



Unwise proposal

The Election Commission's proposal seeking contempt powers for itself is alarming

Permanent laws cannot be made in response to transient trends, especially to create a power that is open to abuse. The Election Commission of India's proposal to the Law Ministry that it be armed with the power to punish for contempt is an unwarranted and poorly thought-out response to some strident accusations of partisan functioning, mainly from political parties that had lost in the electoral arena. With democratic practices evolving over time, even the power to punish for contempt vested in the judiciary has come under question, with many wondering whether this relic of a bygone age should be retained. Even superior courts, empowered to act under the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, are often advised to use it only sparingly. Against this backdrop, for a multi-member Election Commission, which enjoys a high degree of public confidence and a reputation for impartiality, to ask that it be clothed with the powers of a high court to punish both civil and criminal contempt is a travesty of our open and democratic system. Civil contempt pertains to wilful disobedience of court orders, and giving the ECI the power to enforce its orders may be an idea worth debating. However, it will be very harmful to free speech and fair criticism if the ECI is given the power to punish for criminal contempt on grounds that something had "scandalised" it or tended to lower its authority – a vague and subjective provision that should have no place in contempt law. It is a matter of concern that the ECI appears to be preparing the ground to use its power to curtail free speech; its letter refers to some parties "taking advantage of the right to freedom of expression" to question the conduct of elections.

There is a marked difference between the judiciary and the Election Commission. Judges have a tradition of not responding publicly to criticism. As Lord Denning observed in 1968, they "cannot enter into public controversy". The ECI, on the other hand, responds robustly as and when allegations about the conduct of elections surface. There is no reason to believe that public confidence in the ECI will be shaken or its superintendence, direction and control over the election process undermined by criticism, however tendentious or calumnious it may be. It is true that parties have made unfair accusations about the conduct of elections, or more accurately, about the outcome of elections that went against them. The Aam Aadmi Party has made it a sort of mission to run down the electronic voting system. Not stopping with scepticism of the claim that the electronic voting machines are invulnerable, it has alleged ECI members are politically aligned to the ruling party at the Centre. However, it cannot be forgotten that reforms such as the introduction of a verifiable paper trail came about only because somebody voiced criticism and suspicion. Throttling criticism in the name of punishing contempt will only cut off feedback.

The Quetta murders

The killing of two Chinese nationals exposes fault lines, but won't affect China-Pakistan ties

The killing of two Chinese nationals, abducted at gunpoint in the Balochistan capital Quetta in May, appears to have exposed fault lines between China and Pakistan, with Beijing issuing statements calling for Islamabad to do more to protect its citizens. To begin with, there have been reports of unhappiness over the \$55-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – some Pakistani economists mention the debt burden Pakistan will face, and there have been protests by Gilgit, Baloch and Sindh activists against the environmental impact of major infrastructure projects. There are also religious issues: Pakistan accused the two Chinese nationals, who had obtained business visas to teach Mandarin and learn Urdu, of being involved in Christian "missionary work", which is unlawful in the country. The abduction and murder, first announced in the Islamic State site *Amaq*, also indicates the inroads the group has made in Pakistan. The Pakistan government, which has faced criticism in the Chinese media for not doing more to save the two Chinese nationals, will clearly have to speed up its plans for a Special Security Division to protect CPEC, raising nine army battalions and hiring about 14,000 personnel. It would, however, be a mistake to read too much into reports that the killings have caused strains between China and Pakistan, or Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The two countries have had decades of close cooperation, led by defence co-production and nuclear technology transfers; if anything, CPEC binds them in an even closer embrace. In a recent statement, Beijing sought to dismiss reports suggesting that President Xi Jinping had refused to meet Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Kazakhstan because of the kidnappings. It said the two leaders had already held substantive discussions during the Belt and Road Forum in mid-May. The killing of the Chinese nationals represents a lapse in security, but is part of what the Chinese Foreign Ministry calls the risks of "going global", indicating that as its footprint grows in developing nations and conflict zones, its citizens will face higher risks. For both China and Pakistan, CPEC and other cooperation is not ideological but driven by mutual strategic interests. China has, for example, refused to consider India's concerns on terror emanating from Pakistan, although groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba have attacked Chinese citizens. Similarly, Pakistan raises concerns over the alleged treatment of Kashmiris and minorities in India, but ignores the Chinese government's strict anti-terror laws in Xinjiang province. While it is important to observe the progress of CPEC closely, and continue to raise India's concerns on sovereignty with China and Pakistan, it is premature to attach too much lasting significance to the kidnappings in Balochistan.

