



This time with feeling

The ordinance enabling the RBI to act on bad loans must be accompanied by wider reform

The Centre has empowered the Reserve Bank of India to get banks to take tougher steps, including insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings against defaulters, to address the growing volume of bad loans on their books. An ordinance to amend the Banking Regulation Act of 1949 has been issued to quell doubts whether the existing provisions allowed the RBI to direct banks to deal with specific stressed assets. The RBI has also been vested with the power to form oversight committees wherever it deems fit. Currently such committees exist only for loans brought into a scheme for sustainable structuring of stressed assets, also known as S4A. Now the RBI can bring in such panels to monitor the alphabet soup of other mechanisms for tackling non-performing assets (NPAs) such as SDR (strategic debt restructuring) through the JLFs, or joint lenders' forums. The hope is that this will let bankers take decisive calls on loan accounts that have turned bad, as an independent oversight committee's approval could keep investigative agencies off their backs. Bankers may not always have the sectoral expertise to monetise or leverage assets underlying bad loans in the best possible way. Yet, their paralysis on the NPA front, with its collateral impact being the worst bank credit growth recorded in decades, is driven by the fear that they could get themselves implicated for poor lending and monitoring decisions. The success of this latest salvo against bad loans will depend on the fine print on how the ultimate decision – whether to take a haircut on a loan and restructure it or invoke bankruptcy clauses – is arrived at.

Parhps of equal significance is the reshuffle of certain public sector bank officials announced on Friday. This is a clear signal that the NDA government is losing its patience with bankers persisting with a status quoist approach. The ordinance is the latest attempt to resolve the twin balance sheet problem (of indebted borrowers and NPA-burdened lenders) plaguing India's domestic investment cycle. In 2015, the Prime Minister launched a Gyan Sangam conclave with bankers, and an Indradhanush road map to revitalise public sector banks. Last year, a Banks Board Bureau was set up to recommend the appointment of top bosses at banks and help them develop strategies and plan raising of capital. If the government wants to see a spurt in investment and job-creation, it needs to do more than just pin its hopes on new oversight committees. It must amend the anti-corruption law as has been promised for a while now, and accept the need to fix the policy-level stress affecting sectors such as telecom, power and highways. Above all, the government cannot in the same breath argue that the political cost of reforms is dissipating, but that the 're-privatisation' of banks as mooted by the RBI recently is still a holy cow for the Indian polity.

Space for all

India's launch of the 'South Asia satellite' sends a positive signal to the neighbourhood

By launching the GSAT-9 'South Asia satellite', India has reaffirmed the Indian Space Research Organisation's scientific prowess, but the messaging is perhaps more geopolitical than geospatial. To begin with, the Centre has kept its promise of considering India's "neighbourhood first". Within a month of taking over as Prime Minister in 2014, Narendra Modi went to Sriharikota for the launch of PSLV C-23 and "challenged" ISRO scientists to build this satellite for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. The decision was then announced at the SAARC summit in Kathmandu, and the government has kept its commitment of gifting its neighbours at least one transponder each on the GSAT-9, a project that cost about ₹450 crore. India has no doubt gained goodwill across the subcontinent through the gesture, and the moment was neatly captured by the videoconference that followed the launch, showing all SAARC leaders (with the exception of Pakistan's) together on one screen as they spoke of the benefits they would receive in communication, telemedicine, meteorological forecasting and broadcasting. The message is equally strong to South Asia's other benefactor, China, at a time when it is preparing to demonstrate its global clout at the Belt and Road Forum on May 14-15. The Belt and Road Initiative is an infrastructure network that every SAARC nation other than India has signed on to. China has pledged billions of dollars in projects to each of the countries in the region; that, India is obviously not in a position to match.

Where India does excel is in its space programme, as it is the only country in South Asia that has independently launched satellites on indigenously developed launch vehicles. However, in recent years Pakistan and Sri Lanka have launched satellites with assistance from China, while Afghanistan, the Maldives and Nepal are also understood to have discussed satellite projects with China. Bangladesh, which will launch its first satellite Bangabandhu-1 this year, is working with a European agency. With the GSLV launch India is showing that where it is capable its commitment to the development of its neighbours is strong. Finally, by going ahead with the project despite Pakistan's decision to pull out, the Modi government is signalling that it will continue with its plans for the neighbourhood – 'SAARC minus one' – if necessary. This vision was dealt a minor blow recently when Bhutan pulled out of the 'mini-SAARC' alternative plan of a motor vehicles agreement with BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India Nepal), but the government's persistence indicates it will not be deterred by the obvious domestic constraints of the SAARC grouping. As Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani, particularly aggrieved by Pakistan's refusal to grant transit rights for India-Afghanistan trade, said at the launch of the GSLV-F09: "If cooperation through land is not possible, we can be connected through space."

