



Short-sighted ploy

The move to impeach the Chief Justice is a setback to the separation of powers in Nepal

By launching impeachment proceedings in Parliament against Supreme Court Chief Justice Sushila Karki, the ruling coalition government in Nepal has ignited yet another crisis at an already fraught political moment — before the scheduled local polls later this month. The proximate reasons for the motion of impeachment relate to the Chief Justice's decision to set aside the appointment of a police chief by the government over the issue of seniority and to recommend the elevation of another claimant. The two biggest parties in the coalition, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist-Centre) led by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the Nepali Congress of Sher Bahadur Deuba, have accused her of interfering with executive powers. However, the timing of the motion and its implications, with the judge due to retire in a month's time, suggest a narrow-minded political strategy. Since the motion was signed by more than one-fourth of the members of the legislature, Justice Karki was suspended immediately under a constitutional provision that has been misused by the CPN(M-C) and the Nepali Congress. She is seen by Nepal's civil society as being fairly independent-minded in a judiciary that is politicised. The Maoists were upset by a recent court decision to reject clemency for a Maoist leader convicted for a murder committed during the civil war. Mr. Deuba reportedly feared being hauled up on contempt charges, which could have made his elevation to the post of Prime Minister difficult. The government's initiation of impeachment proceedings over a debatable issue of judicial overreach and for such expedient reasons threatens the separation of powers in the fledgling republic.

The impeachment proceedings have political consequences as well. One of the alliance partners, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, has decided to withdraw support to the coalition, making the ruling arrangement more fragile. Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bimalendra Nidhi, also of the Nepali Congress, has resigned in protest against the motion. With the government unable to rope in the opposition led by the CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist) to agree to amendments in the Constitution that will address the concerns of Madhesi parties over a federal redrawing of boundaries, the prospects of smooth conduct of local body elections were already dim. The tussle with the judiciary and the frivolous use of impeachment makes any understanding with the opposition prior to the elections even more unlikely. If local elections are not held in May as scheduled, it will also make it difficult for sets of constitutionally mandated parliamentary elections to be held by the January 2018 deadline. All said, the action of impeachment of a serving Chief Justice is yet another indictment of the Nepali political class, which needs to rise above petty and narrow interests after its momentous achievement of overturning the monarchy a decade ago.

Infosys, trumped

As IT companies adapt to new visa regimes, the case for free trade must not be given up

Infosys's decision to hire 10,000 local workers in the U.S. has caused concerns over the impact of President Donald Trump's restrictive visa policy for skilled workers. Explaining the move, Infosys CEO Vishal Sikka said it is purely a business decision focussed on building the company's capabilities in fields such as artificial intelligence and cloud computing. Indian IT companies have been under pressure to adapt nimbly to the restrictive visa regimes being put in place not just in the U.S. but also in key markets such as the U.K. and Australia. As a matter of fact, these companies had been gearing up to become visa-independent even before Mr. Trump's rise to power. In 2015-16, for instance, Infosys hired 2,144 people in the Americas, increasing its workforce in the region by over a quarter. In 2016, Tata Consultancy Services, another IT giant, made only about 4,000 U.S. visa applications, compared to about 14,000 a year before. The trend is likely to only strengthen. Not surprisingly, there is now increasing speculation that many Indian IT giants will refrain from sponsoring H-1B visas for junior engineers. The exact impact of Mr. Trump's immigration stance on overseas hiring is difficult to gauge. Going by the numbers, the plan to hire 10,000 local employees looks significant compared to Infosys's current foreign workforce in the U.S., which is estimated to be in the range of 20,000 to 30,000.

Yet, while individual companies adapt to the new political economy in the West, it does not diminish New Delhi's responsibility to make a case for more open immigration policies for India's skilled workers. The economic rationale behind the free movement of labour is that it promotes economic efficiency. This, as economists from David Ricardo to Jagdish Bhagwati have pointed out, increases the size of global economic output despite the costs. It is obvious that the tightening of immigration is likely to have a net negative effect on the global economy. Also, investment in advanced technologies itself, such as by Infosys, could be a measure to deal with high labour costs in the U.S. Artificial intelligence has already helped IT companies cut labour costs. In any case, job losses owing to automation are likely to accelerate, which is of course not an issue that affects the IT sector alone. While putting forward the argument that they create thousands of American jobs makes business sense for companies such as Infosys in their most critical market, it runs the risk of bolstering the narrative against the free movement of labour across borders. Sadly, since the benefits of globalisation are diffused among billions of people while its costs are concentrated on a smaller but organised group, such adjustments often end up validating populist, protectionist policies.