Musings on London Bridge

Combating the new range of threats posed by the IS will also require political settlements in Syria and Iraq



MOHAMAD BAZZI

On the evening of June 3, three men unleashed terror in the heart of London, killing eight people and wounding dozens, in the third major terrorist attack in Britain in three months.

The assailants sped across London Bridge in a white van, ramming into pedestrians. They later emerged from the van with hunting knives and began stabbing people in Borough Market, a nearby night-spot. The attackers were quickly chased down and killed by British police.

On May 22, a suicide bomber attacked a concert arena in the city of Manchester, killing 22 people. Two months earlier, a driver mowed down pedestrians on Westminster Bridge in London, and tried to break into Parliament before being shot and killed by security forces.

The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for all of these attacks, and it now seems that the terrorist group will be quick to adopt nearly every attack on civilians, especially in the West. These claims of responsibility tend to be somewhat generic – they don't show the IS's involvement in the planning or execution of attacks – but they do help the group in its propaganda efforts.

A decentralised jihadism

These self-directed and "lone wolf" attacks are not an accident. They are the result of an organised, decade-old movement within Islamic jihadism to decentralise attacks and make them more diffuse. This trend predated the emergence of the IS – it can be traced back to al-Qaeda after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

While al-Qaeda was a hierarchical organisation, its leader Osama bin Laden and his deputy and even-



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tual successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, realised that maintaining training camps and central control was not going to work after the group was forced out of its base in Afghanistan under U.S. bombing. Before the September 11 attacks, bin Laden had relied on recruits trained at Afghan camps, and many had personally pledged allegiance to him.

But even while in hiding, bin Laden and al-Zawahiri frequently addressed their supporters through dozens of videos, audiotapes and Internet statements. They encouraged new recruits to act autonomously under al-Qaeda's banner, and they helped inspire hundreds of young men to carry out suicide or conventional bombings in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Spain, Britain and elsewhere.

After a large number of al-Qaeda's leaders were killed, captured or forced to flee, one of bin Laden's former bodyguards in Afghanistan described the group's revamped operations to an Arabic newspaper. "Every element of al-Qaeda is self-activated," he said. "Whoever finds a chance to attack simply goes ahead. The decision is theirs alone."

The rapid rise of the IS

Today, the IS has expanded and perfected this concept of the "leaderless jihad." And it is now wreaking havoc and spreading fear, both in the West and in West Asia.

Big data, big dangers

India needs to negotiate the world of big data technology with adequate safeguards



HEMANT KANAKIA

With the Supreme Court turning its gaze on privacy issues associated with Aadhaar, can we take a moment to look to the myriad ways in which our privacy is being assaulted in the digital world? When my neighbour across the street got too curious about my life, I installed curtains to block his gaze. But what about when the invisible drones at Facebook send him a message that one of my colleagues has tagged me enjoying a music festival in Goa and he might want to "like" this picture? How do we draw a curtain around our digital lives?

Think beyond the nosy neighbour to the corporations that want to utilise minutes of your life to sell products that you may or may not need. Corporations have always been interested in understanding consumer behaviour and been collecting data about users using their products or service. What is unique about Big Data Technology (BDT) is the scale at which this data collection can take place. For instance, Google has stored petabytes of information about billions of people and their online brows-

ing habits. Similarly, Facebook and Amazon have collected information about social networks. In addition to using this data to improve products or services that these corporations offer, the stored data is available also to highest bidders and governments of nations where these companies are based.

Looming dangers

One major problem with collecting and storing such vast amounts of data overseas is the ability of owners of such data stores to violate the privacy of people. Even if the primary collectors of data may not engage in this behaviour, foreign governments or rogue multinationals could clandestinely access these vast pools of personal data in order to affect policies of a nation. Such knowledge could prove toxic and detrimental in the hands of unscrupulous elements or hostile foreign governments. The alleged Russian interference in the U.S. election tells us that these possibilities are not simply science fiction fantasies.

