ministers (against 19 at present), reallocation of subjects among various Ministries and creation of a new Ministry of Science and Technology are among the wide-ranging recommendations made by the study team of the Administrative Reforms Commission on "Machinery of the Government of India and its procedures of work." In its interim report just submitted to the Commission the team has also recommended sharing of executive powers of the Planning Commission, unification of Transport, Aviation and Communications, under one Ministry and transfer of Nagaland problems from the Ministry of External Affairs to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 3, 1917

Boy-Scout Movement

The Hon'ble Mr. K.R.V. Krishna Rao moved the following resolution:- This Council recommends to His Excellency the Governor-in-Council that adequate measures be taken for the introduction of boy-scout movement among Indian students in some important secondary schools as a beginning in this Presidency, and that a committee of officials and non-officials be appointed to inquire into and suggest the lines on which such a movement can be introduced. In doing so he said that the Boy Scout movement was considered necessary since it was calculated to create a feeling of loyalty and patriotism in the minds of the younger generation in India. Mr. A.C. Miller of Belgaum had organised a system by which the movement could be made popular.

DATA POINT

A high toll

Casualties in India due to heat waves have remained high in the last four years. In 2016, there was a drop in the number of deaths due to actions taken after advance warnings, even though the severity of heat waves was higher.

State	2013	2014	2015	2016
Andhra Pradesh	1,393	447	1,422	100
Telangana	584	300		
Odisha	1	24	50	20
West Bengal	4	19	14	
Assam	12			
Jharkhand	6			
Maharashtra	3	36	43	
Madhya Pradesh	3	2		
Rajasthan	5	6	2	3
Gujarat	6	3	7	87
Chhattisgarh	14			
Kerala	4			
Total	1,433	549	2,081	557

MINISTRY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY & MINISTRY OF EARTH SCIENCES