Turkish delight turned sour

Opening a new page in India-Turkey relations clearly needs to wait for better times



RAKESH SOOD

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's state visit to India last week was expected to open a new page in bilateral relations, which have traditionally alternated between formal and lukewarm, at best. The reason is simple. On issues of mutual concern, both countries have displayed a lack of sensitivity.

Turkey's position on Kashmir has traditionally reflected its proximity to Pakistan, guided by the links between the two military establishments. Both countries were part of the anti-Communist military alliance, the Baghdad Pact (later Central Treaty Organisation or CENTO), and in both generals had wielded political power. Membership of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has been another abiding link between the two countries. On the issue of UN Security Council (UNSC) expansion, Turkey and Pakistan are part of the Uniting for Consensus group which opposes the idea of adding new permanent members, proposing instead a doubling of the non-permanent category to make the UNSC more representative.

More recently, on India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Turkey supported the Chinese idea of a criteria-based approach for non-Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) member states, intended to accommodate Pakistan.

A personal chemistry

Against this negative backdrop is the personal relationship between Mr. Erdoğan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi developed during the last two years on the margins of G-20 summits. Mr. Erdoğan's efforts to shift Turkish foreign policy away from its Western orientation had created space for a growing relationship with India which Mr. Modi was keen to exploit.

There are similarities between the two leaders which may have



drawn them together. Amitav Ghosh wrote about their 'Parallel Journeys', their difficult economic circumstances (Mr. Modi had run a tea stall at the railway station while Mr. Erdoğan sold lemonade at a street corner), the struggle to rise to the top in their respective political parties, a lasting and deep religiosity and exceptional communication skills. According to Mr. Ghosh, Mr. Modi's electoral victory in 2014 was reminiscent of Mr. Erdoğan becoming Prime Minister when his Justice and Development Party (AKP) won in 2002; in both cases, their parties associated with religious organisations had overturned long standing 'secular-nationalist elites'.

In his slim volume *A Question of Order - India, Turkey and the Return of Strongmen*, published earlier this year, describing India and Turkey as two of the world's largest multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracies in Asia, Basharat Peer identifies "religion and secularism as their common and dominant faultlines". Their founding fathers (Ataturk and Nehru) were both charismatic and sought to turn their countries towards western modernity on the basis of free and fair elections and religious freedoms. The economic parallels are less persuasive but Mr. Peer weaves the political threads together in terms of the "strongmen" persona of today's leaders – their promises of reviving national pride and restoring greatness, harnessing militant nationalism, impatience with criticism and civil society, and their personal charismatic appeal. Interestingly, Mr. Modi would like to do away with 'triple talaq' in order to give greater rights to Muslim women while Mr. Er-

doğan reintroduced the women's headscarf, overturning the ban that had been introduced by Ataturk decades earlier!

Stars not aligned
Notwithstanding the personal chemistry between the two leaders, the legacy of mutual insensitivity proved too difficult to overcome. The stars were not aligned. Vice President Ansari's visit to Armenia and Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades visiting India in the week preceding President Erdoğan's arrival were hardly good omens. Mr. Erdoğan too reverted to the pro-Pakistan default position on Kashmir and the NSG. He acknowledged that while India with 1.3 billion people needed to have its place in the UNSC, he added that the 1.7 billion Muslims also needed to be present.

Both sides sought to emphasise the potential for greater economic cooperation. However, there are clear limits here, imposed by existing agreements. Half of Turkey's \$350 billion foreign trade is with Europe. Our bilateral trade which stands at \$6 billion, and is expected to grow to \$10 billion by 2020, can hardly become a major driver.

Troubling policy choices

In coming years, Mr. Erdoğan has his hands full in dealing with the forces unleashed by his policies in the region and domestically. A decade ago, Turkey had a booming economy, Mr. Erdoğan had clipped the wings of the army, Turkey appeared a moderate and progressive Islamic state, and prospects for EU membership were bright. Then came the Arab Spring and Turkish policy adopted a blend of pan-Islamism and neo-Ottomanism. Elec-

tions in the aftermath of the Arab Spring were expected to bring in the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement with which AKP was closely aligned. But by 2013, two problems had emerged. President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt had been removed and the army was back in power in Cairo with the tacit understanding of both the West and Saudi Arabia, and Syrian President Bashar-al-Assad's regime had proven to be far more resilient than anticipated.