The other major problem is the potential drain of economic wealth of a nation. Currently, the corporations collecting such vast amounts of data are all based in developed countries, mostly in the U.S. Most emerging economies, including India, have neither the knowledge nor the favourable environment for businesses that collect data on such a vast scale. The advertising



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revenue that is currently earned by local newspapers or other media companies would eventually start to flow outside the country to overseas multinationals. A measure of this effect can already be seen in a way that consumer dollars are being redistributed across the spectrum of U.S. businesses touching them. For instance, communication carriers such as AT&T, Verizon and cable networks find that their revenue has remained flat to slightly falling in the last five years whereas the revenues of Google, which depend on these carriers to provide connectivity to consumers, are increasing exponentially. Unless we employ some countermeasures, we should expect the same phenomenon repeat itself for corporations based in India.

Sadly, BDT is a tiger the world is destined to ride. It is no longer possible to safely disembark, but stay-

ing Muslims. But IS leaders endorse the wholesale slaughter of civilians, including many Muslims that they regard as infidels, as epitomised by the spate of attacks on Muslim countries during Ramadan in recent years.

By mid-2014, the IS seized large chunks of Syria and Iraq. The group then proclaimed a caliphate in the territory under its control, and named its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as caliph and "leader of Muslims everywhere".

Looking for real solutions

Over the past three years, the IS displaced al-Qaeda as the dominant force in international jihadism.

Baghdadi's group had been more successful in its strategy, which relies on capturing and holding territory. But after its recent losses in Iraq and Syria, the group has reverted to its roots as a jihadist insurgency, bent on large-scale attacks that instil fear but achieve few tangible gains.

In doing so, IS leaders realise that they are on the verge of losing their self-declared capitals in Raqqa, Syria and Mosul, Iraq. That means the group would squander the caliphate that has distinguished it from other jihadist movements, and helped it attract new recruits.

To combat this new and more complex range of threats posed by the IS and its sympathisers, governments in the West and throughout the world will need to do more than simply continue military strikes against targets in Iraq and Syria. Detering new attacks against civilians will require working towards political settlements in Syria and Iraq. It will also mean greater vigilance in monitoring clandestine networks set up by IS operatives – and adjusting to a new enemy that knows no limits.

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Mohamad Bazzi is a journalism professor at New York University and former Middle East bureau chief at Newsday. He is writing a book on the proxy wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran

ing on is not without its perils. The only way to negotiate this brave new world is to make sure that India does it on her own terms and finds a way to protect both financial rewards and ensure individual privacy and national security through appropriate safeguards.

What India can do

China has apparently understood this dynamic and taken measures to counter this threat. It has encouraged the formation of large Internet companies such as Baidu and Alibaba and deterred Google and others from having major market share in China by using informal trade restraints and anti-monopoly rules against them. India may not be able to emulate China in this way, but we could take other countermeasures to preserve our digital economy independence. The heart of building companies using BDT is their ability to build sophisticated super-large data centres. By providing appropriate subsidies such as cheap power and real estate, and cheap network bandwidth to those data centres, one would encourage our industries to be able to build and retain data within our boundaries. In the short term, we should also create a policy framework that encourages overseas multinationals such as Google and Amazon to build large data centres in India and to retain the bulk of raw data collected in India within our na-

tional geographical boundaries.

Moreover, we should also build research and development activities in Big Data Science and data centre technology at our academic and research institutions that allow for better understanding of the way in which BDT can be limited to reduce the risk of deductive disclosure at an individual level. This will require developing software and training for individuals on how to protect their privacy and for organisations and government officials to put in place strict firewalls, data backup and secure erasure procedures. In the West, we already are seeing a number of start-ups developing technology that enables users to control who gets access to the data about their behaviour patterns in the digital world.

The government has approved the "Digital India" Plan that aims to connect 2.5 lakh villages to the Internet by 2019 and to bring Wi-Fi access to 2.5 lakh schools, all universities and public places in major cities and major tourist centres. This is indeed a very desirable policy step. But unless we evolve appropriate policies to counter the side effects of the Digital Plan, this could also lead to the unforeseen eColonisation of India.

