



Mending the rift

The international community must push for a resolution of the Qatar crisis

The fact that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have handed over a list of demands to the Qatari regime should, on the face of it, indicate some progress in the impasse created after they cut ties with Qatar. The list has not been officially released, but is reported to include demands that Qatar snap all but trade ties with Iran, end military co-operation with Turkey and shut down the Al Jazeera news network. It may be that many of the demands are only meant to be bargaining counters – even U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who has been running the backroom negotiation along with the Emir of Kuwait, said they are “very difficult for Qatar to meet”. In any case, such demands on the list may be more understandable if these countries complied with them as well. For example, in asking Qatar to disown ties with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE cannot ignore their own role in building up Sunni extremist groups across West Asia, sometimes in partnership with Qatar. The UAE has a thriving business relationship with Iran. And while the Saudi-led bloc may object to “negative narratives” and the platform given to their dissidents on Al Jazeera and the other news outlets named, it is unlikely that they will lean too much on the internationally recognised news networks to close shop. The bulk of the demands, however, focusses on asking Qatar to enforce its own commitments from the 2014 Riyadh declaration of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on ceasing support to extremist and terrorist groups. This indicates that a path is being cleared for a resolution to the current crisis. The next few days will be crucial in ensuring the outcome.

There are implications of this crisis that India and the international community cannot afford to ignore. While the action against Qatar is mainly political and nowhere close to the Saudi-led action on Yemen, where more than 10,000 people have already been killed, in both cases the muscle power of the regional allies has been allowed to prevail over a weaker nation. The treatment of Qatar could well become the playbook for future diplomacy, which would lead to a further weakening of the international order, the rule of law and the UN system of conflict resolution. There are also signs that this may be the precursor to a larger conflict with Iran. This is a troubling scenario for the world, and for India in particular with its commitment to build connectivity and shore up oil reserves. The impact of any conflict in the Gulf cannot be over-estimated, given India's dependence on oil supplies and remittances from some eight million Indians based there. For New Delhi to continue to be as sanguine about the Qatar crisis as it appeared to be a few weeks ago, when External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj called it an “internal matter” of the GCC, is no longer an option.

In another court

K. Srikanth, Sai Praneeth and H.S. Prannoy have transformed men's badminton in India

K. Srikanth brought joy in two equal helpings. The 24-year-old won back-to-back badminton titles in the space of eight days, on Sunday adding the Australian Open title to the higher-rated Indonesia Open he had clinched on June 18. Success is not new to Srikanth, and in Sydney his domination of an elite field could be gauged from the fact that he dropped just one game in five matches. Even more heartening, he is part of a cohort in Indian men's badminton, with the likes of B. Sai Praneeth and H.S. Prannoy, who have been beating elite players this season. For instance, Srikanth has upstaged the current World No. 1, Korea's Son Wan Ho, twice in two weeks and raced past the reigning World and Olympic champion, Chen Long, in Sunday's final at Sydney. He will be back in the world's top 10 ranking this week, having also beaten World No. 4 and the top-most Chinese, Shi Yuqi, twice this year. In fact, Srikanth, who had overcome a bout of brain fever in July 2014 to become World No. 3 a year later, has beaten all the leading Chinese players. Praneeth, winner of the Singapore Open and the Thailand Open, is finally realising his potential. Interestingly, Praneeth holds a 5-2 head-to-head record against Srikanth, and the latter's dream run is bound to increase his confidence of also beating the best in the world. Prannoy, unbeaten in this year's Premier Badminton League and conqueror of the legendary Lee Chong Wei and Chen Long in successive matches in the Indonesia Open this month, will also expect to strike it rich going ahead. In sum, Srikanth, Praneeth and Prannoy are on track for a potential podium finish in the World Championship in Glasgow in August.

With Saina Nehwal and P.V. Sindhu maintaining their formidable challenge in the women's game, Indian badminton now has a strong nucleus of the world's best. The biggest gain of late has been the consistency with which the male shuttlers are delivering, with each believing he has the game to outdo the other. This healthy competitiveness, coupled with the maturity and patience shown on the court of late, is paying dividends. Srikanth has wisely refrained from being in attack mode at will. Known for his powerful smashes, his current use of soft strokes and deft touches is proving very effective, complementing the deep clearances from the backhand corner. Pullela Gopi Chand's role in the success of these players is well-known; Indonesian coach Muljo Handoyo too has clearly made an impact, especially in rallying the players to think clearly in the heat of a match. As a result, Indian shuttlers are no longer ‘choking’ against more illustrious rivals. Significantly, all the leading overseas players today have lost to an Indian at least once. On current form, at least a medal each from the men's and women's singles in this year's World Championship is now a realistic expectation.