The jihadi highway that Mr. Erdoğan opened up on the Turkey-Syria border for radicalised Europeans, Central Asians, Afghans, Arabs and Africans to enter Syria created a backlash. While the Russians were targeting the Islamic State (IS) in Syria to prop up the Assad regime, the U.S. was using its Turkish airbases for strikes against the IS and increasingly relying on the Syrian Kurds for ground operations. Relations nosedived after the shooting down of a Russian Su-24 killing the pilot. Six months later, Mr. Erdoğan had to apologise to Russia to get sanctions lifted. Meanwhile, Turkish Kurds (the outlawed PKK) linked up with their Syrian counterparts, the PYD and its militant wing YPG, spurring Kurdish nationalism as the PYD called for a Rojawa (homeland). During 2016, Turkey suffered more than 200 terrorist attacks, attributed to the IS and the Kurds, killing more than 300 persons.

Having repaired relations with Russia, Mr. Erdoğan is eager to repair relations with the U.S. which had frayed during the Obama years. He was quick to compliment U.S. President Donald Trump for the early April Tomahawk missile strikes on the Shayrat air base in Syria, calculating correctly that he could manage the fallout of this with Russia. Mr. Trump reciprocated by telephoning him to congratulate him on his successful referendum in April. This has been followed up with an invitation to the White House on May 16-17.

Turkey is keen to join in the assault on the IS stronghold of Raqqa to ensure that the YPG is kept under check but the Syrians oppose a role for Turkey. Meanwhile, Turkish soldiers have occupied al-Bab in northern Syria, beating the YPG to it. The idea of a contiguous Kurdish

enclave on its southern border is anathema for Turkey. It has become a strong votary of maintaining Syrian territorial integrity even as Russia and the U.S. are talking about autonomous areas under different groups, separated by buffer zones to ensure peace.

Exploiting a failed coup

Even as Mr. Erdoğan copes with foreign policy challenges, he demonstrated his political agility by exploiting last July's failed coup to round up all potential opponents prior to the April referendum. It is estimated that about 120,000 government employees have been suspended or dismissed, primarily from the judiciary and the education branches, suspected of being Gülen sympathisers. In addition, 7,500 soldiers and officers including over a hundred with the rank of a brigadier and above, and over 10,000 police cadres have been sacked. More than a dozen colleges and universities and a thousand schools are closed; licences of 24 radio and TV channels have been revoked and over a hundred journalists have been arrested.

With all this, Mr. Erdoğan's referendum, which proposes 18 amendments to transform Turkey into a highly centralised presidential government, was passed with a slim majority of 51.4% versus 48.6%. The proposed changes permit Mr. Erdoğan to get two terms of five years each after the 2019 elections, appoint at will vice-presidents and cabinet members and 12 out of 15 supreme court judges, abolish the post of prime minister, provides for simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections and coterminous tenures, enlarges the parliament to 600 seats while reducing the minimum age of candidacy for parliament to 18 years.

This is an ambitious agenda, even for a highly committed and driven leader like Mr. Erdoğan and will keep him busy for the next two years. Opening a new page in India-Turkey relations clearly needs to wait for better times.

Rakesh Sood is a former diplomat and currently distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation. E-mail: rakeshsood2001@yahoo.com

Decoding the doctrine

More clarity is needed on implementing the Joint Indian Armed Forces Doctrine



DINAKAR PERI

"Surgical strikes", probably the most abused term of 2016, are now the new norm. The Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces 2017, released in April, has formally embedded them as a part of sub-conventional operations – meaning that from now on, they are among a range of options at the military's disposal to respond to terrorist attacks.

The more interesting aspect in the second such joint doctrine since 2006 is that the scope of "surgical strikes" has been left open. There is no mention of their employment being within the country or beyond its borders – the ambiguity is intended to send a message in the neighbourhood.

Larger message lost

In this context, it is important to note that the surgical strikes in September 2016 on terror camps

along the Line of Control, though much maligned due to political chest-thumping draped in the camouflage of nationalism, did achieve some far-reaching strategic objectives. They were never meant to put an end to terrorism but reversed a discourse which began in 1998 that India was out of conventional options in its quiver in the face of continued cross-border terrorism after the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests. Unfortunately, this bigger message was lost in the noise.

