



## Shoots take root

The rate increase by the Fed indicates that the world's largest economy has gained traction

The biggest takeaway from the U.S. Federal Reserve's decision to raise the federal funds rate, for a third time in six months, is its assertion that growth in the world's largest economy has gained traction and is on course to warrant further "gradual" rate increases. Fed Chair Janet Yellen emphasised the factors underpinning this rebound in economic activity – an "ongoing improvement in the job market and relatively high levels of consumer sentiment and wealth" that have spurred household spending, an expansion in business investment, and most significantly, a global pickup in demand. This offers more reassurance that the global economy may have finally re-emerged from the post-financial crisis doldrums. It is also noteworthy that the economic revival has been happening amid heightened policy uncertainty worldwide, especially in key areas like trade, as political tumult continues to roil the U.S. under the Donald Trump administration and, more recently, the U.K. as well. And while Ms. Yellen reiterated that the American central bank remained on alert in monitoring inflation developments, given a recent softening in price gains, the Fed's decision to announce the contours of a programme to gradually pare the size of its \$4.5 trillion balance sheet is another sign that the U.S. economic engine is warming up. India's exporters can take heart that demand in one of the largest markets for their goods and services is likely to continue to strengthen in the coming months. The Fed also bumped up the median projection for U.S. economic growth in 2017 to 2.2%, from 2.1% forecast in March.

Ms. Yellen and her colleagues on the Federal Open Market Committee have also done well to ward off a 2013 'taper tantrum'-like scenario by flagging the projected path of balance sheet normalisation – a deliberate and clearly calibrated set of reductions that increase over time – without detailing a schedule for the start of the process. Clearly spelling out that the plan to decrease reinvestment of principal payments from asset-backed and Treasury securities is conditional on the economy staying its anticipated course, the Fed has earmarked this year as the broad time frame for its start. India's monetary authorities can derive some reassurance that they are not alone in adopting a policy stance that seems counter-intuitive to some in the light of slowing inflation in their respective economies. While the Fed describes its stance as "accommodative" to spur further strengthening in labour market conditions and a sustained return to 2% inflation, the Reserve Bank of India has said that its "neutral" poise is intended to continue support for economic expansion while ensuring price stability. The common theme is the welcome emphasis on consistency and stability in the messaging.

## No time to work

With ratification of conventions on child labour, we must have assessment of violations

In a welcome move this week, India has ratified two key global conventions meant to keep children away from work, decades since they were originally adopted by the International Labour Organisation. Nonetheless, the scepticism aroused by the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 over the government's commitment towards complete abolition of child labour will persist. The ILO treaties are about the minimum age at which a person may begin work and the hazardous industries where she may not. Crucially, conventions 138 and 182 of the United Nations body leave it to the member-states to determine what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable work for children at different ages. Such flexibility has given the Indian government wiggle room in adopting the international standards in question, even though the 2016 legislation falls several notches below a comprehensive prohibition of child labour. The Act contains the controversial provision that condones the employment of children below 14 years under the rubric of family enterprises and the declassification of several industries as hazardous occupations. The detrimental effects on the ground from these dilutions of the original 1986 Act could be widespread. With roughly 90% of the workforce continuing to remain outside the ambit of the organised sector, protecting vulnerable children from exploitation is difficult. The rules notified by the Ministry of Labour and Employment for the enforcement of the 2016 amendment include some small concessions. Under these stipulations, children may work in domestic enterprises only for three hours after school, and not between 7 p.m. and 8 a.m. These restrictions are intended to ensure attendance at school. But given the sensitivities involved in monitoring activities within traditional households, effective enforcement will pose a challenge, and the rescue of vulnerable children will remain an uncertain proposition.

India's ratification of the two conventions, after more than 165 countries have legally bound themselves to their obligations, is itself a sad commentary on the priorities of successive governments, cutting across party lines. The ILO's Minimum Age Convention of 1973 entered into force in 1976 – and the instrument pertaining to the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in 2000. While policymakers are no doubt alert to the inequities that perennially plague Indian society, the practical realities are too painful for the millions who languish on the margins. Any genuine enforcement of a minimum age at work will elude governments so long as a universal minimum wage of subsistence for the adult workforce is not implemented scrupulously. On this score, the record of different States is at best patchy. This scenario is unlikely to improve in the absence of a vibrant mechanism of collective bargaining among stakeholders. Without this, the total elimination of child labour will remain a difficult task.