The dragon beckons

India should ask China if it's willing to address its concerns so as to enable participation at the BRI meet



P.S. RAGHAVAN

On March 17, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution on security in Afghanistan. It includes a reference to regional development initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China promptly announced that this reference (possibly inserted at its instance) reflected a global consensus on the BRI. This is part of an intensifying campaign to mobilise high-level attendance at a summit — the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) — being hosted by China in mid-May. The declared purpose is to review progress of the BRI, obtain perspectives of stakeholders and plan new trajectories of cooperation.

The grand design

The BRI originated from two speeches by President Xi Jinping in Central Asia in 2013, outlining plans for China's global outreach through connectivity and infrastructure development. The Silk Road Economic Belt includes land corridors from China through Central Asia and Russia to Europe with spurs to West Asia and to Pakistan — the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The 21st century Maritime Silk Road links China's east coast through major sea lanes to Europe in the west and the Pacific in the east. Together, they constitute the BRI (originally "One Belt One Road", until the Chinese recently changed the name). The concept was subsequently fleshed out with multiple justifications and project ideas, finally giving it wings as the



DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

grand strategic vision of President Xi.

Among Chinese objectives of the BRI are finding outlets for excess capacity of its manufacturing and construction industries, increasing economic activity in its relatively underdeveloped western region, and creating alternative energy supply routes to the choke points of the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca, through which almost all of China's maritime oil imports pass. The political subtext is strengthening China's influence over swathes of Asia and Africa, buttressing its ambitions to be a maritime power, and developing financing structures parallel to (and eventually competing with) the Bretton Woods system. It is a rich mix of economic, developmental, strategic and geopolitical motives. It is also the most ambitious global infrastructure project ever envisaged by one country.

Connectivity and infrastructure development are unexceptionable objectives. Much of Asia lacks them and the finances required to develop them. The devil is in the detail. Analysts have highlighted a number of potential issues: Chinese overcapacity may override host countries' development priorities in project selection; political tensions between coun-

tries may prevail over considerations of economic benefit; local elites may corner the "spoils" from new projects, thereby exacerbating social tensions; and financing strategies may result in countries sleepwalking into a debt trap (the Hambantota development projects in Sri Lanka provide a telling example). Much will depend on how sensitive China is to international and local concerns on these counts. However, even if only a part of the grand BRI design is eventually implemented, it could have a major political and economic impact.

India and the mid-May meet

Officially, India says it cannot endorse the BRI in its present form, since it includes the CPEC, which runs through Indian territory under illegal Pakistani occupation (Gilgit-Baltistan). Some analysts have argued for the more "pragmatic" approach of a partial endorsement: as the initiative rolls out in various countries, India can engage with them (and with China) to promote projects that would be of benefit.

Judging from recent Chinese actions, their major focus today is not so much securing endorsement for the BRI as ensuring high-level global attendance at the BRF.

Whatever its other objectives, the principal role of the forum is to showcase international endorsement of President Xi's strategic vision of economic cooperation for peace. The forum is timed to enable him to carry this aura of global recognition into the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party later this year, where he will put his policy stamp on his second term as party general secretary.

As of April 21, China confirmed attendance of 28 heads of state and government at the BRF. They include leaders of Russia, Turkey, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Indonesia. This is a relatively disappointing list. The U.S. of course, but also Germany, France and the U.K. will not be represented at the top level (because of their leaders' domestic preoccupations). There are only two each from South Asia, Central Asia and Africa and none from West Asia. It is no wonder then that China is launching an all-out charm offensive to attract more quality attendance at the forum. India has also been a target, since it has apparently not yet conveyed the level of its attendance. China's argument, that India would be "isolating" itself by staying out, is a pressure tactic: roads, ports and railways are public goods, which cannot be open to some and closed to others, based on nationality.

Scope for give and take

India should ask China whether it is willing to address its concerns in such a way as to enable high-level Indian participation. Would China be willing to declare that the CPEC is not a component of the BRI but a separate bilateral China-Pakistan project?

