



The rot in farming

We must enable a sustainable price discovery for agricultural produce

To say it is a domino effect of the loan write-offs for small and marginal farmers by the Uttar Pradesh government may be simplistic, but farmers in different parts of the country have begun agitating for waivers. In Tamil Nadu, they have given the State government two months to meet their demand for a full waiver or face a fresh agitation. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, in the face of protracted protests by farmers, has announced a blanket loan waiver for ‘needy’ farmers, with an estimated outgo of ₹35,000 crore. In Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has resisted announcing a waiver, but unveiled a ‘package’ that includes a ‘settlement scheme’ to bring loan defaulters back into the credit net with interest-free loans. Farm groups in Punjab also began dharnas on Monday for loan waivers and other interventions. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has categorically said States must generate their own resources to fund such largesse, and the Reserve Bank of India has warned of inflationary risks from fiscal slippages caused by large farm loan waivers. However, it would be short-sighted to see the rising angst in the farm sector as simply the desire of farmers around the country to keep up with U.P. There are deeper reasons that must be addressed holistically.

The problem is price discovery. In fact, there is deflation in pulse and vegetable prices. The RBI has acknowledged that already falling vegetable prices dipped more sharply because of ‘fire sales’ following demonetisation, and pulses are cheaper because of high output on top of imports. Prices for eggs, oils, cereals and milk are moderating, and while the sharp fall in food prices has kept consumer price inflation tepid, rural distress has been aggravated. The new cattle trade rules threaten the viability of livestock and dairy farming. Banks are awash with funds since the note ban, but rural lending growth collapsed to 2.5% in the second half of 2016-17 and even shrank in several States, including Punjab and Maharashtra. Prices of fuel used by rural households have surged for three successive months. It is this squeeze on several fronts that seems to have pushed farmers to the brink. In consultation with the States, the Centre must reconsider whether it is prudent to narrowly target low food inflation. If India wants to be the world’s food factory, its farm policy needs to recognise farmer requirements for state support. If consumers and producers can benefit from a single national market in the GST era, farmers should also have the freedom to sell their produce where and when they want – with a predictable policy framework (no flip-flops in export-import stances, for instance) that enables farm-to-fork supply chains independent of local mandis and traders. Labour and land reforms also need to be revisited to create more opportunities beyond farming, and irrigation and other infrastructure projects speeded up to boost farm productivity.

Feats on clay

While Nadal sealed his greatness at the French Open, Ostapenko announced her promise

In sport, there aren’t many tests tougher than playing Rafael Nadal on Parisian clay. For over a decade, the Spaniard has reduced nearly every player, regardless of reputation. Roger Federer included, to an unrecognisable heap of dust. On Sunday, when he did the same to Swiss Stan Wawrinka to win an unprecedented 10th French Open title and his 15th major overall, it was just a reiteration of the same. Nadal lost only 35 games all tournament, a number second only to Bjorn Borg’s 32 in the 1978 French Open, and did not concede more than four games in any set he played. Coming as it did after two years of under-performance, troubled by a creaky wrist and stripped of his aura, it might well be his most significant title. This does not mean that Nadal’s status as the greatest of all clay-courtiers was ever in doubt. As the 31-year-old himself said after thrashing Dominic Thiem in the semi-final, “I think I don’t need to make more history. It’s enough. Nine are more than good.” Rather it should highlight, more vividly than ever before, that Nadal is no ordinary dirt-baller. When he won for the first time at Roland Garros in 2005, he was seen as yet another of those cautious, risk-averse, immovable objects the clay-court specialists were. Through 15 Grand Slam titles, including two Wimbledon titles, he has proved that his tactical nous and regenerative powers are second to none. The last fortnight perhaps offered a glimpse of what a devastating blend a happily married offence and defence is.