# The anniversary of a divide

Fear, like an invisible fume that you do not see, surrounds us. And it can ignite in our face



GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

This year, the 70th anniversary of India's independence is also the 70th anniversary of India's partitioning. The division was not neat. It was a giant, bloody mess. Uprooted from their homes, some 14.5 million human beings, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, left the new Pakistan for India, or India for the new Pakistan.

They left in terror, travelled trembling, and 'arrived' traumatised to a ramshackle refuge. A new and powerful word moved from the small print of the English lexicon to everyday Indian speech: refugee. The very rich and the ridiculously poor were refugees together. One had left a manor, another a hut. Both begged together for food, shelter, medicines, clothes – and dignity. All these took time coming. The only immediate relief was that the claws of abduction, loot and death were no longer upon them.

### Rejoicing and mourning

Estimates vary but some of them tell us that at the lowest about 200,000 and the highest about 2,000,000 human beings were butchered in the process. The Government of India claimed that 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women had been abducted. The Government of Pakistan claimed that 50,000 Muslim women had been abducted.

Life stood divided, death stood partitioned.

Refugees seethed in rage. On this anniversary, we should remember that 1947 was one part independence, one part dismemberment, one part triumph, one part tragedy. Unimaginable, indescribable tragedy.

"Tomorrow we will be free from bondage to the British," said

Gandhi in Calcutta on the eve of the new dawn. "But from midnight to-night Hindustan will be broken into two pieces. So tomorrow will be both a day of rejoicing and of mourning." There was much celebration in the city, great camaraderie.

The euphoria was short-lived. Sixteen days into Independence, on August 31, at about 10 at night, a fuming mob of Hindu youths came to where he was staying in the Muslim quarter of Beliaghata, looking for his Muslim hosts to attack and perhaps kill them. It was Gandhi's day of silence.

He was unwell, tired and preparing to leave the next morning for Noakhali, by now in East Pakistan, to assuage Hindu families traumatised by the murderous attacks on them. The youths started breaking things, hurling stones at lamps and window panes.

They ran into the rooms looking for their 'targets'. "What is all this?" Gandhi asked the rampaging crowd, breaking his silence and walking into the mob. "Kill me, kill me, I say. Why don't you kill me?" A posse of military police arrived and dispersed the crowd. But riots flared in the city. The next day, Gandhi cancelled his Noakhali visit and went on a fast.

"For how many days?" Abha Gandhi asked. "Until peace is established I shall take nothing but water." By the fourth day of the fast, Calcutta was quiet again. Later that night some of the riot-instigators came and surrendered their weapons – rifles, cartridges, bombs.

In Delhi shortly thereafter, he saw the same mayhem again. Another fast ensued, another calm. In his prayer meeting on January 20, 1948, as he spoke, a small bomb – they later called it a gun-cotton slab – detonated. There was some commotion. "Sunno, sunno (listen, listen)," he said to the congregation, "kuchh nahin hua hai (nothing has happened)... agar sach kuchh ho jae to kya karoge (if something were to really happen, what will you do)?" And then asking the gathering to stay calm, he got his



associates to begin singing the Ramdhun. All India Radio has recorded the entire sequence, with the sound of the explosion distinctly audible.

The 'bomber' was 25-year-old Madanlal Pahwa, a refugee from West Punjab. He was spotted by a woman, appropriately named Sulochana (the good-eyed), and a police team soon arrived and took the young man into custody. When asked later if he thought Pahwa's was just "the harmless prank of an irresponsible youth", Gandhi said it was not.

"Don't you see there is a terrible and widespread conspiracy behind it?" He was right, Pahwa was integral to the conspiracy which was to hit its target 10 days later. That was the temper of the nation 70 years ago. Hate, brutality, violence both sudden and also calculated. It was the season of vengeance, of retribution. It was the season of dank suspicion, of hooded conspiracies.

So, does the 70th anniversary of the birth of independent India which is the 70th anniversary of the death of undivided India as well, admit of any celebration?

Of course it does, for ridding ourselves of the yoke of colonialism was unquestionably a triumph. Seeing the imperial power out of our lives was a matter of rejoicing. Watching Jawaharlal Nehru unfurl the Tricolour on the

Red Fort was "very heaven".

We must and will celebrate that and more – the advance of India on the path of economic self-reliance and prosperity, electoral democracy and the rule of law. But we cannot afford to forget the price at which that independence came. Not just because it was a heavy levy but because we are paying that cess even today. And it may be called the Two Nations Theory Cess.