The sovereignty issue needs to be addressed. China's Foreign Minister declared that the CPEC does not change Beijing's stand on Jammu and Kashmir. A senior

Chinese diplomat was more explicit, drawing attention to Article 6 of the 1963 China-Pakistan "boundary" agreement (in which Pakistan ceded the "Trans-Karakoram tract" to China), wherein the two sides agreed that after the J&K issue is resolved, China would renegotiate the boundary with the relevant sovereign country. Would China be willing to say the same today about the CPEC — that once the status of Gilgit-Baltistan is agreed bilaterally between India and Pakistan, China will renegotiate with the sovereign authority the terms of transit of the corridor?

China argues that connectivity provided by the BRI would enhance economic cooperation and promote peace. Will it walk its altruistic talk and include the existing land corridor from India to Afghanistan, through Pakistan, in the BRI? This corridor would intersect the CPEC and may therefore open new routes for Chinese goods to both India and Afghanistan, besides promoting India, Pakistan and Afghanistan trade. With its investment in the CPEC now estimated at over \$60 billion, its increasing bilateral assistance to Pakistan and its growing military presence in that country, China is in a strong position to persuade Pakistan to recognise that this is in its best economic interest: it may even transform the CPEC into a commercially viable project.

The Indian government may have other ideas on reciprocal actions. The short point is that the strong Chinese interest for a high-level Indian presence at the BRF may provide New Delhi the opportunity to extract something of commensurate value in return.

P.S. Raghavan is Convenor of the National Security Advisory Board and formerly Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. Views expressed here are personal

In search of gentle death

A judgment in the U.K. that weighed in on dispassionate medical opinion and a passionate appeal by the parents



V. RAMASUBRAMANIAN

On April 11, 2017, Justice Nicholas Francis of the family division of the High Court of England and Wales gave a ruling which I doubt very much, whether I, as a judge, would have had the courage to give. He said: "With the heaviest of hearts, but with complete conviction that it would be in the best interests" of an eight-month-old boy, the hospital which was treating the baby could withdraw the treatment, save for palliative care, to enable the little darling "to die with dignity".

The parents had made an emotional appeal to give the baby a chance — a window that was open, however small it was — so that they could take the baby to the United States for treatment. From the time the doctor in the U.S. had indicated the possibility of treatment, they had been able to raise £12,67,080 through a GoFundMe webpage. But the judge had the courage of conviction to reject it since the success of such treatment was admittedly highly uncertain as it had not even been tested on mouse models.

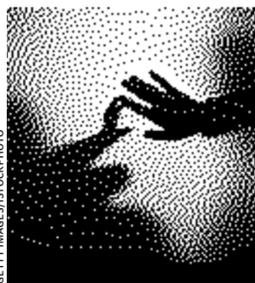
The baby was born on August 4, 2016 with a condition called mito-

chondrial DNA depletion syndrome (MDDS). This is an autosomal recessive disorder, and the baby had the encephalopathic form which causes progressive muscle weakness and brain damage. While the doctors at the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in London, where the baby was being treated, were of the unanimous opinion that it would not be in the best interests of the child to subject him to a therapy known as nucleoside bypass therapy, the doctor in the U.S. claimed that the therapy offered by him was a pioneering one.

Course of the case

Justice Francis not only made the consultant at GOSH who was treating the child speak to the doctor in the U.S. but also recorded his evidence by teleconference. The U.S. doctor confirmed during his interaction that he had never treated anyone who had encephalopathy with nucleoside therapy and that he could not provide any scientific evidence to show that a patient with such a syndrome would respond positively to treatment.

After a great deal of discussion with experts in the field, the judge found no evidence to show that nucleoside therapy can cross the blood/brain barrier, which it must do to treat the RRM2B gene. The boy suffers from the RRM2B mutation of MDDS. Therefore, the judge was convinced that exposing the child to



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nucleoside therapy may perhaps benefit medical science, on account of its possible outcome, but ruled that such experimentation would not be in the best interests of the child unless there was a prospect of benefit for him.

Tossed between a dispassionate medical opinion rendered by experts in the field and a passionate appeal from the parents to allow them to do anything under the sun to save the child, the judge answered a question that would normally surface in the mind of a common man: "some people may ask why the court has any function in this process; why can't the parents make this decision on their own? The answer is that although the parents have parental responsibility, overriding control is vested in the court exercising its independent and objective judgment in the child's best interest".