A controversial inheritance

P.N. Bhagwati was India's most influential judge – it's time his legacy is revisited



ANUJ BHUWANIA

Justice P.N. Bhagwati, who died recently, at 95, is perhaps the most influential judge independent India has had. What Indira Gandhi is to Indian politics, Justice Bhagwati is to the Indian judiciary: their legacies have endured, having engineered a populist democratisation based on radical rhetoric, but at very heavy costs to the institutions themselves.

One can see strong resonances of Mrs Gandhi's style in the Modi government's mode of functioning in their all or nothing friend or enemy view of politics, with complete disregard for the autonomy of institutions. Similarly, with contemporary standards of judicial behaviour, pronouncements pandering to the lowest common denominator – calling for the cow to be declared the national animal, imposing the national anthem on cinema-goers and imposing thoughtless prohibition near national highways – while simultaneously displaying pusillanimity in institutionally vital cases against the Central government such as Aadhaar, the Money Bill and the Delhi government cases. The very condition of possibility of such playing fast and loose with the law are Justice Bhagwati's landmark interventions.

Charting a way to power

Just as nationalism has now emerged as the currency of contemporary judicial populism, socialist rhetoric was his path to power. He was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1973 at the height of Mrs Gandhi's ideological onslaught on the judiciary, with her call for a ‘committed judiciary’. The *Kesavananda Bharati* judgment



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had recently been delivered, in which the Supreme Court had dared to stand up to Mrs Gandhi and had declared the Constitution's basic structure as un-amendable even by her brute parliamentary majority. In the aftermath of this judgment she superseded the three senior-most majority judges leading to their resignations, and appointed Bhagwati and Krishna Iyer to the Supreme Court.

Two key points deployed in Mrs Gandhi's mid-1970s attack on the judiciary were the inaccessibility of the legal system and its alien British form. The responses were also twofold: the expansion of legal aid and the injection of indigeny in legal institutions, respectively. Legal aid was even declared part of the Emergency's flagship Twenty Point Programme. The two recent judicial appointees, Justices Krishna Iyer and Bhagwati, enthusiastically responded and penned successive reports proposing ‘nyaya panchayats’ as the silver bullet solution to both the problems. The challenge of democratising access to courts could have been met through an expansion of legal aid. Instead the solution was seen as creating parallel informal institutions, diluting judicial procedure by short-circuiting basic principles of adjudication. These visions of paternalistic deprofessionalised indigenous justice provided the basis for future developments such as Lok Adalats at the lowest level, tribalisation at the

intermediate level and Public Interest Litigation (PIL) at the highest level of the judiciary. For the part they played in this process, Professor Upendra Baxi later wrote that the two judges “remain vulnerable to the charge of acts as legitimators of the emergency regime”.

Moving to extremes

Justice Bhagwati soon proved his loyalty to the Emergency regime much more directly: as part of the majority in *ADM Jabalpur vs Shivkant Shukla*, which upheld the constitutionality of the draconian Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), and declared that even the right to habeas corpus would not survive during the Emergency. Justice Bhagwati was justly targeted for his role during the Emergency after the 1977 elections. He soon moved to the other extreme, and proved his loyalty to the Janata government by upholding its use of Article 356 against Congress-led Legislative Assemblies, a decision with disastrous consequences for Indian federalism. He did another somersault after Mrs Gandhi returned to power in 1980. He was the only judge in the *Minerva Mills* case to uphold her Emergency era amendment immunising any statute implementing a directive principle from judicial review for violating Articles 14 and 19, thus giving primacy to directive principles over fundamental rights. Accordingly, a statute implementing pro-

hibition, or prohibiting cow slaughter, or introducing uniform civil code, or pursuing ‘socialism’ would be immune to judicial challenge for violating the rights to equality and freedom. If this sounds rather familiar, it is because the Indian judiciary has implicitly followed the logic of Justice Bhagwati's dissenting opinion in recent years. In the Judges' Transfer case, he went on to explicitly support the appointment of judges based on their ideological predilections, i.e., court packing for a ‘committed judiciary’. When the constitutionality of the National Security Act, 1980, Mrs Gandhi's successor statute to MISA, was challenged, he got another chance to somewhat undo the notoriety of the Habeas Corpus case, but he upheld this law as well. In spite of such an appalling record on civil liberties and such open servility to regimes in power, how did Justice Bhagwati acquire such a heroic reputation?