On the women’s side Jelena Ostapenko, the 20-year-old Latvian, sent out the same vibes with her triumph as a teenaged Nadal had done in 2005. If Nadal had won his maiden title in his first attempt in Paris, for Ostapenko the 2017 win was the first trophy of any kind and helped her become the first unseeded woman to win at Roland Garros since 1933. Like when Maria Sharapova, all of 17, mowed down Serena Williams at Wimbledon in 2004, Ostapenko played with a panache that belied her experience. She was up against Simona Halep, the favourite, in the final but so nerveless was her performance that even being a set and 0-3 down did not affect her poise. She lived by the sword, making 54 winners and as many errors in the final. It’s a tactic that does not always fetch the right dividend on clay but credit should go to Ostapenko for persisting with her attacking mindset. Admittedly, the women’s draw was shorn of stars with Williams, Sharapova, Victoria Azarenka all absent, Petra Kvitová just about recovering from a knife attack, and World No.1 Angelique Kerber anything but that. Regardless, the competitive quality on the women’s side was a notch above the men’s, and Ostapenko, playing five thrilling three-set matches out of her seven, was a testament to this.

The road from St. Petersburg

Nostalgia may be useful, but it cannot make up for a lack of substantive drivers in India-Russia ties



SHYAM SARAN

There has been a certain depressing pattern in India-Russia relations over the past decade. Annual summit-level meetings have been marked by expressions of nostalgia for the glory days of Indo-Soviet friendship, declarations of solemn intent to take contemporary relations to new heights and highlighting common perspectives even as the two countries mostly go their respective ways. The St. Petersburg Declaration issued at the end of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent visit to Russia appears not much different in this respect.

Convergences, divergences This is not to say that the two countries do not continue to have important convergent interests. Certainly there are specific areas such as defence hardware and technology, nuclear energy and oil and gas where their cooperation is of mutual benefit. There may even exist longer-term convergence in helping shape a multipolar international political and security architecture.

However, these shared interests must be balanced against divergences that are inherent in the very dramatic transformations which have taken place in the two countries themselves, and in the regional and global situation since the end of the Cold War, which have inevitably altered the overall context of our relations. This altered context has to be acknowledged by both sides, and rather than cling to the assumptions of a very different past, there should be an unsentimental reckoning of both the challenges and opportunities that could define India-Russia relations in the new millennium.

It is fine to say that our relations



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are “immune” to the changes in the geopolitical situation. This is good political packaging but we should accept that in reality this is simply not true. India-Russia relations today are very different precisely because we are very different countries today and the world is very different from the 1960-1990 phase of the India-Soviet strategic partnership. The cordiality and mutual trust of the past may be leveraged to fashion a new relationship but they cannot substitute for a lack of substantive drivers in the relationship.

Let us look at how the key assumptions underlying the Indo-Soviet strategic partnership, pre-Cold War, has changed.

Shared China concerns

One, it is the shared perception of a Chinese threat which brought Delhi and Moscow together. The end of the Cold War changed this, with Russia no longer looking at China as a current security threat. The early settlement of their border dispute, the expansion in their economic and trade relations and the emergence of China as a major recipient of Russian weapons and defence technologies brought about an asymmetry in perceptions of China between India and Russia. But Russian perceptions of a long-term Chinese challenge to its interests persisted, and still do. For example, Russian nuclear experts have been reluctant to deep

cuts in nuclear weapons in bilateral negotiations with the U.S. precisely because the gap with China’s expanding and qualitatively better nuclear arsenal is diminishing and this heightens Russian concerns. Chinese inroads into Central Asia and Eastern Europe are also a concern for Russia, which regards both these regions as part of its strategic periphery. These concerns may currently be muted because Russia needs Chinese support in confronting a hostile U.S. and Western Europe.

What this means for India is that we need to adjust to a new and more positive phase in Russia-China relations, learn not to rely on Moscow to confront Chinese hostility towards India or support India against Pakistan, but seek to build a broader framework of relations based on the longer-term Russian concerns about the emergence of China. Russia, like India, prefers a multipolar world and is unlikely to accept a junior league status in a Chinese-dominated world. The St. Petersburg Declaration describes India and Russia as “great powers”. That is signal enough that neither is about to succumb to Chinese pretensions to singular dominance. For the same reason, Russia may welcome a higher-profile role by India in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In this context, India should pursue the proposed Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union and seek to

play a more active role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a member.

Two, it is in India’s interest to see an improvement in relations between Russia and the U.S. and Western Europe. It is the coordinated support of these three major partners of India which enabled us to overcome Chinese opposition and obtain the unprecedented waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008. This is no longer the case. The U.S. under President Donald Trump appeared to be moving in the direction of normalising relations with Russia, but this now seems unlikely as reports of Russian involvement in the American electoral process become more compelling. However, the very unpredictability of Mr. Trump and his roiling of the Western alliance confronts both U.S. allies and adversaries with the need to avoid misunderstanding and misperceptions. A more united and coherent European Union may well be open to re-engaging with Russia, and this should be encouraged by India. In an increasingly fluid international situation, an India which has strong relations with the U.S., Western Europe and Russia is in a unique position to play a larger geopolitical role. It can use its enhanced relations with each to upgrade its relations with the other major powers. This will also diminish Chinese pressures on India.