Pointing out that the intellectual milestone for a judge in a case of this nature was to find out what is in the child's best interest and that the judge must look at the question from the assumed point of view of the child, the judge agreed that there is a strong presumption in favour of a course of action which will prolong life. But such a presumption is rebuttable.

Uncertain recovery

Finding that a child of a tender age was actually "lying in bed, unable to move, fed through a tube, breathing through a machine and uncertain to recover from the nucleoside therapy", the judge eventually came to the conclusion that the doctors should be permitted to remove the life support system and give only palliative care and allow the child to die with dignity. The judge concluded his opinion with a tribute to the parents of the baby for their absolute dedication to their "wonderful boy" from the day he was born and also their brave and dignified campaign on his behalf.

The beauty of this judgment is that it is apparently filled with emotions, but was nonetheless the product of a strong intellect. It assumes significance in the wake of the fact that there is no law in the United Kingdom which sanctions the right to die with dignity. This is in contrast to the U.S. where the States of California and Colorado

have statutes known as End-of-Life Options Act, 2016. The State of Oregon has an Act known as Death with Dignity Act, 1997. The State of Vermont has an Act called Patient Choice and Control at End of Life Act, 2013, and Washington has its Death with Dignity Act, 2008.

But what distinguishes most of the cases that arise under those statutes in the U.S. from the case on hand is that in cases arising under those statutes, the claim is based upon the right and will of the terminally ill person to make a choice. But in the case on hand, the court had to make a choice on behalf of a baby who was incapable of making a choice of his own. It requires a great deal of courage and conviction for a judge to make a choice of this nature, contrary to the wishes of the biological parents.

The paradox is that in a country like ours where death is perceived by religious beliefs merely to be a transition from one form of life to another, many of us might not have exercised the same choice as Justice Francis did, though he must have surely read what was said in Deuteronomy 30:11-19: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live".

Justice V. Ramasubramanian is with the High Court of Judicature at Hyderabad for the States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh

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.

Winning back Kashmir

The article, "Winning back the Valley" (May 3), is conspicuously reticent about offering specific solutions to douse the flames of unrest in Kashmir. The writer has uncritically propagated the myth of the "unattached militant" to make the current phase of political turmoil appear as purely home-grown. It is no secret that the "boys and girls" who pelt stones at security personnel would not come to the streets but for their brainwashing by elements hostile to India. If they had been worried about employment, they should be equipping themselves academically rather than risking their lives in confronting the police and the army. The question is, who is indoctrinating them? The spurt in terrorist attacks on the army has to be seen as in this context. If pumping thousands of crores of rupees as developmental money into

Kashmir has not brought the population closer to India, appeals for peace would only evoke contempt. While enjoying the fruits of power, the State's political elites have preferred to sit on the fence without attempting to act as interlocutors between the local populations and the Central government. Central rule must be imposed conveying the message that winning hearts and minds doesn't mean capitulating before manufactured insurgencies.

V.N. MUKUNDBARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram

■ Jingoistic nationalism cannot subsume the aspirations of the disaffected and alienated people of Kashmir. New Delhi has no moral authority to criticise the so-called radicalisation in the Valley when it is asserting a right-wing agenda in the rest of the country. The resolution of the Kashmir dispute needs

more than the reiteration of the stand that Kashmir is a part of India.

G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthanode, Tamil Nadu

Soldier deaths

Pakistan has exceeded all limits in its nefarious and persistent attempts to needle India. Violating a ceasefire to kill Indian soldiers is bad enough. Mutilating the bodies is unpardonable. The extent of cruelty is unthinkable. By this, the Pakistan Army has proved that it is no different from terrorists. India needs to rethink its strategy and aggressively counter Pakistan's ill-conceived designs. It needs to be taught a lesson in a language it understands.

SRINIVASAN UMASHANKAR, Naggur

■ Even after the incident of killing and mutilation of the bodies of two Indian soldiers has sent shockwaves, it is shameful that Pakistan still demands

proof when prima facie evidence points to misadventure by Pakistan. There is no doubt that not only does Pakistan shelter and support terror but it also carries out despicable acts which are a crime against humanity. There has to be a strong message to Pakistan that denial and defending barbaric practices is no longer acceptable.