Behind the PIL

Much of Justice Bhagwati's fame rests on his role in pioneering the PIL. In fact, PIL letter petitions would initially be personally addressed to him, rather than the court. This enabled him to sidestep the then Chief Justice's role in allocating cases, also leading to allegations of soliciting petitions. More enduringly, instead of grounding the PIL in rules and principles, his view of legal procedure as the enemy of justice meant that all aspects of procedure in PIL cases were diluted, removing all checks on judicial arbitrariness and making it a juggernaut annihilating all procedure. The dilution of locus standi could have been grounded in some notion of ‘representation standing’. In its absence, most PILs are filed by citizens unconnected to any issue. In the *Bandhua Mukti Morcha* case, he diluted evidentiary standards in PIL cases to an extent that proved catastrophic in the long run. He also was the first judge to openly legislate in a PIL relating to inter-country adoptions,

creating another dangerous precedent.

Justice Bhagwati is also famous for his judicial improvisations. Based on the idea that ‘arbitrariness is the antithesis of inequality’, he introduced a new test to examine violations of ‘Right to Equality’. This test is however completely illogical, as constitutional scholar H.M. Seervai demonstrated. Even more famous is his pioneering ‘right to life jurisprudence’ in the *Maneka Gandhi* case. A negative right against the state's illegal deprivation of any individual's life or personal liberty has since been interpreted as a positive right to life, making it a receptacle for all manner of socio-economic rights. The only right it now seems to exclude is the literal mandate of Article 21. Another instance of careless improvisation is his unnecessary innovation of ‘absolute liability’ as a principle of liability in cases of injury caused by inherently hazardous industries. Needless trying to remove the few exceptions that the time-honoured principle of strict liability allowed, once again Justice Bhagwati was set on winning the tournament of competitive radicalism that his vision of judgeship entailed, regardless of institutional costs. This has been his most enduring legacy as a role model for future judges: to think of their judicial role instrumentally as social activists and not mere jurists. A certain looseness of legal language entered Indian appellate judgments and radical rhetoric became the path to power for Indian judges. The value of careful judicial prose declined as fidelity to law no longer mattered, what mattered was the show of ideological commitment.

Justice Bhagwati's legacy lives on. But it is high time we revisit it.

Anuj Bhuwania is a lawyer and an anthropologist and the author of ‘Courting the People: Public Interest Litigation in post-Emergency India’. He teaches at South Asian University, New Delhi

Who's afraid of neutrinos?

The India-based Neutrino Observatory would greatly advance scientific research



RAVI KUCHIMANCHI

Which one of us would not have applauded Galileo in January of 1610 when he trained his telescope for the first time on Jupiter and observed four dots alongside it? Within days he noticed that the dots seemed to be going around Jupiter... they were its four largest moons!

Today, very large telescopes send us iconic images of distant galaxies and of faint remnants of the light produced by the Big Bang. The light from the moons of Jupiter was always falling on earth. It took a telescope to detect it because it was so feeble and could not be seen with the naked eye. Interesting things, telescopes. They observe something that is already there. They do not produce what they observe.

Just like light

There are two other things that, like light, can travel great distances in the universe, and therefore can be usefully observed. The first of these are gravitational waves. Predicted by Einstein's famous theory, these waves travel at the speed of light and are produced when very

heavy objects such as black holes collide. Gravitational waves were first detected in September 2015 by the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO). As the waves passed, LIGO measured that they expanded and contracted the earth a tiny bit for a fraction of a second. The measurement told us that the colliding black holes were 30 times the mass of the sun, 1.3 billion light years away, and during the collision, the mass of three suns just vanished to produce the energy of the gravity wave that spread across the universe. However, LIGO did not produce the waves that it observed.

They were produced by cataclysmic events, and we wouldn't want to be anywhere near them, but observing them through LIGO is like receiving a postcard from that collapsing, tragic part of the universe that even light cannot escape from.

The only other particles that can zip through the universe at speeds very close to that of light are called neutrinos. The biggest nuclear reactor that most life on earth derives energy from is the sun. Like all nuclear reactors, in addition to giving out energy (heat and light), the sun also emits neutrinos. We have all seen sunlight. Can we also observe the billions of neutrinos the sun emits every second?