The Two Nations theory had two celebrated articulators: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha and Mohammed Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League. Their perspectives were different, their purposes divergent. Savarkar believed Hindus and Muslims were two nations living in their distinctness within an un-harmonised India but he did not want a division. Jinnah believed Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations that needed to be in two separate nation states.

The Muslim League's advocacy of the Two Nations theory reached its purpose by the formation of Pakistan 70 years ago. What of the counter goal of a Hindu Rashtra?

### Bedrock position

For some three generations over the last 70 years, India has been a plural society with a secular government committed to the idea that religion has no business with government and government has

no interest in religion.

Has that bedrock position been officially reversed? No, it has not. But it stands undermined.

Those connected historically and culturally to the idea of a Hindu Rashtra are, today, promulgating their passionately-held philosophy in different ways, dispersed incidents, apparently unconnected, in ways that make a Muslim feel fearful, a Christian feel as light as a leaf that can be blown off by a single majoritarian breath, a liberal feel vulnerable, a dissident feel targeted. They serve to make the cattle-trader afraid, the non-vegetarian at his meal declare it is not, please, Sir, not beef. They go to make the journalist feel hesitant, the farmer feel betrayed, the Dalit and the tribal feel insecure. Above all, anyone hurt by administrative wrongdoing or dismayed by state policy feel afraid to say so for: if you are against the government, you are against the nation.

Fear is abroad, like an invisible fume that you do not see but know that it surrounds you. And know, too, that it can ignite in your face.

The great American thinker Thomas Jefferson said: "We may consider each generation as a distinct nation." A new generation of Indians, a new distinct nation, is marking the 70th anniversary of our independence in an idiom and with a vocabulary which has nothing to do with the freedom struggle. It is making 'the differently disposed', both outside and within the Hindu fold, its target. And its equally active counterpart in Pakistan, going for 'the other' both within and beyond Islam, is not its adversary but its twin. Their religion is not Hinduism or Islam, it is Separateness.

On the 70th anniversary of independence and partition we must resist a second partitioning of India, of its versatile ethos, through an invisible surgery, performed by the knife of discord moving under the numbing anaesthesia of fear.

Gopal Krishna Gandhi is a former administrator, diplomat and Governor

## Fuelling other fires

The Grenfell Tower tragedy will feed into the frenzied debate over inequality and social justice in Britain



VIDYA RAM

How soon is too soon to raise difficult, politically charged questions about a tragedy that has cost lives? It's become an increasingly pertinent question in Britain, which has witnessed a series of devastating events – from three terrorist attacks within a three-month period to the catastrophic fire that engulfed a residential tower block in west London on Wednesday killing 17 people, with the death toll set to rise further.

In the past politicians have often stayed away from questions around whether policy decisions have contributed to tragedies for a certain amount of time, but in the heated political and highly ideologically charged country that Britain has become over the past year, that's become less so.

In the days immediately after the Manchester attack, Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour party, spoke out against the government's foreign policy and cuts to police forces, arguing that the

tragedy raised questions about both: whether Britain's interventionist approach in countries such as Syria, Libya and Iraq contributed to the risk to civilians from terror attacks back home, and whether cuts to police forces made it harder for them to gather counter-terrorism intelligence sufficiently rigorously. His decision to do so was clearly not off-putting enough to the public, who handed the party its biggest increase in terms of share of the vote in post-war Britain.

### Austerity link to tragedy?

The fire was still raging through Grenfell Tower on Wednesday morning when Mr. Corbyn drew a potential link between the government's austerity programme and the tragedy.

"If you deny local authorities the funding they need, then there is a price paid by a lack of safety facilities across the country. I think there needs to be some very searching questions as quickly as possible in the aftermath of the fire," he told LBC Radio, also pointing to the cuts that had taken place to fire services across the country, and reiterating his message that people could not be protected on the cheap.

This time he was not a lone voice in raising questions about whether



policy had played a role: Ronnie King, the honorary administrative secretary of the House of Commons All Party Parliamentary Group Fire Safety and Rescue Group, had told the radio station earlier in the day of how his group and others had urged the government to act upon the findings of past inquiries that had highlighted the need for reform of the fire regulations governing tower blocks, often a crucial part of affordable housing schemes in city centres. The recommendations were not acted upon.