Defence, nuclear, energy ties

Three, India and Russia should focus on maintaining and expanding their already considerable cooperation in the defence hardware and nuclear energy sector. Both sectors are important to Russia as well as to India. The loss of the Indian market in these two areas would be a blow to Russia and they would deprive India of advanced technology not always accessible elsewhere. However, there is no need for India to accept terms and conditions which are onerous merely because of sentimentality. During the recent visit, one heard nothing about the fifth-generation fighter aircraft that the

two sides had agreed to co-develop and produce almost a decade ago. It is probably just as well since whatever one had heard about the Russians constantly changing goal posts and revising costs did not augur well for India’s long-term interests. We should not have to go through another Admiral Gorskov episode, which has left such a bitter taste.

Four, since the end of the Cold War, India sought to establish a strong, long-term energy partnership with Russia. While some important deals like the Sakhalin oil and gas project have been a success, the early promise of expanding cooperation in this sector has been mostly belied. Russia has seen its interests better served by giving priority to Western Europe and China. India has been rather low on the radar. In St. Petersburg, there was a reference to India and Russia setting up an “energy corridor” and another reference to the use of natural gas as a relatively clean and climate-friendly fuel. One hopes that this statement of ambitious intent is followed up with some concrete and practical steps. India has been reluctant to use gas for power generation. Does the joint statement signal a rethink in this regard and will Russia play a role as a major supplier? One will have to await details.

This 18th annual India-Russia summit appears to have been more substantive than the previous ones, and one hopes that in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, India and Russia find a more realistic basis and more compelling reasons to work together. One’s assessment of Russia’s foreign policy remains: its current closeness to China is tactical; its long-term interest both globally and in its neighbourhood are not aligned with China. India should pursue its relations with Russia keeping this reality in mind.

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Upholding Chavismo

The Venezuelan Opposition needs to support democracy and help in drafting a new Constitution



ABDUL NAFEY

Democracy is said to stand consolidated when no one challenges the legitimacy of the process to access power. In Venezuela, the Opposition wants a restoration of the old order, one in which power and privilege came as inheritance. Political actors of different hues, who were united in their common distaste for late President Hugo Chávez, have been determined to strip President Nicolás Maduro of the presidency ever since the Opposition gained a majority in the national legislative elections held in December 2015.

The National Assembly was particularly incensed by the Supreme Court order of March 29, 2017 which upheld the power of the President to make energy deals with international oil firms. Crude exports bring in 95% of the country’s foreign exchange, and, with prices remaining low for three years, it is never easy to find joint venture partners for the heavy and

extra-heavy crude production. The National Assembly has obstructed every joint venture between the state-owned oil company and foreign oil firms. With its no-holds-barred politics, it has opposed even steps such as establishment of ‘fair price’ shops to sell essential food items at fixed rates. Major bills and other presidential initiatives have remained stalled. Further, the legislature has rather brazenly sought to encroach upon the powers of judiciary and the President through measures such as ordering the release of political detainees.

A way out

With all offers of dialogue, including through papal mediation, having been rebuffed, Mr. Maduro has finally taken recourse to the Constitution to restore peace and overcome the politics of hatred and intolerance. Article 347 of the 1999 Constitution allows “the people of Venezuela” to convene a Constituent Assembly with the aim of “transforming the state” through a new legal framework. The National Electoral Council (CNE) has validated the election to a 540-member National Constituent Assembly (NCA) to be held on territorial and sectoral basis before the end of



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July. To write the new Constitution, 364 members would be elected by the municipalities; the remaining 176 will represent the diversity of the nation, which includes local communities like those of the workers, the peasants and fishermen and the indigenous communities. It will be a participatory body – representative and multicultural in its composition. A registered voter, above 18 years in age, can contest for the NCA, which will be a non-partisan body. The NCA will be bound by the ‘guidelines’ enshrined in the Constitution. It will lay down the necessary statute for its working by remaining within the ambit of the principles that define the Republic and the framework of the 1999

Constitution.