In the mid-1960s, when solar neutrinos were observed through the first neutrino telescopes, it quietly unleashed one of the



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biggest revolutions in our knowledge of the laws of physics that govern the universe. Raymond Davis and John Bahcall detected that only half the neutrinos that the sun was emitting towards the earth were actually reaching us.

The reason? As they travelled the distance from the sun to the earth, the neutrinos were changing from electron-neutrino type that the sun was emitting to muon-neutrino type, and thus escaping detection. All the laws and forces of nature that we know of, other than gravitation, are described by what physicists call the Standard Model. It predicted that neutrinos, which come under three types or flavours – tau-neutrino, electron-neutrino and muon-neutrino – would not oscillate from one flavour to another. The discovery that they do meant that the Standard Model or the basic laws of physics had to be further modified. Thus, through the neutrino detectors we are actually observing the fundamental laws of physics at the cutting edge.

The proposed India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) aims to ob-

serve muon neutrinos that are continuously produced in the atmosphere when cosmic rays strike the earth. Since every type of matter particle has an anti-matter partner particle associated with it, there are also anti-neutrinos that the INO can observe. Anti-neutrinos also come in three flavours and can oscillate from one to the other. An important question in the mystery of trying to piece together the laws of physics is: do anti-neutrinos oscillate or flip their flavours at exactly the same rate as neutrinos do, or are there slight differences in their rates? In other words, do laws of physics treat matter and anti-matter exactly the same way as far as the neutrinos are concerned or do they treat them differently?

While the INO will not by itself provide an answer to this question, its measurements will – by determining the order of the neutrino masses and thereby help other neutrino experiments that are already under way or being built in other parts of the world. The INO, by observing the rates at which neutrinos and anti-neutrinos oscillate, will make a substantial contribution to the quest to unravel the secrets of the ultimate laws of physics.

Nothing to fear

Unfortunately, some activists and political parties in Tamil Nadu have made baseless allegations that the INO, which is just like a telescope,

causes radioactivity and have compared it with the dangers of having a nuclear power plant or radioactive material in the neighbourhood. This cannot be true since the neutrinos, whether they are naturally occurring in the atmosphere or from the sun, or are emitted by far away man made nuclear reactors and sent in beams of neutrinos with few GeV energy, are very feeble and weakly interacting particles that we can't even see or feel without the help of an observatory. Beams of neutrinos are being sent to the NOVA neutrino detector in the U.S. and to the T2K neutrino detector in Japan every day. Moreover, being the lightest matter particles, the neutrinos do not decay into any other particles, as everything else is heavier – so they are not like uranium which decays radioactively into smaller atoms. All the INO would do is to provide the lens to observe neutrinos as they are too feeble or faint to be detected by the naked eye. It does not create a radiation hazard or put us in harm's way. While we should ensure that the tunnel is dug with proper environmental safeguards and the project has various clearances, raising the spectacle of radiation hazards and comparing it with nuclear or thermal power plants is spreading false fears and is unscientific.

Ravi Kuchimanchi is the founder of the non-profit Association for India's Development (AID)

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.

Power to punish

The privileges in legislative institutions to protect the freedoms of speech and expression in the House and in ensuring that undue influence, pressure or coercion are not brought on the legislature in the course of its functioning were constituted in the good old days when sessions were conducted in the right spirit. But what is the situation now? In Parliament and our Assemblies, crores are spent on unproductive sessions, which defeat the very purpose of those privileges. Under these circumstances, if our legislators had felt that they were being defamed, they could have sought judicial remedy in their individual capacity. This appears to be the era of imposing a heavy punishment for small mistakes in the guise of mis-utilisation of the

freedom of expression. The legislature has enormous powers, but these should not be at the expense of the liberty of critics. Criticism must be taken by our representatives in the right spirit, who must try and see whether any of those levelled are right. Constructive criticism is the backbone of any democracy (Editorial - “Whose privilege?” June 26)

T.S.N. RAO,
Bhemanavaram, Andhra Pradesh

Dissent vs. violence

Zoya Hasan conveniently forgets to mention the violence resorted to by unscrupulous elements posing as “farmers” by burning private properties and stoning buses with passengers, but instead condemns the government's action in imposing Section 144 of the CrPC and other restrictions in Mandsaur,

Madhya Pradesh

(“Restricting protests, stifling dissent”, June 26). While police firing is condemnable, she should have criticised the violent incidents which led to many police personnel being injured. She also tries to justify the visits of Opposition political leaders to protest sites. These are only for political gains. Has Ms. Hasan forgotten how people were injured in police action in Darjeeling only because it is happens to be an Opposition-ruled State? Freedom of expression, dissent and the right to protest are essential in a democracy but people taking the law into their hands and subjecting innocent people to hardships should be severely dealt with.