Others on the scene noted the lack of council staff on hand as the tragedy unfolded, with community organisations stepping in to provide assistance. "There's been so many cuts, there aren't enough people to do with this," a Kensington and Chelsea councillor told *The Guardian*.

At a time when there is a frenzied national debate over inequality and social justice, the tragedy will inevitably feed into this. The tower is owned by the local council in a borough considered the most unaffordable to rent in the entire city and which, like most of the rest of London, has extreme wealth sitting side by side with great deprivation.

Harrods is as much part of the borough as social housing estates such as the Lancaster West Estate, with largely working-class, multi-cultural communities.

The chilling blog of the Grenfell Action Group chronicles the many times over the years that residents had raised questions around neglect, often relating to fire safety regulations. "The Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Association," it ominously warned last November.

The tragedy has unsurprisingly led to checks up and down tower blocks across the country, while Prime Minister Theresa May has pledged a full investigation. But keeping up the pressure will be essential – tensions around inequality and the ability to have one's voice heard have long simmered

below the surface in the capital city, exploding at points as they did in 2011 when thousands rioted, triggered by the death of Mark Duggan, a black man stopped by police in North London. They swiftly became about much more: the angry energy of the urban poor.

### Fire safety standards

But while in the aftermath of such situations promises of goodwill and measures to tackle underlying problems are aplenty, in reality they've rarely been acted upon in a concerted way. In the case of Britain's tower blocks, one architect, Sam Webb, told various media outlets on Wednesday of a report he'd worked on as early as the 1990s which warned the government that the majority of tower blocks he surveyed across the country had failed to meet basic fire safety standards.

The precise cause of the fire will only become known in the days and weeks to come as firefighters contend with the grim aftermath, but the anger palpable in the local community and beyond makes the need to ask difficult questions more pressing than ever. Politicians and the public must have the guts and persistence to ensure they're answered and dealt with.

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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.

### Deadline jitters

The Finance Ministry's resolve to go ahead with implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from July 1, rejecting the chorus of demands for its postponement, is myopic ("Put off GST rollout to Sept.1, Aviation Ministry tells FinMin," June 15). Experts have justifiably raised a red flag over the challenges faced by industries in the service sector. Companies with multiple offices spread across the country are now required to obtain separate registration for each State. With barely 15 days remaining for the roll-out, the IT system and the GST Network (GSTN) system are not even accepting new registrations. The GST Suvaidha Providers (GSP) too have reportedly expressed their inability to perform

their assigned tasks due to various technical and other reasons. Some of the rules too have not been finalised yet. There is nothing sacrosanct about July 1 as the GST is required to be only operationalised by September.

S.K. CHOUDHURY, Bengaluru

### Anti-democracy

The Election Commission (EC), acclaimed for its professionalism in holding elections in a transparent and fair manner in a vast country like India, appears to have suddenly lost its way by seeking power to punish for contempt ("Unfair proposal," editorial, June 15). There is no yardstick to measure what amounts to 'contempt'. Positive criticism may be looked upon as contempt by an intolerant institution.

Democracy thrives and evolves through debate and discussion, though the process of reaching consensus may face difficulties. The EC has still a lot to answer for concerning issues of public interest such as missing names on electoral lists and bribing of the target electorate.

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

The EC's seeking of power to punish for contempt is yet another sad example of how intolerant our institutions of democracy have become to criticism. There is no doubt that the EC still continues to enjoy the confidence of the large majority of people despite some embarrassing questions posed by political parties. However, the institution can retain public trust only if it responds to

criticism through a codified process rather than attempting to silence the already fading voices that raise scepticism. Further, the 'power to punish' under contempt law invites abuse in general and has to be revisited.

S.A. THAMEEMUL ANSARI, Kayalpattam, Tuticorin

### Next First Citizen

With the Election Commission of India issuing the statutory notification for the country's 15th presidential elections, it seems just next to impossible that a broad consensus would emerge between the NDA dispensation and the Opposition front. One wonders why the ruling elite swung into action so late in this regard as June 28 is the last date of filing nominations. As far as the

majority mark in the Electoral College – comprising all elected MPs and MLAs – is concerned, the BJP seems to be way ahead. However, as we complete 70 years of independence, our legislators need to make sure that the winner gets elected unanimously. It was a good four decades ago, in 1977, that Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy got elected unopposed, the only person to have done so thus far.