Further, while acknowledging that the possibility of a "conventional war under a nuclear overhang" recedes with attendant "political and international compulsions", the doctrine notes that training of "Special Operations Division" for execution of precision tasks needs no reiteration. Factoring in the escalation potential of a conflict due to such actions, it states: "The possibility of sub-conventional escalating to a conventional level would be dependent on multiple influences, principally: politically-determined conflict claims; strategic conjuncture; operational circumstance; international pressures and military readiness."



The doctrine also reiterates the basic tenets of the Indian nuclear doctrine, no-first use (NFU) and minimum credible deterrence, contrary to recent calls to revise the NFU and speculation in the West that India would resort to a first strike.

It adds that conflict will be determined or prevented through a process of credible deterrence, coercive diplomacy and conclusively by punitive destruction, disruption and constraint in a nuclear environment across the Spectrum of Conflict.

Flowing from the broader objective is the statement that Special Forces units will be "tasked to develop area specialisation in their in-

tended operational theatres" to achieve an optimum effect.

The various objectives open up an entire gamut of capability addition and process optimisation for the Indian military to be able to enforce it. Achieving these broad objectives requires seamless synergy between the three services, a far cry in the present circumstances.

Interestingly some of the biggest policy decisions have been stuck endlessly – appointment of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), formation of cyber, space and Special Forces commands and carving out inter-service theatre commands. After some initial push from the Government, the enthusiasm has gone cold.

The doctrine also declares: "Undertaking 'Integrated Theatre Battle' with an operationally adaptable force, to ensure decisive victory in a network centric environment... in varied geographical domains, will be the guiding philosophy for evolution of force application and war fighting strategies." In this context, how the doctrine will be put into effect will be worth watching given that the 15 year Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan is nowhere near being

achieved by any of the three services.

Indigenisation challenge

Another important pronouncement under the "National Military Objectives" is: "Enable required degree of self-sufficiency in defence equipment and technology through indigenization to achieve desired degree of technological independence by 2035."

This probably presents the biggest challenge of all given the fledgling state of the domestic defence-industrial complex. While a grand pronouncement was made under the "Make in India" initiative, it has essentially remained an exercise in doling out billions of dollars to foreign companies.

The doctrine is a bold announcement, but without the necessary elements in place, it will remain just another document like the policy formulations enunciated earlier. Or worse, it will be relegated to being another political slogan for popular resonance rather than send out a message of intent beyond Indian borders and shores.

dinakar.peri@thehindu.co.in

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.

The Nirbhaya case

The Supreme Court's verdict has delivered justice to Nirbhaya after inexplicable barbarism perpetrated on her ("SC upholds death for Nirbhaya convicts" (May 6). But it is also time to deliver justice to the cause for which our society rose in one voice after the incident. This is the time to effectively implement various policies such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and effect stricter punishment for voyeurism and stalking. There are still countless women in rural India who are unable to report or file complaints against harassment. The low number of women police personnel further

aggravates the problem. It is also time to overhaul our way of thinking, where all students are taught to respect women, impart self-defence lessons to girls and augment police patrolling at night with women constables. These small steps will all help in delivering results.

GAGAN PRATAP SINGH, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

■ Child rape, gang rape, the abduction and killing children for ransom, terrorist and militant acts leading to the deaths of many also shock the conscience of public in equal measure. The perpetrators also deserve severe punishment and such cases must be fast-tracked. These cases also fall under the rarest of rare cases, warranting the consideration of capital punishment. Will the top

court issue guidelines on these as well?

S.V. VENKATKRISHNAN, Bengaluru

Space bonding

By fulfilling its promise made at SAARC, India has cemented its position in its "neighbourhood first" agenda, winning it immense goodwill ("Space bonding hits a new high", May 6). Another unprecedented feature is the free-of-cost usage, which will further improve the credibility of India as a reliable regional partner. Finally, the vast applications of the satellite will prove useful in consolidating and integrating the region as a whole.

ATIN SHARMA, Jammu

The spirit of 1967

The writer argues that the India of 2017 needs the kind

of strategic alliance seen in 1967, forged by C.N. Annadurai ("Breathe in the spirit of 1967", May 6).

Secularism, federalism and pluralism are no doubt lofty ideals but questions remain on how these were followed by successive governments in India. Secularism, for instance, supposedly means equal respect for all religions. But politicians turned it into a plank for the appeasement of minorities. During the UPA rule of 2004-2014 – a shining example of Indian federalism – what we witnessed was mega scams. One needs to introspect on why people are voting for change, since 2014, even putting up with temporary hardships caused to them by measures such as demonetisation. A corruption-free government that delivers is more desirable than the one that

merely swears by utopian ideals.