M. AMARENDER REDDY,
Secunderabad

How smart?

The editorial, “Being smart”, and the Magazine article, “A less concrete solution?” (both June 25) should be eye-openers to the officials concerned. One only wishes that some of the ideas, such as using raw data on pedestrian movement and ensuring a base of reliable civic services, are ensured in the smart city project. I am deeply concerned about the lack of encroachment-free footpaths for pedestrians to walk on safely, comfortably, and with dignity. The vision for smart cities needs to be done in consultation with those who live in these areas.

B.R. SANT,
Hyderabad

Reforms in sport

To say that there has been a total failure in the functioning of the BCCI may

not be fully correct (“Last wicket stand”, June 26).

That the Augean stables of the cricketing body need cleaning has been taken cognisance of and is under the supervision of the Supreme Court. There may be a few setbacks to Indian cricket in the form of Ramachandra Guha and Anil Kumble stepping down but this does not mean it's the end. The silver lining is the way the Indian cricket team is progressing. We produce great batsmen but always seem to struggle to groom fast bowlers and quality spinners. As far as match results are concerned, let us be mature enough not to link failures to Board politics. A word about women's cricket. Indian women have begun well in their World Cup campaign by beating England – a classic case of it being a

combined effort with no “superstar ego”.

BALASUBRAMANIAM PAVANI,
Secunderabad

A shuttler to watch

Kidambi Srikanth has undoubtedly been in devastating form of late, scalping many a famous name in the badminton circuit (“Sport” - “Srikanth's cup of joy overflows”, June 26). His feats have given sports lovers plenty to cheer about. Credit must also be given to his mentor, Gopi Chand, for the tough grooming his academy gives. Consequently, players such as Srikanth and Prannoy are now hitting the headlines as much as Saina Nehwal and Sindhu are. Indian badminton is on the ascendance.

VJAJ PANT,
Hempur, Uttarakhand

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The pathology of lynching

There is 'blood at the root' of the Hindutva movement whenever it refuses to see Muslims and other minorities as fully Indian



TABISH KHAIR

I first heard the famous Billie Holiday version of the song 'Strange fruit' (1939) quite late, as I had grown up in a small town of Bihar, where the choice of music was rather limited. I must have been in junior college then. By then I had read of the song, and the tragic history behind it; I still recall the tingling feeling as Billie Holiday's powerful rendition literally made my hair stand on end:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
blood on the leaves and blood at the root,

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Described by record producer Ahmet Ertegun as "the beginning of the civil rights movement", this powerful song was written as a poem by Abel Meeropol, and first performed in public by his wife (a singer) in 1937.

Meeropol was writing about more than 1,500 African Americans ('Black bodies') lynched by white American mobs around the turn of the 20th century. In particular, he was reacting to a photo taken by Lawrence Beitler of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith on August 7, 1930: these two African Americans were accused, without any evidence, of murdering a white man and raping his companion, and they were lynched by a crowd of racists in front of the local police.

Violence by vigilante groups

You can see the connections to the kind of murders of Muslims that have taken place recently in North India – violence that, actually, also connects to a longer history of the murder of Dalits and aborigines by mobs of casteist Hindus. Yes, I allude specifically to such violence. The lynching of a (Muslim) police officer by (Muslim) separatists in Srinagar is by definition a criminal act, and its perpetrators will be prosecuted by the government as required. But violence by vigilante groups in the name of the law is another matter – because it seeks not just to attack the state but also to circuitously involve it in its own demise.

These are the elements: rumour and hearsay lead to a mob breaking the law



Battling the vigilantes: A protest at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, in October 2015 against the Dadri lynching ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

of the country in the name of justice; the mob has already condemned the 'guilty' because of who they are and how they look; the authorities look the other way, and later describe it as simply a law and order breakdown. ('It was just an argument over a train seat,' we were told after the recent lynching of a 17-year-old boy in Haryana.)

There is no attempt to look at the larger disease of hatred and prejudice behind such 'incidents'. Because, of course, as the first stanza of the song tells us, for there to be 'blood on the leaves', there also has to be 'blood at the root'.