K.R. SRINIVASAN, Secunderabad

An Indian boycott?

It is unfortunate that India's participation in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy in England is uncertain. It is not just the Indian cricket fan who is confused over this ambiguity but even Indian cricketers who are unsure whether they will get a chance to defend the title ("Sport" - "Magnanimity is the call of the hour for BCCI", May 3). The BCCI appears flummoxed on this issue after it has lost the ICC

vote and a significant revenue share. If the BCCI still thinks that it is the superpower of world cricket, it is sadly mistaken. Cricket is far bigger than

any individual player or a cricket board.
R. SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A report (May 3, 2017) on a serving Indian Air Force pilot — who was injured in a MiG-21 crash in 2005 and awarded ₹55 lakh as compensation by the Delhi High Court for being exposed to "unreasonable risk" was erroneously headlined: "High Court grants ₹55 lakh compensation to MiG-21 crash survivor." It should have been "orders" instead of "grants".

There was a reference in the third paragraph of the Editorial page article, "Guided by the Constitution" (May 2, 2017) to "rights in Part IV and aspirations in Part IV" co-existing in harmony. It should have been rights in Part III and aspirations in Part IV.

In the report headlined "Parrikar likely to contest from Panaji Assembly seat" (May 2, 2017), Mr. Manohar Parrikar was wrongly described as a Rajya Sabha Member from Lucknow. Actually, members to the Rajya Sabha are elected at the level of States — Uttar Pradesh, in this instance.

"LinkedIn India crosses 40 million active users mark" — read a Business page headline (April 30, 2017). LinkedIn has clarified that their user count does not specify either active or inactive users.

The opening sentence of "Franco-Russian ties: Orthodox & unorthodox" (Paris Despatch, April 30, 2017) erroneously said it's hard to miss the symbolism of a structure on the right bank of the Seine in Paris. It should have been the left bank.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturji Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

Sorry, we owe you no apology

In the new model of the state, everyone is supposedly accountable, no one is specifically responsible



KRISHNA KUMAR

It must have been a difficult decision for the Chief Executive Officer of United Airlines, a major American airline, to apologise following outrage over alleged mistreatment of a passenger of Asian origin by airline staff. Initially, the company tried to blame the passenger, a doctor, who was forcibly evicted from his seat and dragged down the aisle by employees. Despite evidence available on video, the company maintained that the doctor was an unruly passenger. Eventually, in the face of persistent public outcry, the company's head felt that it was better – because it was cheaper – to apologise.

In our own country, people apologise only when they feel compelled to do so by the fear that their long-term interests will be hurt. More common are half-apologies that implicate part of the blame to those seeking the apology. The argument goes that had the latter not manipulated the message and misunderstood it, there would have been no need for an apology. However, even a grudgingly made apology is better than denial of an obvious blame or its cause.

Shifting the blame

A denial of reality is what happened in the recent case of attacks on young African students residing in Greater Noida, a township near the nation's capital. An official apology would have improved our tarnished international image, but we chose to reject the charge of racism. A similar case related to that concerning a report by the National Green Tribunal detailing the ecological damage suffered by the Yamuna river due to a mega-spiritual event conducted last year. Instead of apologising or agreeing to pay a fine, the organisers questioned the environmental court's assessment. Their argument was that if the river had been so "fragile and pure", the authorities should not have permitted the event and, hence, the penalty should be on the concerned administrations.

Despite being a laudable – and an inexpensive – option, apology remains unpopular because it signifies



weakness. In politics, an apology can elevate a leader to greatness, but few have the courage to take the risk for fear of looking weak or losing face. It is more expedient to let a dispensable head roll when a mistake comes to light. Usually, it is a civil servant on whom the responsibility can be fixed. In cases where a bureaucrat is indeed responsible for a bad decision or policy, it is pointless to exact an apology. A civil servant, on his part, doesn't apologise and expects to be defended by colleagues and underlings.

Even academic administrators don't like apologising. They prefer marching on, letting the young pay the price, often without being aware of it. In any case, the idea of autonomy that universities believe to be their privilege enables their administrators to ignore criticism, both from within the institution and outside.