Hemant Kanakia is a computer scientist and investor in high technology companies. The views expressed are personal

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.

Roots of a crisis

The report of two debt-ridden farmers committing suicide in Madhya Pradesh evokes much sorrow and resentment. It is lamentable that the State government continues to turn a Nelson's eye to the growing crisis (June 10). Farmers have no guaranteed income and there is widespread perception that the agrarian crisis is an outcome of natural calamities which no one can fight. Governments over the years have used this to hide their inefficiencies in problem-solving. One should understand that an agrarian crisis not only affects the life of the farmer and his family but the rural economy as well. The time has come to scrutinise the impact of 'LPG' – liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation – reforms on Indian agriculture. Therefore, an agrarian crisis is a much broader

phenomenon than it is understood by many.
R. SIVAKUMAR,
Chennai

Advice for the Congress

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh's call to like-minded parties and secular forces to find common ground is timely ('The Wednesday interview: Amarinder Singh', June 14). The Congress party in particular should pay heed to his advice if it is to revive its fortunes. The political situation is now vastly different from when the Congress was numero uno and the party must be willing to reconsider the coalition formula. Despite doomsday predictions by one and all, the Indian National Congress is capable of bouncing back. It needs to keep a level head and follow good advice.
J. ANANTHA PADMANABHAN,
Tiruchi

Unrest in the hills

In being non-negotiable conformists of cultural identities and rejecting the prerequisites to cope with the challenges of a globalised era, the hill community in Darjeeling is only doing a great disservice to itself in its response to the language issue (Editorial - "A shattered peace", June 14). A working knowledge of the State's principal language plays an important role in the process of integration with economic opportunities and avenues created across the State. Those in Darjeeling spearheading the agitation must realise that they are the chief architects of the future of the next generation who also have dreams and ambitions. This phenomenon of a concrete cultural fencing can be seen in Assam as well. A majority of the Bengali-speaking people face obstacles when

engaging with their Assamese-speaking counterparts in areas of professional or personal outreach. While insecurity over cultural imperialism is valid, this must be tempered first by reposing a strong faith in constitutional safeguards of minority cultural rights and also by sustained engagement between various cultural communities so as to build an edifice of trust.
BIBHUTI DAS,
New Delhi

The demand for a separate administrative region of Gorkhland has existed since 1907 when the Hillmen's Association of Darjeeling submitted a memorandum to the Morley-Minto Reforms Committee. The movement for a separate state of Gorkhland gained serious momentum during the 1980s. The perception now

is that the fire has been relit over the issue of "language imposition". If the West Bengal Chief Minister has made the assurance that Bengali is optional in the hills, why is the agitation still escalating? The answer perhaps lies in the BJP, the arch-rival of the TMC in West Bengal, fanning the flames of unrest. The peace in Darjeeling should not be shattered and the BJP should not try to fish in troubled waters; this is not an ordinary political issue. If West Bengal fails to quell this unrest and the BJP ticks foul for the sake of politics, it could eventually ignite a whole set of demands for smaller territorial units.
H.M. RIJAJUL HOQUE,
Baranaldaha, Nadia, West Bengal

Amenities can wait

As a senior citizen and a frequent train traveller, I am not in a position to share the enthusiasm of our Railway

Minister over the decision to retrofit train coaches with "modern amenities" ("40,000 train coaches to be retrofitted", June 14). One should travel by reserved, ordinary, second class coaches to experience the travails of the average passenger. Ticketless travellers lay siege to the passageways and the approach to the toilets which are always soiled. The less said the better about the TTEs, who seem as helpless as the passengers and go about their job of ticket checking mechanically. Let the funds earmarked for refurbishing coaches be spent on ensuring a hassle-free journey. Train travellers would be only too willing to pay extra for a safe and comfortable journey.
S. VASUDEVAN,
Chennai

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To battle the demons within

A Sri Lankan documentary examines the Tamil community's internal battles during the civil war



MEERA SRINIVASAN

Sri Lankan filmmaker Jude Ratnam's debut documentary, *Demons in Paradise*, got the rare red-carpet honour at the Cannes Film Festival recently, but he is certain that he will be called a "traitor" for making it. "For me, the film was a way of confronting the questions I have had since childhood about my Tamil identity," he told *The Hindu* in an interview in Colombo.