The new Constitution, like the present one, will also, most likely, be put to referendum. Until then, all existing constitutional bodies, including the National Assembly, will remain in office. The stipulation under Article 349 that existing constitutional authorities “shall not be permitted to obstruct the Constituent Assembly in any way” does not mean the NCA assuming the legislative powers. Tibisay Lucena, president of the National Election Council, has assured the people that all regional and presidential elections will be conducted as scheduled for 2017 and 2018.

Ushering in change

When Hugo Chavez won the presidency in 1999, 50% of the Venezuelans were poor and another 20% indigent. When he died in 2013, only 24% of the population was poor, to quote the UN. He built one million homes for the poor; and gave land title to millions of squatters in and around Caracas. The country has the highest percentage of university enrolment in Latin America; likewise, the ratio of doctors remains higher than elsewhere in the region. Several hundred thousand emigrated from southern European and Latin

America countries to take advantage of the improved health and housing conditions offered by the Bolivarian regime; besides, Venezuela sheltered some 2,00,000 refugees who fled the conflict in Colombia.

In essence, Chavismo changed the social equilibrium; it has left no scope for the conservative, predominantly white oil patriarchy to return to power.

The expected ‘Caracas spring’ has not arrived. Protests are confined to the posh areas of Caracas and the other big cities. Slingshots and steel bullets, and not the much-hyped ‘medicines-in-shortage’, have become the most smuggled items. The streets of Caracas are witness to politics of cynicism aimed at precipitating conditions for a military coup.

Democracy stands consolidated when the given set of institutions become the only game in town. The Opposition in Venezuela must know this; it should support democracy even if it is opposed to the regime, and participate. The new Constitution will seek to make democracy the only game in town.

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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.

Expensive way out

Populist interventions such as farm loan waivers are very serious and expose rural and agricultural lending institutions to considerable risk (“Maharashtra capitulates to grant farm loan waiver”, June 12). A striking example is Thailand where the populist Thaksin government announced a debt moratorium for small farmers in 2001 that seriously affected the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC). More than two million farmers owing over \$1.7 billion – a third of BAAC’s portfolio – enrolled in the programme. As a result, BAAC’s loan write-off rate jumped from 3% in 2001 to 12% in 2002, and its reserves for bad debt rose to 21% of its loan portfolio, according to Christen and Pearce, 2005. Another recent case occurred in India in February 2008 when the government announced a

comprehensive loan waiver for small farmers. Preliminary data indicate that approximately 369,000 farmers benefited from debt forgiveness. One of the immediate impacts was a steep drop in recovery rates. Moreover, it negatively affected the overall credit culture, says a report. A recent survey showed that one out of every four respondents wants to wait for another loan waiver. K.M.K. MURTHY, Secunderabad

Ripple effect

It is interesting that this year’s Economic Survey has a detailed chapter on the leather and apparel sector. Here, the Chief Economic Adviser tries to highlight the importance of this sector as a key solution for rising unemployment. In this context, the decision of the government to put checks on the sale of cattle for slaughter is paradoxical. This is the same government whose Prime Minister was

endorsing the famous Kolhapuri chappal in Maharashtra. It is to be understood that the economic repercussions of the cattle ban are not only limited to the issue of freedom of food choice but also the livelihoods of the minorities and Dalits. NITHIN SURESH PUTHIYAPURAYIL, Bengaluru

Distasteful

Instead of focussing on eradicating poverty and promoting peace in these tense times and when there is farmer unrest in some parts of India and rights violations in Kashmir, it is disturbing that BJP President Amit Shah has chosen to make a distasteful comment about the Father of Nation, who showed the world that non-violence is an absolutely powerful weapon. I think that rather than give the Mahatma labels, we need to recognise him as the leader who was able to defeat the British, lead us to Independence,

and all this in a non-violent way. Has Mr. Shah forgotten this? ANAMIKA BAHRUGUNA, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Think renewable