There is 'blood at the root' of the Hindutva movement whenever it refuses to see Muslims and other minorities as fully Indian. In this sense, to lynch a man on the suspicion (or, for that matter, even the evidence) of eating beef is the logical outcome of statements like those dismissing the Taj Mahal as not an Indian building. There is no point pretending otherwise. And I suspect that it is not the so-called Hindutva loony fringe that pretends otherwise; it is all the others who refuse to countenance the true nature of the fruits hanging from our beautiful and historical Indian trees.

The problem with such blindness is that it can end up hollowing out the rule of law and order. The Indian government has to act decisively and visibly against lynching and mob violence because, if it fails to do so, it fails to govern. And if it fails to govern long enough, there might not be much left to govern.

Law and order are there to stop citizens from inflicting 'justice' on each

other; the state is there to break the endless cycles of personal, family and group revenge that have been at the root of violence in all traditional societies. That way lies chaos! Any government that fails to see this does India the greatest disservice possible, for it enables the hollowing out of governance in India, and hence the rise of anarchy.

A strange and bitter crop

Meeropol's poem, as sung by Billie Holiday (and, later, by singers like Sting, Diana Ross and Annie Lennox), ends with a memorable line: "Here is a strange and bitter crop."

This image alludes to the longer consequences of such acts of vigilante justice: it is not just the tragic breakdown of law in that particular instant; it is also the sowing of a bitter crop that will return again and again. I shudder to think of the consequences of the bitterness of a minority population of 180 million people in India, more so as the 'laws' for which such lynchings are taking place do not even represent the beliefs of the majority of Hindus.

But that is the silver lining in our dark cloud, just as it was the silver lining in the tumultuous clouds of lynching in the American south a century ago: Abel Meeropol, the writer of 'Strange Fruit', was not an African American. He was Jewish and a socialist who believed in order, equality and justice. He was moved not because he was Black, but because he was human and humane. I believe that India contains many millions of Abel Meeropols, and that they will make their voices heard.

Tabish Khair's latest novel is 'Jihadi Jane'

An old new tax

The new GST regime is a work in progress, it must be fixed urgently



PUJA MEHRA

Sixteen years in the making, India is finally set to roll out the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from July 1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the new indirect tax at the stroke of midnight in Parliament, taking a leaf out of Jawaharlal Nehru's book. "A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to new," Nehru had said while ringing in India's independence. The two events are obviously not comparable – nonetheless, the GST's introduction could have been a rare transition, but is not.

The GST, to be collected on everything from matchboxes to gold, will touch everyone. A modern tax system should be fair, uncomplicated, transparent and easy to administer. It must yield revenues sufficient to cover the cost of government services and public goods. India's GST does not pass these tests convincingly. It is too complex. We must collect it at fewer and lower rates, and on more items.

The GST has been fixed for more than 1,200 categories of goods and services consumed in the country at 0.25%, 3%, 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%, along with cesses to be imposed additionally in some cases. The present taxation system has not been given the boot yet. Electricity, real estate and alcohol will remain in it, exempt from the GST. Petroleum products will be in both systems, old and new, but with zero-rate GST. Over half the items will be taxed at 18% or 28% GST, the steepest rates in the multi-rate structure. This skew violates the basic principle of revenue collection: the lower the taxation rate, the higher the compliance. An opportunity is lost to collect more tax revenues, while at the same time, taking a little load off the consumer's pocket.

More than sound economic, or political, logic, the GST seems driven by the deciding authorities' discretion. The GST rate for gold, a luxury good, is lower than that for matchboxes. The tax incidence is the same in the GST on environment-friendly hybrid vehicles and fossil fuel-guzzling SUVs. In the extant system, the effective rate for guzzlers is significantly higher than that for hybrids. This 'carbon tax' on SUVs, popular with politicians, is being withdrawn.

The GST will be imposed at 18% on



soaps and washing soaps, but at 28% on detergents. Some moviegoers will pay 18% GST and, others, on the same movie, 28%, depending on the price of cinema ticket – not exactly the promised 'One nation, one tax'.

Status quo wins

The GST, as it's being rolled out, is an outcome of a political process in which 29 States and seven Union Territories agreed to give up their right to impose sales tax on goods (VAT) and the Centre gave up its right to impose excise and services taxes. In the amended federal arrangement, they will each receive a share of the GST collected nationally. Instead of every State imposing a tax, they will sit together and decide what that tax rate should be. Individually, States see this as an erosion of their financial autonomy, even if Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, the chief architect of the consensus, described it as, "the states and Centre pooling their powers and sovereignty".