HEMANT KUMAR, Ambala City

### Paradise getting lost

The little pleasures of mountaineering – escaping into the beautiful Nature and discovering yourself while getting lost – have disappeared due to its vulgarisation, as has happened in the case of Mount Everest ("Mission

Everest Inc," FAQ, June 15). The fragile ecology of the peak is adversely affected due to overcrowding and littering of the glaciers and camps. If this so-called tourism boost continues at the present pace, the day is not far away when this pristine peak would be called the 'world's highest garbage dump'. The recent crumbling of Hillary Step should be a strict warning to stop exploiting our mountain ecosystem. Efforts must be put in not only by the government but also by NGOs and citizens themselves to prevent soil erosion, trampling of vegetation and excessive waste disposal caused by incessant expeditions.

KRITI CHACHRA, New Delhi

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LEFT, RIGHT, CENTRE

# Is the media under siege?

It is not just the media that is under siege, but the very idea of the nation that is India



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**← LEFT**  
Late last year, an editor whose employment was ended under the 'tattkal' quota met a media owner whose exit had been similarly fast-tracked a few months earlier.

"Who was making the [phone] calls?" the latter asked. When he heard the names of a couple of Union Ministers, the 'malik' snarled: "Oh, wasn't that glib RSS chap in the BJP amongst them?"

The anecdote might well be apocryphal. What is not is that mainstream media is in deep coma, gasping under pressure not felt even during Emergency's darkest nights. That was an advertised, in-

your-face, executive intervention – the censor sat openly amid journalists in newspaper offices and blacked out stuff they thought Indira Gandhi wouldn't like.

**Co-option and coercion**

What is on today is a sly, insidious operation without anybody's Aadhaar-linked fingerprints. It is aimed not merely at "managing the headlines" in the newsroom but at paving the way for a lethal ideology that has long craved legitimacy, through the boardroom.

In that sense, it is not just the media that is under siege, but the very 'idea of India'.

Influential owners, anchors, edit-

ors across the nation resemble the hapless Kashmiri tied to the Army jeep. They are the advance party to quell dissent, manufacture consent, set the agenda, drum up support, and spread fear, venom, hatred and bigotry – sometimes through sheer silence.

The saffronisation of the air waves is staggering.

It would be useful, therefore, to stop deluding ourselves that the siege began with the raid on NDTV's promoters. Far from it, it is the culmination of a devious, top-down attempt at co-option and co-operation that failed. Hence, the coercion.

So, in the "New India", it is per-



fectly normal to hear that the government has a list of journalists who attended a protest meeting in NDTV's support; perfectly normal for the Foreign Correspondents' Club to publicly assert it was not involved in it; perfectly normal for a CEO to privately predict no one in the TV industry will stand up because "most will be too scared".

When Big Brother tracks every channel, watches every tweet, and reads every word, why would anybody want to take a risk when the "caged bird" is a homing pigeon, striking targets with precision?

Putting the same man in charge of the Finance and I&B Ministries in 2014, therefore, was a master-

stroke. After all, the government is the biggest advertiser.

"The country is going through an existential crisis. Fear, anger, anxiety and paranoia have become normal. Nobody trusts anyone anymore. Nobody feels secure. People, including journalists, try to prove their loyalty to the government by snitching on colleagues and neighbours." Turkey's most famous woman novelist Elif Safak could well be speaking about India.

**Who's to blame?**

Much of what is now happening here is happening in countries where nativist nationalists are running riot: the United States, Japan, Turkey, even France.

Defamatory name-calling (using terms such as 'presstitutes', 'journal-

alopes' and 'giraegi'); weaponised trolling; arrests, killings, raids, lockdowns. Little wonder, India now stands at 136 on the World Press Freedom index, down from 133.

However, it would be foolish to lay all the blame for Indian media's current plight at the politician's door. The siege began long ago with dodgy ownership; mercenary business practices; advertising and circulation revenue meltdowns; emerging technologies. But at least there was "independent journalism" shining the light, showing the way.

Today, as non-state actors throttle India's foundational values in broad daylight, and much of a besieged media happily plays cheerleader, future historians might wonder if it did not suffer from the Stockholm syndrome.

Has the government reacted to the concerted attack on it by the left-liberal media with an iron fist? No



**CHANDAN MITRA**  
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**→ RIGHT**  
It was fashionable, at least until quite recently, for Muslim clerics in India to raise the war cry: Islam in danger! This was used to feed the paranoia of the unlettered masses among their followers and galvanise them into violent action against another community or the state whenever any threat, real or perceived, was felt. Looking at the way sections of the Indian media have behaved over the last few months, it seems they are replicating that model.