There is absolutely no doubt that there is an urgent need to follow the path of sustainable development, especially in the context of climate change (“Expensive, hazardous and inequitable”, June 7). But the approval of 10 nuclear power plants by the government raises many concerns and questions, a major one being the risk factor. We honestly know that Japan is leaps and bounds ahead of us in terms of infrastructure and technology but even then was unable to deal with Fukushima. If this is the case with a country such as Japan, how will our country, so highly populated, deal with even a small disaster? There are also questions regarding the viability of nuclear power plants. India is very lucky being a tropical

country and with abundant sunshine. There is huge potential for solar energy production. Hydroelectric power has also not been fully tapped. There is also wind energy. KARAN CHOUDHARY, Pathankot, Punjab

Nadal on a roll

After Roger Federer at the Australian Open, it is now Rafael Nadal at the French Open. These two legends have raised the bar and given their fans so much joy over the years that it may come as no surprise if the two of them dominate the sport in the coming months and rekindle the great rivalry. Nadal’s 10th title at Roland Garros is a tribute to his resilience and a fitting reply to all those who wrote him off a few years ago. Never underestimate these two icons of tennis and let us sit back and enjoy another era of their titanic battles which we were fortunate to see (“Sport” page - “Nadal returns as the

king of clay with La Decima”, June 12).

C.M. UMANATH, Marikunnu, Kozhikode, Kerala

■ The significance of this milestone in as competitive a sport as tennis and during an era when two other all-time greats, Federer and Djokovic, are competing will be better appreciated in times to come. More than Nadal’s ferocious forehand, stamina or athleticism, it is his unshakable self-belief when playing on clay that makes him invincible. One struggles to find examples of such domination in other racket sports. Rudy Hartono in badminton with eight All England titles, Jahangir Khan with 10 consecutive British Open squash titles or Jansher Khan winning the World Open squash eight times are the only names that come to mind. CHANDRAMOHAN NAIR, Ernakulam, Kerala

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More to it than MSP

Price increase alone won't benefit farmers. Issues of procurement and credit need to be addressed



ELUMALAI KANNAN

Agricultural distress is often viewed as a short-term phenomenon in which farmers look for support from various quarters on account of being unable to get a gainful return due to price crash, poor marketing facilities, rising credit burden, increasing cost of inputs and frequent occurrence of natural calamities. A prolonged unrest in rural India – such as the decision of Andhra Pradesh farmers not to sow in the 2011 kharif season and mark a 'crop holiday' protest – will have serious consequences for food security.

Agricultural distress has become a permanent feature due to the failure of not only elected governments to find a lasting solution but also local institutions such as community or social networks which are supposedly weakening because of increasing individualisation. The consequence is that helpless farmers are increasingly pushed to the brink of committing suicides.

A tipping point

The distress seems to have reached a tipping point, with scenes of dejected farmers throwing agricultural produce such as vegetables and milk on the roads becoming a routine feature in recent years. Rather than addressing the genuine problems of farmers, politicians are unfortunately busy scoring points over the deaths of innocent farmers.

Are demands of our farmers unjust? Not really. They want a reasonable price for their produce, better marketing facilities, institutional credit, irrigation, quality seeds and fertilisers, procurement during times of market glut and a social safety net during natural calamities. These are the basic inputs and services farmers need to continue to engage in agricultural production. Many committees and commissions constituted in the past have looked into India's farming conditions. Their recommendations have been shelved by successive governments.

The non-availability of remunerative prices to farmers on agricultural produce is a vexed issue and emerges as the prime issue in various research studies wherein farmers are



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asked to rank production constraints. Will a rise in the minimum support price (MSP) solve the problem? Some critics argue that a rise in the MSP will lead to increase in food inflation, while others that it will augment farmers' income. Both arguments rest on the mistaken notion that the MSP is a remunerative price. It is actually an insurance price, a floor price of sorts. Besides, a vast majority of the farming population is unaware of its existence.

The Government of India has an MSP for 23 crops, but official procurement at the MSP is effectively limited to rice and wheat, and that too concentrated in a few States only. Awareness about the MSP is limited to States such as Punjab, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh where such procurement takes place. According to the National Sample Survey's (NSS) Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households 2013, even for paddy and wheat, less than one-third of farmers were aware of the MSP; for other crops, such awareness was negligible. Further, a substantial proportion of crops are sold to local private traders and input dealers to whom the resource-poor marginal and small landholders are obligated to sell their crops due to tie-up with credit.