The constitutional guarantee that the Centre will fully reimburse the transitional losses did not fully address the States' insecurities. The States insisted on keeping the GST's rate structure as close as possible to the old system. A GST regime resembling the old tax system cannot be a low, single-rate GST. The options narrowing to a delayed or an imperfect GST, the Centre chose to defer to the States' collective opinion. The result: far from simple or neat, the new indirect tax is a multitude of rates, cesses and exemptions.

So, politicians, not tax experts, de-

vised the GST. The GST Council, made up of Ministers from State and Central governments, scrambled elements from the current indirect taxation system into the GST, tinging the new with the old, guided by old habits, not healthy appetite for reform.

"Status quo has strong appeal in real life," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said of the resistance to 1991's economic reforms. Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian's summation of the process that delivered the GST suggests that decades later, attitudes have not changed: "On the GST, the political pressures from the States to keep rates low and simple were minimal. The general desire is for the structure to mimic the complicated status quo. There was insufficient concern for the implied consequences for efficiency and simplification."

The lingering imperfections, and disregard for economic principles, will limit the GST's transformational potential. Small firms, unlike industry chambers and lobbies, are not vocal, and therefore not easily heard. They are concerned about the number of man hours the new reporting requirements will extort. These should be taken on board. The GST Council must show sensitivity to transitional challenges. A hotline among its members, as an instantaneous problem-solving mechanism, may smoothen the transition. Increasing simplicity and reducing the complexities remains a promise made, not kept.

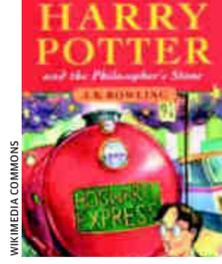
Puja Mehra is a Delhi-based journalist

SINGLE FILE

An antidote to hate

Potter provides an escape into a world that is full of wizards, and yet so human

RADHIKA SANTHANAM



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Two decades later, the magic lingers on. On the 20th anniversary of the release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, social media is awash with nostalgia. While adults reminisce about how they acquired their first Potter book, children trot to parties in long black robes and rounded glasses. The Gryffindor versus Slytherin war has transcended Hogwarts and entered cyberspace. But what explains this need not just for

children but also the most intelligent-sounding adults to utter gibberish, try on droopy Sorting Hats, and wave around wands that unleash no magic?

It is not as though the prose is classic. "Descriptive in the most pedestrian way" is how one writer put it. Neither is the genre of fantasy fiction new: from Catherine Fisher to Philip Pullman and C.S. Lewis, bookshelves over the centuries have been filled with tomes on witchcraft and wizardry. But under what genre can we clump the Potter series? School stories? Horror? Children's fiction? Adult fiction? Romance? Mythology?

Then there's Harry himself, a wimpy protagonist with glasses and a scar, with no extraordinary powers (discounting the virtue of gallantry exhibited with the help of his friends, and what he inherited at birth). Harry Potter is not your typical macho hero: neither is he strikingly handsome like Malfoy nor remarkably intelligent like Hermione nor steadfastly loyal and unpredictable like Snape. Few rate him as their favourite character.

And yet here we are in the 21st century with a new literary idol: an unlikely hero who is as popular as was Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot.

What works is perhaps precisely what critics think doesn't. The Potter series may be a pastiche of styles, but that pastiche is delectable for most. There's something for everyone: for the owl or elf-lovers, for the nerds, for the lovers of action, romance, and syrupy endings. The series contains all the elements of stories that humans have ever told and cherished. Unremarkable Harry could be any of us and that makes him relatable. Not to forget how well Rowling knows her characters and how well she makes us believe in a world that doesn't exist.

Rowling also incorporates modern-day themes in her craft: racism, feminism, diversity. I remember a quiz that was popular once on Facebook: are you as feminist as Hermione? At a time when prejudice and hate are at their peak, for many people, comfort comes from floating into a world that is full of wizards and yet so human, a world that is so alien and yet so close to our hearts. The Potter series may not galvanise minds, it might not make us literary experts. It might even be surprising that many crave magic and fantasy in a world that is striving to be more secular, rational, and scientific. Yet, the story of the boy who lived lives on and we can only guess why. When good triumphs over evil, we are all overjoyed, for that's ultimately our hope for the world.