V. JAYARAMAN, Chennai

Heartburn for farmers

It's disheartening to note that chilli farmers in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are suffering from the problem of excess supply and falling prices ("Market crash forces A.P. farmers to let chilli wither away", May 7). India is an agrarian nation and farmers should be able to produce their crops to the maximum

extent possible without having to bother about demand. The government has a significant role to play by procuring the entire supply at the minimum ceiling price and ensure that farmers are not exposed to the vagaries of market conditions. State governments do not have concrete plans for the development of the agricultural sector.

S. RAMAKRISHNASAYEE, Ranipet, Tamil Nadu

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

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Editing error: Prof. Douglas Webber, whose quote appears at the penultimate paragraph of "French rivals clash in debate" (May 5, 2017), was wrongly described as professor of political science at the Business School for the World. He is actually with INSEAD, an international business school.

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: +91-44-2818297/2857630 (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, Kasturba 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

Blurring the lines on what is local

Local issues do shape contestation in urban local bodies, but they alone do not drive the outcome



BHANU JOSHI

In the lanes of a Block in Mangolpuri, an old man points us to a board outside what once was a community toilet complex. The board reads, Site for Baraat Ghar, Estimated Cost ₹140 Lakhs. "The Japanese had constructed the toilet, and after their contract got over, people took everything away," laments the same man, who considers himself a social worker. "The previous MLA promised a Baraat Ghar (Community Centre) from his MLA quota, but this land belonged to MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi)," he added. "No, it is DDA (Delhi Development Authority) land and not the MCD," offered a passerby. "There is some problem between the MLA and the Councillor, and only a board was put up, and nothing since has happened," says the social worker.

Just beyond the block is a Jhuggi Jhopri (squatter settlement) cluster where heaps of garbage mixed with sludge drawn from drains and leaking water taps marks the entry to the settlement. Although he has no formal position, the Pradhan or cluster leader is ushered in to meet us. "He maintains a register of the owners in this cluster and negotiates on our behalf," says a man standing next to the Pradhan. Mangolpuri is one of the areas in Delhi that voted last month for a new city government.

Citizen's perception of public services provided by the rural governance institutions in India is very clear. Indian cities, however, have a far messier governance structure where the larger question of what urban citizens respond to and how their demands are met remains ambiguous.

Urban politics in India

Many political scientists argue that the decentralisation of public administration and the introduction of local elected bodies have produced systems of governance that are better able to meet the needs of the poor. From a political perspective, when decentralisation works well, citizens in small communities have the power to hold their elected representative

accountable for policy decisions, yielding policy outcomes more uniquely tailored to the needs of these communities.

Yet, the true nature of Indian urbanisation severely departs from this theoretical ideal, with political parties investing heavily in winning at the local level, only to give those elected leaders very limited power, while the State government exercises close control through unelected parallel bodies. In Delhi, this becomes all the more evident, where in spite of the cacophony around the importance of the election, the fact remains that we still don't know who the three Mayors of Delhi will be. Perhaps worrying about this is of no use, given that the tenure of a Mayor in Delhi is only for one year!

Indeed, the question of the broadening of the political spectrum was one of the main ideas behind India's decentralisation policy, yet the central issue of local power – political or otherwise – and incentives for citizen participation in urban areas have remained ambiguous. This is in contrast to the local governments in rural India, which, though also limited in their functionality, have significantly more power than their urban counterparts. During our field work on understanding electoral behaviour in West Bengal, rural citizens associated with their local representatives more closely and also scrutinised their work more critically. Given this knowledge and perception of local provisions and working of the officials, rural voters can make reasonable inferences on the functioning of rural local government.

In the presence of a limited functional domain, the question of how citizens assess their representatives in the urban context has remained a rather unexplored topic. Inequality in the city leading to differentiated access in services is also leading to different ways in which citizens in poorer and "unregularised" areas access the state. In Mangolpuri, for instance, the social worker and the Pradhan have been working on bringing public services to the people. As intermediaries, their influence on citizens, and particularly on their electoral participation, remains ambiguous.

Is there a local agenda?

Does State politics subsume the local agenda or is it the personality cult of national and State leaders that tilts the outcome? The answer to this



A residential colony in northwest Delhi in the run-up to the municipal corporation elections, in April 2017. •SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

question lies somewhere in the middle. A study to delve into these issues was conducted by the Centre for Policy Research in four Indian cities. This study along with brief recent fieldwork preceding the MCD elections reveal some trends.