As a five-year-old, Mr. Ratnam fled the capital with his parents to escape the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots. His formative years were spent in the Tamil-majority north-east of the island nation where, as a displaced boy, he witnessed different Tamil militant groups organising themselves. "The young men with guns, preparing to fight the oppressive Sri Lankan Army, looked like heroes to me."

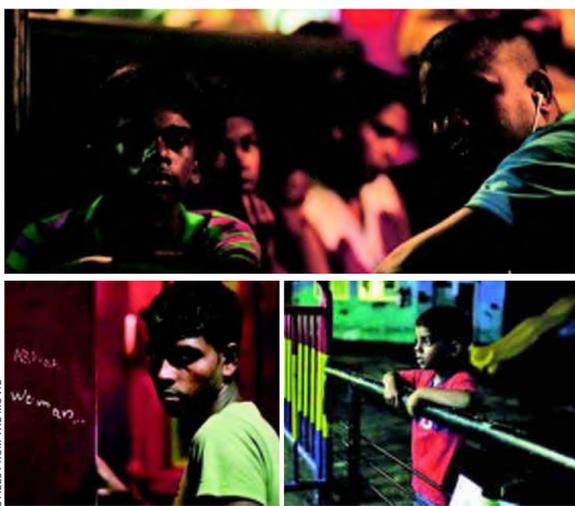
Returning to the roots

Later, his family moved to Kandy in the central highlands where his father, an Anglican priest, was stationed, before returning to Colombo. More than three decades later, the filmmaker took the train to the north, just as his family had in 1983, for his 90-minute film on Sri Lanka's civil war through the experiences of his own family.

In its largely autobiographical first half, Mr. Ratnam draws on some vivid childhood memories to narrate how the war impacted his family. "My mother would wipe off her *pottu* (bindi) and my father dressed in sarong to look like the Sinhalese. And those days our family spoke Tamil in hushed tones for the fear of being heard and killed," the 39-year-old filmmaker recalled.

All the same, the film is not about the Ratnams alone, whose ancestors came to Sri Lanka from Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu six generations ago. He uses his family's past as a peg for a larger story — of a Sinhala majoritarian state that victimised Tamils; of the birth of Tamil armed militancy; of the path it took the Tamil community on; and of the nagging questions that persist eight years after the war ended.

He goes back to eyewitnesses and people seldom heard in the narra-



STILLS FROM THE MOVIE

tives of war — like the Sinhalese photographer who captured the iconic image of a Tamil man being stripped naked at a bus stop in the heart of Colombo in 1983, shortly before he and others like him were murdered; and the railwayman who witnessed scores of Tamils escaping to the north, including some who were callously thrown off the train.

It took Mr. Ratnam ten years, and enormous conviction and family support, to make the film. "I had to work very hard to convince some people to talk. It was when [Mahinda] Rajapaksa was in power. There was a climate of fear, many were scared to speak candidly about the past," he said.

This project came out of his disillusionment with the human rights sector — where he had worked — that he felt was severely flawed in its approach. "NGOs think that reconciliation happens when you put five Sinhalese and five Tamils in the same hall of a five-star hotel. How can that ever work without factoring in our histories and the politics of the war? How can Tamils reconcile with the Sinhalese before reconciling within the Tamil community first?" he asked.

These are the questions that dominate the second half of his film. Here, Mr. Ratnam probes the Tamil community's political choices and militancy using the story of his uncle Manoranjan, who discouraged him from joining the armed struggle. "Like many young boys I too toyed

with the idea. But he had been there, done that and knew where it was headed."

Mr. Manoranjan, who was raised in Kandy and speaks fluent Sinhala, moved to the north as the war intensified, where he made an unusual move of joining a small left-wing group, the National Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam (NLFT). But after a few years, with the LTTE's growing hegemony and the repression of other organisations, he decided to give up the gun and continue his political work as a journalist. Following death threats from the LTTE, he was forced to leave Sri Lanka and he relocated to Canada. The film shows him visiting the country after many years, reuniting with the Sinhalese neighbours in Kandy who had given refuge to his family following communal violence; and revisiting some traumatic memories of bloodshed and brutality in Jaffna.