In the world of business, apology is even more uncommon, partly because an apology does not end the matter. The head of United Airlines has apologised but the company will have to face a court case as well. May

be the apology came too late. Delay dilutes the element of sincerity. However, big business organisations, especially multinationals, are a little different from the bureaucracy. They take enormous time to weigh the consequences of an apology, thereby diminishing its effectiveness.

State-corporate nexus

The state and the big business have now come closer across the world. In India, they were far apart until quite recently. In the early decades following Independence, public commentary on business houses was avoided. I recall being told by an editor to take out the name of a company I had included in an article on childhood malnutrition. That was in the early 1970s, when you were free to criticise state actors, but wary of naming a private company in public, apparently because it could give rise to a legal dispute. The media hence chose to focus on the political leadership.

Conditions have changed quite radically over the last three decades, the change having made any acknowledgement of a mistake even rarer. In

the current discourse, 'governance' implies a lean state whose main job is to coordinate non-government actors of different kinds. They now occupy centre stage in a so-called partnership system. Two kinds of partnerships have emerged: between the state and private businesses; and between the state and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Thinner staffing and decline in the quality of public services have forced people to try private providers. When one provider doesn't satisfy, you are expected to try another one. This new reality disperses the responsibility to serve the citizen's needs so much that no one seems answerable.

Functional opacity

A political consensus on these changes explains why the transition to the new arrangements has been so smooth. Terms like 'accountability' and 'transparency' are now propagated as the highest values in public life, enabling transition to a new model of the state without complaints about its functional opacity. This model of a minimalist state allows a greater scope for private services, encouraging an expansion of the role of business in areas like health, education, posts and so on. Enlargement of the private sector apparently fulfills the aspirations of the relatively mobile strata among the poor.

The rich also feel freer from the constraints placed by state agencies. Thus, in education, the 'international school market' has grown side by side with that for non-elite private schools. As for the poorest, they are now being increasingly served by a partnership between the government and NGOs in many parts of the country. This model is more visible in regions where the proportion of the poor is high.

Against this background, we can see why an acknowledgement of mistakes concerning poor quality of service, leave alone an apology, from any empowered actor is highly unlikely. The citizen has lost his right to be served by a disinterested state. Everyone is supposedly accountable, but no one is specifically responsible. The route to redressal is longer and the expectation of an apology looks more romantic than real.

Krishna Kumar is former director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and professor of education, Delhi University

Guarding the gatekeepers

Practising journalism in the age of social media



MANDIRA MODDIE

These are challenging times for journalism. Two things have disrupted the way in which people access information, and therefore the practice of journalism itself: social media and the mobile phone. These two in combination have disrupted the way in which legacy newsrooms operate, forcing them to adapt to fast-changing technology.

The Digital News Report 2016 by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that 51% of their sample use social media as a source of news. According to the Global Web Index's first-quarter report for 2017, 94% of digital consumers aged 16-64 say they have an account on at least one social media platform and 98% have visited/used one within the last month; one in every three minutes spent online is devoted to social networking and messaging, with digital consumers engaging for a daily average of over two hours. At least 78% of the Internet population aged 16-64 is now networking via a mobile.

Publishers are relying less and less on their websites and instead going where the audiences are – the social media platforms, on the mobile.

Big Brother is watching you

For democracy to be practised at its best, there should be plurality of thought and a public sphere that is vibrant with a multitude of views.

Jürgen Habermas, the guru of mass communication theory, has written about how mass media changed the concept of the public sphere from the free-flowing discussions in the coffee houses of 18th century Europe to the mediated space of mass media. Mr. Habermas's public sphere was occupied by journalists and opinion makers; the audience, in turn, was expected to sift through the news and views to make informed decisions about the world in which they lived. The presumption in this model was that media organisations were driven by responsibility to the public while the audience was politically engaged, rational and discerning.

Cut to the 1990s, when the media ecology changed drastically with the advent of the World Wide Web. The generation and distribution of news and opinion was no longer a linear process but networked. This was a medium that was democratic, accessible to all (at least in theory) and a place where multiple conversations could take place. It was felt that the rise of the Internet had given way to the decline of the newspaper but that

theory was soon debunked, and between 2000 and 2009, newspapers began setting up the online versions of their printed publications; this became a time of consolidation for the news media online as people would visit the websites of trusted publications for news.