Since the BJP with Narendra

Modi at its helm barged into power in Delhi, the so-called left-liberal sections of journalists, especially in the English-language media, have demonstrated near-hysterical behaviour, claiming from rooftops that the Indian media is under siege.

**Anti-Modi bias**

This stems basically from their pathological dislike of Mr. Modi. Undoubtedly the BJP knocked down the comfortable bastions of the left-liberal intelligentsia's privileges. But to conclude from the discomfiture of the erstwhile elite class of scribes that the media in India is under

siege is not only fallacious but also mischievous and smacks of an ideological bias.

There is not an iota of evidence to substantiate the charge of siege. It was truly gagged hand, mouth and foot only once in independent India, which was during the Emergency.

The vicious anti-Modi campaign that was unleashed by the left-liberal media in 2002 still determines their mindset towards the BJP government. Be it in print, TV or the social media, the present government, particularly the Prime Minister, is lampooned on a daily basis. Stories that would make the regime uncomfortable are exaggerated and grossly highlighted.



Upstarts like a small-time demagogue called Kanhaiya Kumar of JNU are given publicity totally out of proportion to their influence.

Reports of attacks on Muslims, especially those accused of eating or selling beef, are played up in a way that is bound to excite communal passions, cause disturbances and thus destabilise the government.

**No vindictiveness**

Has the government reacted to this concerted attack with an iron fist? During the Uttar Pradesh election campaign virtually the entire left-liberal media ran a drive suggesting the BJP's vote bank had shrunk

What is under siege is not the media, but a political and moral idea of media as watchdogs



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**↑ CENTRE**  
Coincidence in the time of conflict is rarely a divine occurrence or even an attribute of moral luck, and one cannot help but ascribe it with sinister overtones.

The timing of the CBI raids on the Roys of NDTV throws up similar questions. The controversy over some of the financial and institutional transactions of NDTV has resulted in a fault line within the media in response to the raids, with commentators suggesting that this might be less about freedom of the press and more about accountabil-

ity. But when democratic institutions are under attack and when it happens selectively against those inclined towards questioning the policies and politics of the government, those who profess constitutional faith in liberal values cannot but blame the powers that be.

**Cause for concern**

But is the NDTV affair conclusive evidence of the fact that the media is under siege? There are difficulties in arriving at such a conclusive prognosis.

For one, is it possible to have a singular idea of the media? NDTV

with its influence has been able to galvanise support from all quarters, but as with most wars, the real casualty is generally borne by the foot soldiers and critics are right to point out that myriad attacks (the recent denial of permission to screen films on Rohith Vemula and Kashmir, the Kafkaesque use of ISBN to monitor publishers, etc.) have not received the same kind of attention as the attack on NDTV.

This is certainly a valid critique and yet at the same time there is a danger of subsuming this into a rhetoric of worthy and unworthy victims, and the assault on NDTV should be a cause of concern for the



ordinary journalist, writer, filmmaker and blogger precisely because NDTV is such a powerful and influential player.

**Defending the elites**

When asked why he chose to defend Klaus Von Bulow, a known aristocratic anti-Semite, in a murder trial, lawyer Alan Dershowitz, who was then a champion of civil liberties, replied that it was precisely because of Bulow's elite status. He added that if the state could get away with harassing elites, then one could only imagine what they could get away with against those much less powerful. There remain other difficulties,

since the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

Despite the party and its allies romping home with an unprecedented 325 seats out of 403, the hectoring of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has been relentless from day one. Did the Union or State government react? Did they stop or even cut down advertising support even to the hostile section of the media?

Has any journalist been harassed for propounding an anti-government view? Has anybody been arrested or even questioned by the police, something common during the Emergency years? If nothing of the above has happened, what is the basis of suggesting the media is under siege?

Following the recent raid on the

premises of promoters of NDTV, the "media under siege" cry has become shriller. Raids on a media house are indeed undesirable, but a distinction has to be made whether the reason for the raid was editorial or financial.

**No cause for alarm**

In the instant case, the CBI claims the reasons were purely financial. It is now for the agency to justify its action in a court of law. It is not for us to prejudice the issue. If NDTV is not being pursued by the investigators for its editorial predilections, there is no cause for alarm.