In this segment, the film turns its lens on the complex impact of the armed struggle on the Tamil community, including through a rare critique of the LTTE from one of its former cadre. "We were so cruel... you cannot accept that in the name of the struggle," says Vasudevan, now living in the U.K., when recounting his participation in the LTTE's "massacre" of some 900 militants from the rival Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) in the internal violence that gripped the Tamil polity. Elsewhere, Mr. Manoranjan breaks down when recalling

the LTTE's execution of two dissident student activists — Selvi and Manoharan — who had saved his own life and that of others from the Tigers. In an eerily dramatic scene, former militants from different Tamil organisations sit in the dark around a fire, reflecting on how Tamil civilians suffered at the hands of other Tamils who were 'weeding out' rivals and dissidents in their midst.

Need for introspection

This sort of introspection — of the past and its manifestation in the present — is in Mr. Ratnam's view indispensable for meaningful post-war reconciliation. "Take the question of caste. Contrary to what many say, the LTTE never eradicated it; they merely brushed it under the carpet. Otherwise why would we see caste-based discrimination emerging as a major challenge in post-war Tamil society?" he asked.

Mr. Manoranjan also hopes that the film will open some doors in breaking the 'taboo' around the pain inflicted by Tamils on fellow Tamils and Muslims. "Tamil society is struggling within itself to do a truthful self-examination of what went wrong. Though it is slowly happening among the ordinary masses, the Tamil media, the academic community, the religious entities and the political parties are still adamantly maintaining silence," he told *The Hindu* via email.

While the film subtly points to this apparent silence, it makes no pronouncements. "That is because I don't have definite answers. I started off with my own discomfort about being a Tamil and that led me to many questions," said Mr. Ratnam, for whom working on the documentary was "cathartic".

"At the end of it, I think I have come to terms with my Tamil identity, shedding the fear and guilt I have had for long," he said.

Though sceptical about whether many would be willing to screen or distribute the film, he is steeling himself to be labelled a "traitor" by many Tamils, as the LTTE and its supporters branded its critics within the Tamil society. "Not just in Sri Lanka, I want to ask film viewers in India, and particularly in Tamil Nadu, who shed tears for Eelam Tamils, if they have the courage to watch this film made by a Sri Lankan Tamil who lived here all through the years of war."

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Taking water to Telangana farmers

An improved land acquisition Act heralds speedier expansion of irrigation projects



SHAILENDRA KUMAR JOSHI

Procuring land is an important precondition for implementing large infrastructure projects. Most irrigation projects require substantial tracts of land that could be justified on the basis of a proper cost-benefit analysis. By and large, one unit of land required for an irrigation project can serve around 20-25 times the area of the fields of farmers.

The overall land required for irrigation projects in Telangana is estimated to be about four lakh acres, to serve 100 lakh acres of farmland. Out of the total land required, Telangana had about 2.5 lakh acres, mostly done through consent award for irrigation projects in place at the time of enactment of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (RFCTLARR) Act 2013. Subsequently, several factors slowed down land acquisition in the State as well as the country.

Facets of the 2013 Act

Efforts to ensure payment of fair compensation, to introduce greater transparency in the acquisition process, and to integrate rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) culminated in the enactment of the 2013 Act. But good intentions notwithstanding, the Act is highly procedure-oriented.

Another major shortcoming is the absence of consent award that was there in the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. Consent award provides a win-win situation to both requisitioning party as well as landowners by preventing avoidable and prolonged litigation.

After the formation of Telangana, the State government has taken up an ambitious plan to provide irrigation facilities to one crore acres of farmland. According to Article 31(a) of the Constitution, the state can compulsorily acquire private property for "public purposes" by paying compensation at a rate not less than the "market value". The State government came out with a market-based approach, a framework allowing landowners to willingly selling their land and properties for an agreed consideration.

Negotiated purchase and consent award allow free discussion and a resulting fair price. Both mechanisms prevent avoidable and prolonged litigation. Telangana added another 60,000 acres of land during the last three years for execution of irrigation pro-

jects, about 45,000 acres of this purchased directly from the landowners.