Since 2004, successive governments claimed to have increased institutional credit flow to the agricultural sector through increased budgetary allocation on crop loans. According to NSS data, over 40% of farmers still rely on non-institutional lenders, who mostly happen to be moneylenders-cum-traders and in-

put dealers. Further, analysis of credit disbursement data from the Reserve Bank of India reveals that out of total advances to agriculture, the share of indirect finance has increased substantially over time, while that of direct finance to farmers has declined. This means that at the macro level, it would appear that there is an increase in credit flow to the agricultural sector but this has actually accrued to agro-business firms/corporations and not directly to the farmers. Consequently, marginal and small farmers continue to rely on traders and input dealers. Unless the fundamental problems of crop and regional bias of MSP policy, government procurement and access to institutional credit are addressed, mere increase in MSP will not benefit most farmers in the country.

Further, the response of various State governments to a glut in the market appears to be muted. There exist intervention schemes to undertake the procurement of commodities whose market prices go below the MSP, but on most occasions the marketing season of bumper crops gets over by the time a bureaucratic decision on procurement is taken. Ultimately, the farmers are left at the mercy of unscrupulous traders to sell at whatever price they offer, with resultant repercussions such as the burning of the entire crop or throwing the harvested produce on roads in protest.

Various studies show an increasing divergence between agricultural and non-agricultural income. And the rising aspirations among rural youth to emulate urban lifestyles put

enormous pressure on them to find ways to increase income through various agricultural activities. Unfortunately, income from crop cultivation, which is a major segment of agriculture, is not growing enough to meet the expected level. On the contrary, the increasing market orientation and reforms in the input sector have resulted in a substantial rise in input costs.

Dipping income

Analysis of data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare reveal that income from cultivation of many cereals and pulses has declined between 2004-05 and 2013-14 despite a considerable increase in MSP during this period. In the case of paddy, out of 18 major rice-growing States, net income has declined in five, and it is negative in six States. In seven States, it has increased only marginally. Income from the cultivation of even horticultural crops is uncertain due to the heavy investment involved and the high volatility in market prices. Most acute is the rise in prices of fertilisers: between 1991-92 and 2013-14, while the price of urea increased by 69%, that of DAP (diammonium phosphate) and potash rose by 300% and 600%, respectively.

Recent policy pronouncements have added to the woes of already beleaguered farmers. The promotion of traditional farming at this juncture of agricultural development will take the sector to where it was decades ago. Most existing modern crop varieties will not respond to these practices in the medium term; consequently, yield and income will decline. Further, facilities to produce adequate organic inputs have not been developed either. Animal husbandry has been practised as a supplementary activity since time immemorial. Livestock acts as a cushion against crop loss during times of drought. The new rules on animal markets will put poor farmers and landless labourers in a fix. These developments do not augur well for rural youth whose interest in farming is already dwindling. While other developing countries are moving towards modernisation of agriculture which would reduce dependence of labour force and enable a rise in productivity, Indian agriculture is cluelessly plodding ahead.

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Marching into a binary

Forcing them to play to the gallery is doing the security forces a huge disservice



VAISHNA ROY

A year or so ago, I was in Hussainiwala, in Punjab's Ferozepur district, on the India-Pakistan border where the Sutlej flows. Until the 1970s, there used to be a flourishing trade in dried fruits and nuts across the border here. All that's over now. What we have instead is a Retreat Ceremony along the lines of Wagah. The evening I was there people crowded into the stands on both sides, waving flags and singing songs. The soldiers did their little dramatic routine, playing to the galleries with grimaces, boot-stomping and hoisted rifles. They were cheered raucously, the more aggressive the posturing, the louder the applause. Except perhaps for two or three people, everybody else was thrilled with all this display of 'patriotic' belligerence.

A duality

For the Army, the performance is just another day at work. Backstage, soldiers from both sides rehearse together, exchange snacks and movie CDs, and peaceably send back goatherds who stray across the border. The amity as well as the swagger at sundown are real, and if war breaks out tomorrow, the killing will be as real. It's a duality they live with. But for a gullible audience that does not have the benefit of nuance, viewing a faux skirmish such as this is to imagine an always hostile enemy. It actively stokes bloodthirstiness.

On a larger scale, on mass and social media platforms, just such a stoking is going on – a crude and constant invoking of a bogeyman, a rage always kept at boiling point.