Given the country's strong democratic traditions, it is worth reminding ourselves that the media in India is as free as it wants to be!

however, with the use of the militaristic metaphor of a siege. The word evokes a sudden forceful takeover and this is not really a useful account of how conflicts actually unfold – the moment of the siege is only the performative culmination of sustained lower-order assaults (by the likes of Censor Board chief Pahlaj Nihalani & Co.).

The presumption of media being a singular thing under threat from the state belies the fact that much of the siege is actively orchestrated by the media as collaborators of the state.

The trolling of academic Partha Chatterjee for likening the Army chief's defence of a Major's actions in Kashmir to General Dyer of Jallianwala Bagh infamy, the tireless

tirade of Times Now against The Wire all gesture to a deeply divided moment for media where one doesn't really need the state to question the legitimacy of media since they are more than willing to do it themselves.

**Civil war within?**

What therefore is at siege to my mind is not the media but a political and moral idea of the media as watchdogs of truth, and until it frees itself of its lustful desire to be and act like biblical angels – whose only job is to sing hymns of praise to the glory and honour of the divine – it would appear that the siege appears as much as a civil war within media as it does a threat by the state.

SINGLE FILE

## Since men are not angels

Is the fate of any reform dependent on how it affects interests of the powerful?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL



Ask any economist, and the standard advice you are likely to hear is that the government must step in to help the economy whenever the market fails. Almost no economist, however, talks about even the remote possibility of government failure – even though there is ample evidence all around us to suggest that governments are far from perfect. Political corruption of various kinds often makes news, and sometimes affects us personally, yet economists continue to believe that the government can play a positive role in the economy. Just why are economists so blind to reality?

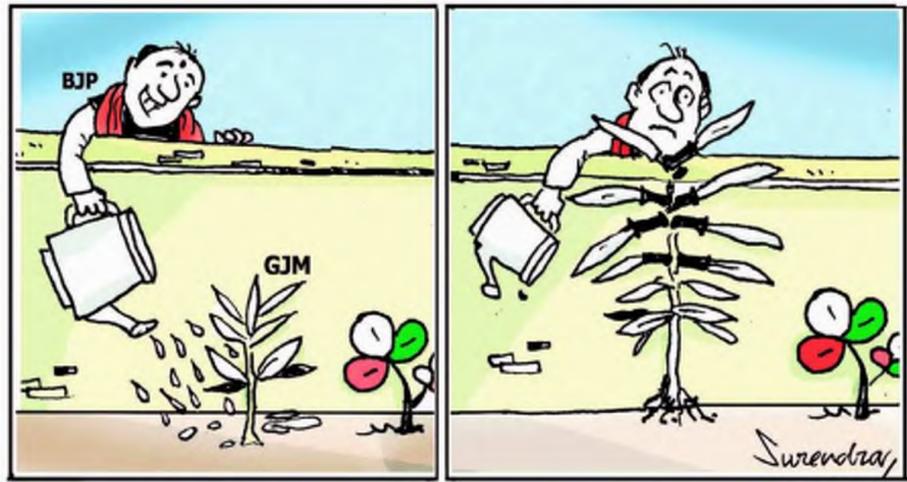
A possible answer lies in the assumption that economists usually make about the nature of individuals. When economists talk about producers and consumers, they have in mind an economic man, or homo economicus, who is purely interested in his own self-interest.

So economic models, for instance, assume that businessmen run companies primarily to maximise profits, while consumers purchase goods and services from firms primarily to better their own personal condition. Yet, when it comes to politicians and bureaucrats who run governments, economists for some reason naively assume that these are altruistic individuals who care only about the well-being of society, rather than their own self-interest.

"People are People: The Elements of Public Choice", an essay by Gordon Tullock, offers an alternative – and more realistic – view of public servants. Tullock, an American economist and a prominent member of the Virginia School of Political Economy, encourages economists to view politicians and bureaucrats as self-interested individuals just like any of us. In Tullock's view, public servants do not participate in public life to promote the interests of the people, but rather just to line their own pockets.

This crucial insight about human nature leads to many interesting conclusions in public policy – mostly to do with the unintended consequences of government ownership and regulation. For instance, private monopolies are usually considered a huge threat to the efficient working of the market economy. Consequently, many economists argue that government regulators must be given the powers to prevent the domination of any single group of companies. Very little thought, however, goes into the likely incentives that face bureaucrats who are in charge of regulation. Not surprisingly, lobby groups – which are more organised than consumers – end up influencing both regulations and regulators. Meanwhile, the social good – which is supposed to be the goal of all regulation – goes for a toss.