First, local issues do shape contestation in the city, but they alone do not drive the outcome. For political parties, elections to urban local bodies appear to be a preparatory ground for consolidating their positions and widening their support base for winning the Assembly elections. For voters, these elections provide an opportunity to express their views on different political parties struggling to capture the State governments. These considerations, rather than definite political programmes of the respective parties on improving the civic services, motivate the political parties and the voters, respectively.

Second, and as a consequence of the first, "politics" defines the terms of debate in the electoral contestations. Local issues do feature in the campaign, but they seem to play a minor role. Politics then determines both the strategy and mode of campaigning and voters' behaviour. Such politicisation of local elections to mimic larger questions of ideology and politics of the State restricts the space of local democracy.

Third, non-competing narratives to developing our cities give way to an uninteresting campaign. In Katwa municipality in Bardhaman district of West Bengal, for example, every political party's manifesto had water supply as a priority, but nobody indicated where from the resources would come to augment water supply. Similarly, in the just concluded MCD elections, most residents interviewed clearly identified garbage collection and disposal as a municipal function which had deteriorated over time, becoming a public health issue. Yet, neither of the three major parties offered anything beyond shutting or closing the landfills. Indeed, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which has been called a class-based urban political party, showed no imagination on a possible road map – something which it did so effectively in its 70-point action agenda before the 2015 Assembly elections.

The citizen-state relationship in terms of jurisdiction and access in Indian cities is complex. As India urbanises, acknowledging the formal and informal interactions and incorporating them to understand local politics can provide valuable insights into our urbanisation trajectory.

Bhanu Joshi is a public policy researcher at the Centre for Policy Research, Delhi

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Proper attribution is good reporting

On two reports and their differing figures



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

Last week, we got a set of queries from readers pointing out discrepancies in two reports pertaining to the crisis in sand quarrying in Tamil Nadu. R. Vidyasagar, an engineer from Chennai, highlighted two differing figures, both in the number of quarries in the State and functional quarries. The report, "PWD shuts down seven quarries in Tiruchi region" (April 30, 2017), said that the State Public Works Department had obtained permission to operate a total of 42 quarries across the State, of which only 21 were functioning. Another report, published a day earlier in 'Property Plus', had different figures in the headline itself: "With only 10 of the State's 38 sand quarries functional, over 40% construction activity has been hit." He wanted to know the exact figures and wondered how these contradictions happened in reports filed within a span of 24 hours.

Let's get the facts first. In his report, "Sand quarries no longer employ machines in T.N.," says PWD, citing published figures, Associate Editor T. Ramakrishnan cleared the air. There were 61 functional quarries in the State till the middle of 2016. However, the situation became murky when the permission that stipulated the time frame and the quantum of sand to be extracted lapsed for most of the quarries over the next few months. The State Environmental Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) lays the norms for sand quarrying. This body was headless for nearly four months till the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change appointed a former officer of the Indian Forest Service as its new chairman. As of April 28, 2017, there were 20 quarries in operation. Of them nine had to be shut down following a Madras High Court order as they had violated the norms laid by SEIAA. As of now there are no river sand quarries in Tamil Nadu that are deploying machines. As the State is not able to meet the demand with the existing quarries, it has decided to shut them down altogether and go to the SEIAA for fresh approvals.

The key journalistic questions in the earlier reports are not about two differing sets of figures but about the failure of the reporters to ensure proper attribution to the facts and figures cited in the article. The 'Property Plus' story was based on figures

given by R. Murritham, President of the Tamil Nadu Sand Lorry Owners Association since 1995. The Tiruchi region story got its figures from local Public Works Department officials. It often happens that the figures provided by two different sources vary. However, had the reporters been diligent, they would have ensured proper attribution rather than sounding like all-knowing-Oracles.

'Err on the side of attributing'

Most journalism manuals have spelt out the importance of attribution. Reporters would gain immensely to remember the following text from "Memo to all hands" by Alfred Friendly, Managing Editor of *The Washington Post* from as early as 1958: "Direct attribution is the best way of handling news and information about an event or conditions or situations of which we do not have direct, eyewitness knowledge ourselves. This is always the best way, inasmuch as it provides the reader with a knowledge of the source, enabling him to evaluate its credibility for himself. It involves no pretence of having direct knowledge, which we do not have. It avoids the risk of having the newspapers used to disseminate material for which the author is unwilling to take public responsibility."