The Telangana amendment

An amendment to RFCTLARR Act was cleared by the State Legislature and after getting the presidential assent, the legislation has been notified on May 18, 2017. It seamlessly provides for land purchase, consent and normal awards for public projects. In addition to providing R&R benefits to land losers and other affected families as per the Act of 2013, it offers choices to project-affected families (PAF) to accept a lump sum package in lieu of R&R benefits, even as they retain their right to R&R benefits as per the principal Act.

The underlying philosophy of this robust legislation is that overall compensation for land purchase/acquisition and voluntary R&R should not be lesser than those provided under the Act of 2013.

However, provisions such as exemption from chapter II (Social Impact Assessment) and chapter III (food security), land purchase etc. compress the overall time frame for land acquisition & rehabilitation and resettlement.

In a single requisition, land could be procured for a department either through voluntary purchase, consent and normal awards, or a combination of all the said options. This perhaps, is the most unique feature of this enactment.

Although the government can dispense with the requirement of SIA in case of certain projects, a socio-economic survey is a must for identification of PAFs, determining overall quantum of compensation and their respective apportionment. Now all PAFs including those losing livelihood are entitled to R&R benefits.

The provision for voluntary purchase of land is expected to offer a better compensation to the land losers and should be available throughout the LA process till such time that the entire land has been procured for the project. The process could further be improved by providing early bird incentives. To the naysayers, it has been upheld by several decisions of the High Court that executive power under Article 298 of the Constitution can be applied for the voluntary purchase of land by the state.

Only time will justify the efforts in this direction but for now, the first hurdle in bringing water to the parched lands of Telangana by way of expeditious land acquisition seems to have been crossed.

Shaileendra Kumar Joshi is Special Chief Secretary (Irrigation), Telangana. The views expressed are personal

SINGLE FILE

Qatar's isolation

The rift between Qatar and other Arab nations is unsustainable in the long run

NASIMA KHATOON



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The recent diplomatic rift between Qatar and other Arab states — like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and Egypt — has again highlighted the geopolitical significance of the region beyond the oil factor. It emerged as a result of an allegation that the small gas-rich country supports and funds terror through its support of Iran and Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Islamist political group outlawed by both Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

These allegations have been in focus in the past as well. An American intelligence report in 2015 had accused Qatar of financing Hamas. It has also been accused of funding al-Qaeda affiliates like Al-Nusra. Qatar's hosting of the Afghan Taliban, including by providing it with an 'embassy', has also invited widespread criticism. However, the Saudi-led action this time seems to be mainly targeted at Iran. A few days before the announcement of the boycott, U.S. President Donald Trump had accused Iran of being a regional terror sponsor. He later spoke in favour of the sanctions against Qatar, unmindful of the fact that the Gulf monarchy hosts the largest U.S. military base in West Asia. Historically, Qatar has avoided allying itself closely with either Saudi Arabia or Iran. It shares the world's largest gas field with Iran, hence can't ignore it.

As regards the impact of sanctions on India, it depends on Qatar for 90% of its natural gas requirements and hence is likely to maintain its good relationship with the monarchy. A few days after the crisis began, the External Affairs Ministry had made it clear that India didn't foresee any issues caused by its own relations with countries in the region. However, the Qatar Airways flights between India and Doha will be affected as following the UAE's decision to not allow its air space to be used, the flights will now have to get routed through Iran.

The sanctions will certainly hurt the Qatari economy. However, with its foreign exchange reserves of about \$335 billion, it is expected to avoid an economic crisis in the short term. The newly expanded port facility will help it continue its gas exports. However, Doha can't allow the dispute to drag on for long. A long-term crisis is likely to make borrowing more expensive for the government, affecting its ability to build infrastructure for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries need to negotiate and find a solution, keeping the group's collective agenda in mind. A diplomatic freeze will only allow non-state actors like the Islamic State (IS) to strengthen their presence. Cooperation between Iran and Sunni Arab countries is also desirable for the benefit of both. The U.S. has been successful in balancing its strategic ties with the countries in the region. However, recent statements by Mr. Trump against Qatar, in which he accused Doha of funding extremism, risk upending the balance. Qatar needs to choose between aligning its policies with those of the regional heavyweights or greater isolation. It is not yet strong enough to have its own independent regional doctrine.