Twenty years on, the media landscape is very different. Large players like Google and Facebook have actually shrunk the space for public discourse and the very nature of news publishing has changed as a result. Big data, personalisation and distributed content are the watchwords today and news organisations are all jumping on the bandwagon.

Increasingly, search engines such as Google and social media platforms such as Facebook deliver personalised content to users. Algorithms are now replacing news editors and opinion makers and they are getting more and more refined in learning from user behaviour. And as content has multiplied, Facebook and Google are privileging content based on engagement rather than its quality.

The more people click, share, like, or comment on an article, the more likely it is to be served to someone else; and not because it is the best article on the subject. These filters limit people's access to information, leading to the political polarisation and spread of fake news.

Returning to its roots

The mainstay of journalism, holding power to account, is increasingly giving way online to publishing trivial content in the hope of attracting more users. In a bid to increase revenue, publishers are aiming for the largest number of page views, and dumbing down content and engaging in clickbait to reach more eyeballs.

In such an environment, it is only a matter of time before readers will seek out trusted journalists and publishers who they can depend on to provide the news and information that is unbiased and accurate, and opinion that reflects multiple viewpoints and world views.

This is a unique moment for journalism to fulfil its watchdog and gatekeeping roles and be publicly accountable for its content. However, to do this, journalists and their publishers also need to adapt to the new reading habits of their audiences and adapt to storytelling in different formats – not just text, but more interactive, visual formats.

It is also an opportune moment for journalists to take full advantage of the social media tools that are available to them like Snapchat, Facebook Live and Twitter's Periscope to connect with their readers without losing the core values of journalism so that they can continue to tell stories that resonate with the reader.

mandira.moddie@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

Happily never after

The contrast between EU clarity and U.K. confusion on Brexit couldn't be starker

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM



The U.K. and the European Union (EU) remain poles apart in their approaches to the former's impending exit from the bloc. British Prime Minister Theresa May may be credited with the coinage of what has now become a political commonplace: "Brexit means Brexit." But the rest of the bloc has painstakingly fleshed out its substance.

From the moment of the referendum outcome last June, European leaders have viewed the termination of Britain's roughly four-decades-long membership of the bloc with resigned acceptance. Yet, they have remained steadfast on the stance that formal talks on the terms of withdrawal could not commence until London officially notified its decision under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. Brussels circulated its draft negotiating guidelines within days of Britain triggering the exit clause on March 29. The bloc unanimously adopted that blueprint on Saturday. Not only does the text stipulate stringent conditions of departure; equally, it emphasises the need for an orderly, sequential process of its implementation. The guidelines, above all, aim to remove uncertainty at three levels. The foremost priority is to guarantee the rights and future of as many as 4.5 million EU and U.K. migrants resident in each other's territory. These include Polish students in the U.K., British pensioners in Spain, Romanian nurses and doctors in Britain and engineers spread across different countries.

The second uncertainty relates to the programmes funded by the common budget. These concern the beneficiaries of the social fund for the least-qualified citizens, development assistance for the backward regions in the 28-nation bloc and common investments to address climate change and developing renewable energy. Brussels maintains that London must honour all these commitments it signed on to as an EU member.

A third uncertainty sought to be addressed in the guidelines is the implication for the union's external borders arising from Britain's withdrawal from the common customs union. The likely implication for the U.K. in this regard is the potential of a united Ireland inside the EU, in the event of a vote in Belfast on reunification with the Republic.

Ill-prepared U.K.

Against this evolving backdrop, there has been no evidence so far of a coherent U.K. negotiating strategy. London's decision to quit the single market was really not an option given that cherry-picking on the four fundamental EU freedoms was never on the cards. Similarly, her European counterparts have cautioned Ms. May not to entertain illusions about concluding a comprehensive trade deal to coincide with the end of the March 2019 withdrawal deadline. Britain's financial settlement to the bloc, estimated to be in the region of €60 billion, may similarly prove contentious.

Ms. May seems to have calculated that a massive majority in Westminster would somehow strengthen her hand vis-à-vis Brussels. But the election that is materially significant to the rest of the bloc is the presidential run-off in Paris on Sunday. One gets the impression that an ill-prepared U.K. will one day discover that it sleepwalked out of the EU.