Soldiers, who had so far stayed away from political grandstanding, have today been hauled into television studios and Twitter timelines and forced into the same false binary as everyone else – with us or against us, nationalist or anti-national, patriot or traitor. Forcing them to play to the gallery is doing the security forces a huge disservice, and this government has dragged them into the very public and simplistic 'us versus them' debate just as cynically as governments down the years have dragged them into conflicts planted and watered by politicians.

Unfortunately, in the Kashmir Valley today, as elsewhere, it is precisely an easy, populist binary that is not available to the armed forces. Who are 'us' and who are 'them'? Citizen, terrorist, insurgent, provocateur, informer – they are all mixed up in one bag.

That eventful day, Major Leetul Gogoi

broke ethical rules of engagement but, equally, he was an ordinary young man functioning in extraordinary circumstances. It is surprising the Army should have reacted by honouring him rather than acknowledging it as an aberration, but one wonders how much such reactions are forced by a climate where military-political lines are being calculatedly blurred, and by the shrillness of debate that insists on black and white answers to murky grey questions.

Sophisticated cynicism regardless, for an overwhelming majority, the abstraction of 'nation' will always be represented by the easy symbolism of soil, flag and anthem. These sentiments drive the soldier too. Quoting Tolstoy calling patriotism "stupid and immoral" might be intellectually correct, but it is facile and ignores the soldier.

This person has undergone years of intense training, a reconditioning of a person into an automaton to succeed in war. Ideals of flag and country have been drilled in so deep that he is willing to lay down his life unquestioningly for these. How do you invoke a borderless world or the idea of 'nation as sham' for this person?



Every argument that intellectualises the idea of nationhood without contextualising it enough drives the wedge deeper into the false binary. Worse, it plays into the hands of the jingoistic, desk-bound patriot-politicians who have conveniently made the armed forces the face of the dispute. And it's a role the forces are increasingly and naively accepting because it seems like 'recognition' after decades of bureaucratic neglect and mistreatment.

Faced with cinematic posturing on one side that claims to 'respect' the soldier and by a dissociated condescension on the other, no prizes for guessing where the soldier imagines salvation lies.

The discussion around the Kashmir Valley has now become so much about theories of nationalism, about grandstanding on one or the other side, that the conflict itself has been normalised. By either constantly foregrounding the soldier's martyrdom or by casually demonising the soldier, we are conveniently forgetting to ask why the soldier is there in the first place.

Surely it would be wise now for the generals to remember that finding solutions in the Kashmir Valley is not the Army's job, but the government's.

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Corner of a shared field

Cricket continues to be a marker of the state of India-Pakistan political relations

MARTAND JHA



in both the countries.

India and Pakistan haven't been playing bilaterally against each other since the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, except in 2012 when the Pakistani team came for a very short tour to India. The Government of India has taken a firm stand that cricket and cross-border terrorism can't go side by side and, as a result, normal cricketing ties between the two nations have remained disrupted for nearly 10 years.

Cricket has become a marker of the state of political relations between the two countries and has been used as a diplomatic tool by leaders from both the sides. From Rajiv Gandhi to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and from Manmohan Singh to Narendra Modi, leaders have tried to use cricket to improve relations with Pakistan. India's famous 'goodwill tour' to Pakistan in 2004 came after Mr. Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan the same year to attend the SAARC summit.

In 2015, Mr. Modi called his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif and conveyed his best wishes for the World Cup. Mr. Modi said, "Cricket connects people in our region and promotes goodwill. Hope players from SAARC region play with passion and bring laurels to the region." This led to speculation that bilateral cricketing ties could be resumed. After Mr. Modi's surprise visit to Pakistan on Mr. Sharif's birthday in December 2015, it was almost believed that the Indian cricket team could visit Pakistan for a tour sometime in 2016.

All these hopes were shattered after the Pathankot attack, which happened just a week after the visit. This was a breach of trust at the highest level and, with an increasingly deteriorating situation in Kashmir later last year, all talks of resuming cricketing ties came to a full stop. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said 'no' to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB)'s call to resume cricketing ties, even as the PCB threatened to take legal action over non-compliance of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2014.

For almost a decade, India has been playing against Pakistan only in ICC tournaments. However, this month, ahead of the match, a new debate emerged on whether India should boycott even that. The argument given was that boycotting Pakistan in international tournaments would be akin to making a firm political statement in front of the international community, much like the boycott of South Africa during the apartheid years. On the other side of the debate were former cricketers. They questioned the singling out of cricket. They said such a boycott should be extended to all fields, like other sporting events and trade. Amidst this, debate, India played and defeated Pakistan convincingly at Birmingham.