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CONCEPTUAL Samaritan's dilemma

ECONOMICS

The dilemma faced by people engaging in charity. On the one hand, charity can help people who are in genuine need of economic assistance by offering them timely help. At the same time, it can also have the unintended effect of encouraging recipients to become dependent on charity in the long run. So a philanthropist must find ways to help those in need of serious help, while simultaneously taking steps to discourage sloth and dependence on charity. The same dilemma is faced by governments providing welfare for citizens. The term was coined by American economist James M. Buchanan in 1975.

MORE ON THE WEB

A look at flames taking over a high-rise building in London
http://bit.ly/FireInLondon

FAQ

Mission Everest Inc.

It has been a controversial climbing season on the world's highest mountain

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

Why the buzz about the Everest season? There has been a renewed push this season to create records among international teams. Almost 600 climbers and their associates have been camping in the valleys and villages near Mt. Everest. More than 380 climbers have reached its summit from the south side this season, and at least 120 from the Tibet side. Last year, 640 people reached the summit. However, this push for records has also led to concerns about the fragile ecology of the region.

How did Everest climbing tourism part of Nepal's tourism industry? Everest climbing was once the exclusive preserve of the Sherpas, the sturdiest of the native Himalayan climbers who led from the front. The first summit climber, Edmund Hillary of New Zealand, was supported by his guide Tenz-

ing Norgay. The Himal region of Nepal has always been a destination for serious trekkers. However, over the last two decades, Kathmandu has turned the season of expedition into a tourism season. It has even allowed small passenger aircraft to fly near the summit, in order to give passengers a look at the world's tallest mountain peak. That said, the Everest season has also helped Nepal generate much-needed foreign currency, apart from providing employment opportunities to the locals. The Nepal government reportedly earns an annual revenue about \$3.5 million in the form of Everest climbing fees.

What accounts for the recent deaths and accidents? There have been at least 10 deaths this year. Expedition attempts, which used to cost \$1,00,000, have been made cheaper due to com-

petition and availability of cheaper gear. They now cost about \$40,000, sometimes even less. Websites offering budget trips have sprung up. This has created a sudden influx of professionals and enthusiasts from across the world. However, Nepal's poor infrastructure has not been able to meet the demands.

Does climbing on a large scale jeopardise the fragile mountain range?

Yes it does. Climbers have pointed out that the famed Hillary Step, the most challenging part of the climb located just below the summit, has reportedly crumbled. This was possibly because of the 2015 earthquake or due to the sustained human assault on the mountains. However, fearing bad publicity, the impoverished Nepal government has dismissed reports of the collapse. If true, the loss of the Hillary Step can make the experience more dangerous.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES FIFTY YEARS AGO

JUNE 15, 1967

Indian diplomats humiliated at Peking airport

Red Guards beat and kicked two Indian diplomats in wild scenes at Peking airport to-day [June 14] before they left by air for Hongkong after being expelled from China accused of spying. The Second Secretary Mr Krishnan Raghunath and the Third Secretary, Mr. P. Vijay were dragged and pushed, held by the neck and arms among a crowd of Red Guards several hundred strong. They were punched and kicked and Red Guards waved red books of Mao Tse-tung's quotations at them. Other Indian diplomats were hit and Third Secretary, C.V. Ranganathan was made to bow his head by the crowd who tried to force him to kneel on the runway.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

JUNE 15, 1917

New Russia: French reply.

The French reply to the Russian Note regarding Allied war aims is published here. It says: "France relying on the sentiments of her old and loyal ally rejoices to be in full community of ideas with the Russian Government and people on the subject of the war. France does not dream of oppressing any people, but is resolved that oppression so long weighing on the world shall be destroyed and that the authors of crimes shall be punished. France, forced to fight in defence of her liberty, means to secure the release and return of the faithful provinces of Alsace and Lorraine and will fight with her Allies till their territorial right to independence is restored, full indemnities for the inhuman ravages are paid and indispensable guarantees against recurrence of horrors obtained."

DATA POINT

Marriage leads to migration

For more than 80% of women who migrated from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand to other States, marriage was the sole reason. This trend was seen less in the southern and northeastern States