CONCEPTUAL Skyscraper curse

ECONOMICS

An idea that seeks to link the construction of skyscrapers to the fate of the overall economy. It was first proposed in 1999 by Andrew Lawrence, an economist at a British investment bank. He argued that when investment in the construction of the tallest skyscrapers peaked, it usually coincided with the end of an economic boom and the likely onset of a recession. Other economists have sought to explain the phenomenon as signalling the temporary misallocation of capital into skyscraper construction being reversed eventually when the projects are exposed to be unviable. The reversal also marks the onset of a recession.

MORE ON THE WEB

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FAQ Flight of the common man

From the current figure of 10 crore, UDAN aims to increase air passenger strength to 30 crore by 2022

SOMESH JHA

What is UDAN?

A regional connectivity scheme, UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik/Let The Common Man Fly) is aimed at reviving dormant airstrips in the country and helping passengers in Tier-II and Tier-III cities fly by air. At the heart of UDAN is the government's decision to cap airfares at affordable levels – ₹2,500 for an hour's flight – aimed at attracting people from the hinterland.

Recently, five airlines – Air India, SpiceJet, Turbo Megha, Air Odisha and Air Deccan – won bids for 128 routes connecting 70 cities under the scheme.

Why is it important?

Almost 10 crore domestic air tickets were sold in 2016, showing a robust growth of 23% compared to 2015. The government expects the number of tickets sold to go up to 30

crore by 2022 with the help of UDAN. Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha said recently that under the first phase of the scheme, 12 underserved airports and 50 unserved airports will be covered.

How does the scheme work?

Airfare for a one-hour journey (covering approximately 500 km) is to be capped at ₹2,500 per seat. The airlines will be provided subsidy for three years in the range of ₹2,470-₹5,100 depending on the type of aircraft and distance covered.

To ensure that they are able to retain business, airlines will get exclusive rights to fly on a regional route for the first three years. Routes are awarded through a reverse bidding auction, so the airline that asks for the least subsidy support gets the exclusive right to fly.

Who is funding the subsidy?

Airlines' losses will be funded by passengers flying on national routes, and State governments. The Centre has set up a regional connectivity fund, to be financed by levying a cess of ₹7,500-₹8,500 on each departing domestic flight on major national routes. So, each passenger flying on a domestic route – apart from those in the Northeast – will be charged an additional amount of ₹50 (approximately).

What about the airfares?

Airfares may range from ₹1,420 to ₹3,500 for flights covering a distance of 150 to 800 km. Airlines will provide lower airfare on 50% of the seats – for a maximum of 40 seats on a fixed-wing aircraft – and will be free to charge market price for the rest of them.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 4, 1967

Non-project from consortium

Nearly \$400 million out of the non-project assistance of \$900 million promised by the Aid India Consortium will be given on the most flexible terms and can be set off by India against its repayment burden in 1967-68. India is scheduled to repay \$365 million to donor-countries this year. This is said to be a major gain of the discussions held by the President of the World Bank, Mr. George Woods, with the Indian leaders earlier this week. Hitherto, even non-project aid has had to be used to purchase specific commodities in particular countries, namely, the donor nations. The only exception was the amount given by the International Development Association, an affiliate of the World Bank. The amount to be given this year on special terms has to be spent in the respective donor-country, but not necessarily for purchases of any specific commodities. This would enable India use, the amount to pay off its debt. Rather than organise any additional assistance, the World Bank is trying to arrange for rescheduling of India's debt by securing special terms for a portion of the non-project assistance already promised.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 4, 1917

Viceroy's bereavement: India's sympathy

Great and widespread sympathy is felt in India with their Excellencies the Viceroy and Lady Chelmsford in the loss of their eldest son, Lieutenant the Hon'ble Frederic Thesiger, R.F.A. Reports received show that Lieutenant Thesiger was the forward observing officer to the guns during the action on April 30th. He had left his station during heavy fire to speak to the infantry brigadier whose troops he was supporting and in returning to his post was hit by a rifle bullet. He succumbed to his injuries on the following day and was buried in the military cemetery at Baghdad on 2nd May, the Service being conducted by the Bishop of Nagpur.

DATA POINT

Caught red handed

Compared to 2013-14, 41% more people were fined for smoking in public/prohibited places in 2016-17 in India. Here are the States which fined smokers the most in the last financial year