So, if people in government are interested only in furthering their own interests, as Tullock argues, what does it mean for public policy? Government policy, in that case, will simply be dictated by the personal interests of those in power. If so, it is worth noting that the fate of any reform that can benefit the overall economy will depend above all on how it might first affect the interests of the powerful.



**CONCEPTUAL**  
**Thucydides' trap**

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The idea that the rise of a new power, as a competitor to an existing superpower, likely leads to the escalation of political tensions and war. The term was coined by Graham T. Allison, an American political scientist and author of the 2017 book *Destined for War*, and is named after the 5th century Athenian historian Thucydides. Allison based his conclusion on the study of 15 historical cases since 1500 in which the dominance of an established power was challenged by a rising new power. War resulted in 11 of the 15 cases, as the rising power caused fear in the ranks of the established power.

**MORE ON THE WEB**

**What is dynamic fuel pricing?**  
<http://bit.ly/fuelpricing>

**ACT ONE**

## Guaranteeing time-bound services

The ombudsman law needs to include statutory guarantees for the right to delivery of services

K. VENKATARAMANAN

When the Supreme Court observed recently that the Lokpal Act was an "eminently workable" piece of legislation, and wondered why it was not being operationalised, it was indirectly admonishing the government for delaying the establishment of the Lokpal. It is one of several citizen-friendly laws dating back many years that have either lapsed or are yet to be enacted or not implemented for one reason or the other.

A significant Bill that could help guarantee delivery of services to citizens and empower them to seek redress of their grievances has not seen the light of day for years now. The Right of Citizens for Time-bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011, was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2011 but it lapsed with the term of the last House. The essence of the proposed law was that every public authority will

be required to publish a citizens' charter that will set out the goods and services provided by it, along with timelines for their delivery. Some States have such legislation to guarantee to right to public services delivery, but the Central law sought to provide an overarching framework.

The Bill required every public authority to establish information and facilitation centres for an efficient and effective delivery of services and redressal of grievances.

The Bill provided for the appointment of grievance redress officers and State and Central Public Grievance Redressal Commissions. Citizens could file complaints before these authorities pertaining to any violation of the citizens' charter, that is, a failure to deliver goods or services as promised, or the functioning of any public official. These grievances would have to be remedied within 30 days. Those aggrieved

by the grievance redress officers' orders could appeal before a Designated Authority. Further appeals to the State and Central Commissions were provided for. Orders by these two Commissions could be appealed against before the Lokayukta and the Lokpal respectively. A Parliamentary Standing Committee, which went into the provisions of the Bill, felt that there was one appeal too many provided in it. It did not favour the Lokpal and Lokayukta, conceived of as anti-corruption agencies, being burdened with grievance redressal.

While implementing laws related to the ombudsman against corruption, the government would do well to give statutory guarantees for the right to delivery of services. As a citizen-strengthening package, it should also fast-track proposals for a whistle-blower protection law and electronic delivery of services as well.

**FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES**  
FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 16, 1967

## Language trouble in Lok Sabha

The language controversy erupted with full fury in the Lok Sabha to-day [June 15, New Delhi], virtually paralysing the proceedings of the House for 15 minutes. The Speaker, Mr. N. Sanjiva Reddi, combined humour with firmness to restore the order in the House. The controversy started when the S.S.P. member from Mysore, Mr. J.H. Patel, sought to put a question in Kannada on the utility of the proposed revolving tower restaurant at the State-owned Ashoka Hotel in the capital. He was allowed to put the question in his language, but when the Minister could not reply and the member insisted on an answer there was trouble.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 16, 1917

## Motor accidents at Poona.

A motor car fatality occurred about the midnight of last night in which a native policeman lost his life and another was slightly injured. It appears that two policemen were on their way home from Napier Cinema where they had been on duty when they were run into by a motor car driven by Captain Manson, R.A.M.C., with whom were two other officers. Collision occurred on Wellesley Road near Jewish Synagogue. Captain Manson drove the injured men to the Sassoon Hospital where the one who was more seriously injured succumbed to his injuries within a couple of hours of admission. The police on learning the occurrence held an inquiry, Superintendent Yond and Inspector Corby to-day recording statements of those concerned in the case.

**DATA POINT**

**Small and marginal**

About 45% of the area under cultivation in India is operated by marginal and small farmers. Here is a State-wise look