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CONCEPTUAL Client politics

A political situation where government policy is influenced by the interests of a small minority, rather than that of the overwhelming majority. In politics, smaller groups at times can exert a disproportionate influence on government policy by virtue of being more organised than larger groups. Individuals in these smaller groups have more incentive to organise since the benefits they gain from a favourable policy are larger when they are part of a smaller group. In contrast, individuals in larger groups have lesser incentive to organise since the benefits they gain are smaller.

MORE ON THE WEB

Rafael Nadal and his Roland Garros la decima
<http://bit.ly/Nadalnips>

ABSTRACT

Economics without entrepreneurs

A recent paper suggests that economics has remained silent on the concept of entrepreneurship

PRASHANTH PERUMAL
Entrepreneurs are said to be the backbone of a market economy, and for good reason. They use their precious savings to acquire scarce resources, which they then transform into various consumer goods according to the market demand. If their judgment about demand turns out to be right, they earn profits; if it's wrong, they suffer losses. Of course, entrepreneurs engage in the risky business of foreseeing demand only to earn personal profits. But they also end up helping society in two crucial ways.

One, in their search for better returns, entrepreneurs look to introduce technology that can help minimise costs. This can not only improve their personal returns, but also increases the overall productivity of the economy. Two, again in the search for profits, entrepreneurs

look to identify and satisfy untapped consumer demand. Being the first to satisfy a new consumer demand can lead to superior returns for an entrepreneur with the foresight. At the same time, such foresight also benefits society by bringing to life several consumer goods that were once unimaginable. Yet, for all these praises sung about entrepreneurs, mainstream economics textbooks largely remain silent about them.

False assumptions

"Economics Doctoral Programs Still Elide Entrepreneurship", a 2017 paper by Dan Johansson and Arvid Malm, provides evidence that even advanced economics courses still remain agnostic about entrepreneurs. The paper provides a survey of readings prescribed to doctoral students in 2014-15 to con-

clude that most of them don't care to even theoretically define an 'entrepreneur', let alone explore his economic function. Firms are virtually assumed to be on autopilot, maximising revenues and minimising costs, without any guidance. In fact, economic models assume an economy where resources have been allocated seamlessly according to consumer demand.

Not surprisingly, economists don't even think about possible errors in entrepreneurial judgment and its implications for the wider economy. How accurate are entrepreneurs generally in their foresight of demand? How do they gauge the likely demand for a product? What, if any, role do past prices play in their investment decision? Clearly, economists are a long way from combating these vital questions.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 13, 1967

Chavan assails Shiv Sena

An unequivocal condemnation of the unlawful activities of the Shiv Sena was made by the Union Home Minister, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, in the Lok Sabha today [June 12, New Delhi]. Describing the Shiv Sena as reactionary and harmful, Mr. Chavan pacified an angry Opposition by reiterating his assurance that Government would not allow anyone to seek redressal of his grievances, however justified it might be, through unlawful means. In a half hour discussion initiated by Mrs. Sushila Gopalan (Com.), angry speeches were made by the Communist and D.M.K. members criticising the Maharashtra Government and the Union Government for what they called the apathy towards the unlawful activities of the Shiv Sena which had caused untold hardship and suffering to non-Maharashtrians, particularly South Indians living in Bombay.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 13, 1917

Bihar labour committee.

The duty of the Committee appointed by the Local Government to enquire into the relations between the landlords in Bihar, will be (1) to enquire into the relations between the landlord and tenant in the Champaran district, including all disputes arising out of the manufacture and cultivation of indigo, (2) To examine the evidence on these subjects already available, supplementing it by such further enquiry, local and otherwise as they may consider desirable, and (3) to report their conclusion to the Government stating the measures they recommend in order to remove any abuses or grievances which they may find to exist. The Lieutenant-Governor in Council desires to leave the Committee a free hand as to the procedure they will adopt in arriving at the facts.

DATA POINT

An unequal contest

The last three Lok Sabha elections have successively seen a higher proportion of women candidates. The 2014 general elections saw an average of eight women contestants for every 100 men candidates.