The public broadcaster, NPR, has a rule: "attribute everything." It says: "Attribute, attribute and attribute some more. No material from another source should ever be included verbatim, or substantially so, without attribution... When in doubt, err on the side of attributing – that is, make it very clear where we've gotten our information (or where the organization we give credit to has gotten its information)."

It is vital to recognise that each report is a piece in the jigsaw puzzle called our reality. A reader puts these stories together to arrive at an informed choice. Many economists are of the firm opinion that sand has become the new oil. The two reports on sand shortage in Tamil Nadu are a part of this larger picture. Is there a more compelling reason for proper attribution?

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

Chaos in Venezuela

It is still not too late to rescue the economy. It requires an end to price controls, and more market competition

PRASHANTH PERUMAL J.



Venezuela is reeling under a severe economic crisis, one that has spilled over into its politics. Massive protests have erupted against President Nicolás Maduro with growing demands for his ouster through fresh elections. Mr. Maduro has called the protests an "economic war" waged by elite business interests. But much of Venezuela's problems are the doing of its own leaders, as confirmed by history.

Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's former President, came to power in 1998 promising to fight poverty and inequality through socialism. He soon nationalised huge amounts of private assets, including oil companies, and expanded social spending on food, housing, education, etc. To fund these programmes, Chavez made use of his nation's oil reserves, the biggest in the world, at a time when oil prices were at historic highs. Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A., a state-run firm that controls all oil production in Venezuela, was tasked with the job of exporting oil to spend the revenues on social welfare.

Short-lived success

As a result, Venezuela's poverty rate fell from 50% in 1998 to 30% in 2012. This apparent prosperity, however, was only short lived. As oil prices slipped from well over \$100 in 2014 to as low as \$27 in 2016, the flow of dollars stopped and the government could no longer fund its social spending except by borrowing freshly created bolivars from the central bank. Venezuela's money supply thus grew from 10.6 billion bolivars in 1998 to 290 billion bolivars in 2010, and later reached 7,513 billion bolivars by 2016. The result was rapid domestic price inflation and a drop in the bolivar's value, that crippled most Venezuelans.

Further, the government's approach in dealing with rising price inflation, particularly under Mr. Maduro, aggravated the crisis. The prices of essential commodities such as food, medicine, toilet paper, etc. were capped, which in turn led to shortages fuelled by excess demand and a steep drop in supplies as business profits declined. According to reports, 75% of Venezuelans lost at least 19 pounds in 2016 due to shortages.

The authorities resorted to rationing to deal with the crisis, which naturally led to corruption of various kinds. Some goods were rationed to friends of bureaucrats. Others, such as bread, were sold in the black market for higher prices.

Mr. Maduro, rather than seeing these as the unintended consequences of his own policies, has taken to vilifying private enterprise. According to leaked estimates by Venezuela's central bank, Venezuela's GDP shrunk by 18.6% in 2016.

The International Monetary Fund projects that inflation could be over 700% in 2017, and as high as 2,000% next year. These are clear signs of an economic disaster. Nevertheless, it is still not too late to rescue the Venezuelan economy. It would require a decisive end to price controls, serious currency reform, and the fostering of greater market competition in the economy.



CONCEPTUAL Fata Morgana OPTICS

A Fata Morgana is a form of mirage, the term also used in a metaphorical sense. It is usually associated with something that is mysterious and unapproachable – as famously pictured by Longfellow in his eponymous poem in 1873. There are several other literary references to it. The unusual and complex optical phenomenon is seen in a narrow band in a narrow band in a right above the horizon, comprising inverted and erect images stacked atop one another. It is the Italian name for a sorceress from Arthurian legend, based on a belief that the mirages were fairy castles in the air or false land created by her witchcraft to lure sailors to their death. The term is sometimes applied to other, common kinds of mirages; the 'real' Fata Morgana significantly distorts the objects on which it is based, unrecognisably.

MORE ON THE WEB

AAP in the doldrums for today
http://bit.ly/AAPcrisis

SHELF HELP

Voyage of melodies

Two books put the text and context of Hindi songs in tune

HARI NARAYAN

What constitutes a film song? Classicists stress the primacy of the ragas while poets vouchsafe for the importance of lyrics. However, film historian Raju Bharatan, in the introduction to his book *A Journey Down Melody Lane*, says that film being a visual medium, the ability of a filmmaker to align the abilities of the composer with his own vision is paramount. A point he explains with the example of Satyajit Ray, who in the 1960s took to composing for his films. Bharatan says a film tune is "hewn", not created.