CONCEPTUAL Conditionality ECONOMICS

The imposition of strict conditions on borrowing countries by international lenders like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Conditionality is aimed at encouraging borrowing countries to implement serious structural reforms that can improve their economy as well as their creditworthiness. Since international lending is tied to fulfilling predetermined conditions, it is believed that conditionality can be used as an effective tool to enforce tough economic reforms. Critics have argued that the conditions for borrowing imposed on countries are influenced primarily by politics, rather than any genuine intent to improve the borrower's economic condition.

MORE ON THE WEB

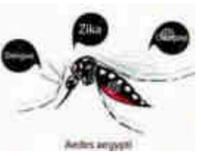
International cricket's latest rule explained
<http://bit.ly/CricICC>

ABSTRACT

Good news on the Zika front

People with a history of dengue infection may not necessarily be at a greater risk of Zika infection

R. PRASAD
Dengue has four virus types (serotypes) that show distinct variation within themselves. While infection by one serotype results in a lifelong immunity against it, infection by a different one results in an increased infectivity and more severe clinical manifestations. This kind of aggravation is called antibody-dependent enhancement (ADE).
However, in the case of the Zika virus, people infected with any of the four dengue serotypes are said to be at an increased risk of infectivity and clinical manifestations due to ADE.
Two studies published recently have shown that this is not true. The first one, published in *Nature Communications*, found an enhancement of Zika when tests were carried out on cells taken from four rhesus macaques with dengue immunity.



However, when the tests were carried out directly on the macaques, they produced completely different results.

Compared with macaques that were not already infected with dengue, the four did not either show any increase in the amount of Zika virus. Neither did the disease worsen in them.

Increased immunity

On the contrary, their previous exposure led to a reduction in the amount of Zika virus and faster clearance. There were changes in the immune system's response but that did not lead to an increased infectivity.
"Results from our work

may suggest that pregnant women with previous exposure to dengue virus may have limited Zika viremia [amount of virus] and less tendency to have invasion of the central nervous system," the authors conclude.

Results of another study carried out among Zika-infected patients with pre-existing dengue infection also did not show increased infectivity or an enhanced severity of Zika. The results, published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, were based on 65 patients with acute febrile illness (45 patients positive for Zika and 20 patients positive for dengue type-2) between January and June 2016.

The researchers found no difference in Zika viral load between those with previous dengue infection and those without it. All Zika-infected patients recovered after receiving recommended supportive therapy.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1967

When a dictionary has to be ignored

Mr. Swaran Singh, Minister for External Affairs, advised agitated members of the Lok Sabha to-day [June 26, New Delhi] to "ignore" the etymology of 'Pakistan' as given by the Oxford Dictionary. The Minister, who was answering a barrage of questions from Mr. A. B. Vajpayee and others, confirmed that the dictionary had given the etymology of Pakistan as 'P' standing for Punjab, 'A' for the Afghan frontier, 'K' for Kashmir and 'istan' for parts of Baluchistan where Muslims predominated. Mr. Swaran Singh characterised the etymology as "amazing" and "ridiculous on the face of it." "We should brush it aside and not devote too much attention to it," he said. Mr. Swaran Singh said: "We know Pakistan is a Persian word which means land of 'Pak,' that is, "The land of the pure. The way in which the Oxford Dictionary has given the etymology is amazing." Earlier, Mr. Vajpayee asked whether the dictionary had defined Pakistan as a country which included Kashmir and whether the publishers had done it under pressure from the Pakistan Government.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1917

The last mails.

The postal authorities [in Bombay] have recovered sixteen mail bags of the S.S. "Mongolia" [on June 26]. Of these six were picked up at Alibag, six on the Bunder, one out at sea, one at Colaba and two were recovered by the Naval authorities. It is expected that some more would be found. All mail bags of the steamer were on deck at the time of accident and as the vessel went down some of the bags which were light floated on sea and were picked up or washed ashore. The contents of sixteen bags with the exception of newspaper packets which have been reduced to rolls of pulp are in fairly good condition. After they have been dried at the Post Office they will be delivered to the addresses in due course.

DATA POINT

The African surge

In the last half decade, the population growth in Africa is estimated to be much higher than that in other continents. South Asia's (and India's) growth rates have moderated

Region/country	Average annual rate of change in population from 2010 to 2015 (%)
Africa	2.59
Oceania	1.53
World	1.19
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.13
Asia	1.05
Northern America	0.75
Europe	0.1
South Asia	1.34
India	1.23

SOURCE: WORLD POPULATION PROSPECTS 2017 BY THE UNITED NATIONS