The 'audio visionary'

To illustrate this idea, he dedicates the second chapter to the genius of Raj Kapoor whom he considers a consummate "audio visionary". This comes in the book even before Bharatan analyses the music of a Naushad or a Salil Chowdhury. Kapoor, who had sung his only song for an obscure film called *Dil Ki Rani*, could paint a picture of the theme, the full

sequence, in his mind before he approved a tune, he says. The composers – be it Shankar-Jaikishan or Laxmikant-Pyarelal – were arrangers, the real music director always being Kapoor himself and his favourite raga, the Raag Bhairavi. From the trendsetting *Barsaat*, which had five songs in the raga, to his last film *Ram Teri Ganga Maali*, Kapoor got Bhairavi moulded to match his ideas in such a way that it became 'RK Bhairavi' in his cinema. One prominent example is the dream sequence in *Awara*. Note the way the screen seamlessly segues from one mood to another – from 'Tere bina' to 'Ghar aaya' – both in 'RK Bhairavi'.

Anirudha Bhattacharjee and Balaji Vittal, in their book *Gaata Rahe Mera Dil: 50 classic Hindi film songs*, consider the *Awara* sequence Hindi cinema's "first music video". The authors analyse the process of composition, the picturisation and the importance of the song for the film. Keeping with

their objective, they include only songs that have been picturised, leaving out those without a video.

Starting from 'Chale pavan ki chhaal' (*Doctor*) by Pankaj Mullick, ending at 'Dil hai chota sa' (*Raja*) by A.R. Rahman – which is, in a strict sense, more a dubbed song – their descriptions follow a pattern: explaining the scenario in the industry during the song's creation; explaining the thinking that went into the song's making; analysing the ragas, the lyrics and the musical arrangements; and looking at how well the song fit into the film as a whole. It is as if the authors wished to compose the articles as songs in themselves: following the prelude, mukhda, interlude, antara pattern.

These are two books that don't stop with showcasing the mastery of the authors in Hindi film music. They want you to listen to the individual songs, beat by beat, and appreciate them better by placing it within the film, adding visuals to tunes.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 8, 1967

President tells MPs politics alone is not life

The President, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, said here [New Delhi] today [May 7] that politicians should exert their utmost to alleviate the suffering of the humanity and raise the material condition of our people. Politicians, he said, should not think that politics should absorb all their life, though "it is indispensable, but not whole of our (politicians') life"... There were politicians who looked upon politics as a matter of prestige and power. "It is one of service and humility. It requires us to identify ourselves with the lowest of the land and do our utmost. Politicians do not mean people who twist their tongues, or have cool hearts. They are men with warmth of feeling, with compassion for the sufferings of humanity. That is what they are expected to be," Dr. Radhakrishnan said. The President, who is laying down office shortly, was replying to a farewell address.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 8, 1917

The Maharaja of Bikanir and his countrymen

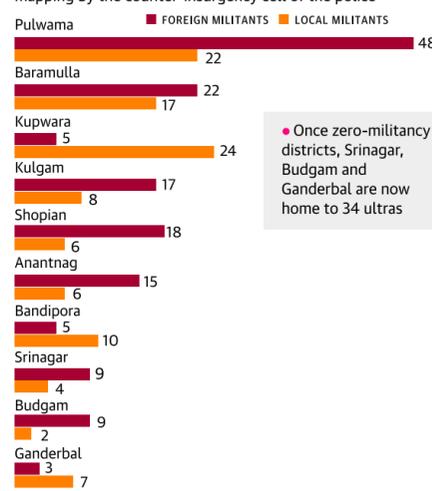
The Indian representatives at the Imperial War Cabinet, the Maharaja of Bikanir, Sir James Meston, and Sir Satyendra P. Sinha, were the guests at a reception at 21, Cromwell road, given by the National Indian Association and the Northbrook Society, April 2nd. In the unavoidable absence of Lord Lamington and Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, the respective presidents, the guests were received by Sir Charles Lyall and Mr. Austin Low, the Chairman. After speeches of welcome from Sir Charles Lyall and Mr. Austin Low, Sir James Meston, in returning thanks, said that the delegates did not anticipate when they left India that they would have anything like the reception which had been extended to them in this country.

The Maharaja of Bikanir said he was particularly glad to meet so many of his young countrymen studying here [Britain].

DATA POINT

Militancy across districts

At least 257 militants are active in Kashmir, shows a district-wise mapping by the counter-insurgency cell of the police



SOURCE: OBTAINED FROM COUNTERINSURGENCY CELL