



Step back

Sustained tension at the Bhutan tri-junction suits neither China nor India

The boundary stand-off with China at the Doka La tri-junction with Bhutan is by all accounts unprecedented; it demands calmer counsel on all sides. The tri-junction stretch of the boundary at Sikkim, though contested, has witnessed far fewer tensions than the western sector of the India-China boundary even as India and Bhutan have carried on separate negotiations with China. China's action of sending People's Liberation Army construction teams with earth moving equipment to forcibly build a road upsets a carefully preserved peace. In fact, during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit in 2014 the stretch was opened as an alternative route to Kailash Mansarovar for Indian pilgrims as a confidence-building measure. That the PLA decided to undertake the action just as the year's first group of pilgrims was reaching Nathu La cannot be a coincidence. Moreover, it came only days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral meeting with President Xi in Kazakhstan. The warmth that officials reported at the meeting was obviously misleading, and it is important for India and China to accept that relations have deteriorated steadily since Mr. Xi's 2014 visit. The stand-off comes after a series of setbacks to bilateral ties. Delhi has expressed disappointment over China's rejection of its concerns on sovereignty issues, and refusal to corner Pakistan on cross-border terrorism or help India's bid for Nuclear Suppliers Group membership. In turn, India's spurning of the Belt and Road Initiative and cooperation with the U.S. on maritime issues has not played well in China – neither has the uptick in rhetoric, including statements from the Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister questioning India's "One China Policy" on Tibet, and from Army chief Bipin Rawat on India being prepared for a two-and-a-half front war.

These issues have to be addressed through sustained dialogue. In the immediate term, however, talks must focus on defusing the tensions at the tri-junction. China has made the withdrawal of Indian troops a precondition for dialogue. This would be unacceptable to India, unless the PLA also withdraws its troops and road-building teams. Apart from its own commitments to the *status quo*, Beijing must recognise the special relationship India and Bhutan have shared since 1947, the friendship treaty of 2007 that commits India to protecting Bhutan's interests, and the close coordination between the two militaries. For its part, India would be keen to show that it recognises that the face-off is in Bhutanese territory, and the rules of engagement could be different from those of previous India-China bilateral clashes – at Depsang and Demchok in the western sector, for example. Bhutan's sovereignty must be maintained as that is the basis for the "exemplary" ties between New Delhi and Thimphu. The Indian government has been wise to avoid escalation in the face of China's aggressive barrage, but that should not stop it from communicating its position in more discreet ways.

Victory in Mosul

The city has been taken from the IS. The Iraqi government now needs to win over its people

The capture by Iraqi forces of the Grand al-Nuri Mosque in Mosul, from where Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself 'caliph' in July 2014, marks the end of the 'caliphate' in Iraq. For three years, the mosque was a symbol of power for the IS, whose black flag flew atop the historic 150-ft tall al-Hadba minaret. IS fighters blew up the minaret when they retreated, practically declaring their defeat in Iraq's second largest city. They are now confined to some pockets of Mosul, and Iraqi commanders believe it is only a matter of days before they can declare total victory. For the Iraqi troops, the eight-month battle has been particularly torturous, given the high casualties and the strong IS resistance, on the battlefield and through suicide attacks elsewhere. It is quite a turnaround for the Iraqi army, which left its barracks and fled the city without even a nominal fight three years ago when it came under IS attack. The ease with which the IS took Mosul, home to over a million people, had raised alarming questions about the professional capability of the Iraqi army to defend its territory against further possible IS expansion. But Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who ordered the Mosul mission and stayed the course despite the huge challenges involved, has put to rest such concerns, for now.

Mr. Abadi managed to stitch together a difficult alliance to fight the jihadists. While the elite Iraqi counter-terror forces led the ground battle, Iran-trained Shia Popular Mobilization Units as well as the Kurdish Peshmerga militia also joined in. The U.S. provided air cover. Despite conflicting interests – the U.S. and Iran are rivals while both Tehran and Baghdad have uneasy ties with the Kurds – the joint front they forged against the IS could be a replicable model elsewhere, especially in Syria where the IS still controls territories. For Mr. Abadi, however, a bigger challenge is to rebuild Mosul, where hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced, and prevent the regrouping of the IS. The destruction of the 'Caliphate', the proto-state that Baghdadi established, doesn't mean that the IS as an insurgency has been defeated. The group is likely to retreat to Iraq's deserts, much like what al-Qaeda in Iraq, the predecessor of the IS, did during 2006-10 after the death of its leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and subsequent military blows. They struck back when they found an opportunity in crisis-stricken Syria and in Iraq's restive Sunni belt, including Mosul, which was simmering against the sectarian policies of Nouri al-Maliki's Shia regime. The IS may also bide its time. Mr. Abadi should reassure Mosul's population that his government will not make the mistakes his predecessor committed. He has retaken the city, and now he has to win over its people.

Written-off in the hinterland

Our education system has failed to integrate the rural into the larger political community, the nation



KRISHNA KUMAR

Rural Mandsaur, where five persons were killed during a demonstration recently, is a prosperous region of western Madhya Pradesh. More than a decade ago, I had the opportunity of spending two days with the children of a private residential school in Mandsaur.

At that time, it was the only English-medium residential school. Its vast and opulent campus in the middle of sprawling green fields was a great anomaly. The school had little to do with its milieu. It represented the dream of a philanthropist to export the best human talent of his region to the global market. This dream resonated national policy trends which, since the mid-1980s, had chosen to view education mainly as human resource development. The idea that education can serve a village in ways that allow it to retain its best boys and girls had been discarded long ago. If you carried in your mind any residues of Gandhi's ideas about village education, you would see the residential academy in rural Mandsaur as an incongruity.

Here was an institution set up to give its metropolitan counterparts stiff competition on global playgrounds. The school had invested heavily in computers. Its strategy to serve rural children was neither purely commercial nor patronising. It was a professional bid to



M. SRINATH

give rural youth an opportunity to aspire for legitimate heights. Some of them belonged to well-off farming families who could afford to send them to study in a residential school. But there were quite a few whose parents had small land holdings or minor jobs. For them, the school meant a potential break from the likelihood of a life dependent on shrinking income from agriculture and labour.

A supplier of talent

The impact of education on rural life has remained consistent since colonial days. When a village boy did well at school, he was expected to shift to a nearby town. That is where he could expect his talent to be recognised. Gradually, villages became the supplier of talent to the city. Only those who were dependent on land stayed back. With the passage of time, land got subdivided into smaller pieces, making agriculture unattractive. In recent times, investments made land more productive, but real income declined. Work opportunities in villages in non-agricultural pursuits remained scarce, and, in the

recent past, job growth has come to a standstill. The phenomenon of 'waiting' to find work, described by Craig Jeffrey in the context of Uttarakhanda and western Uttar Pradesh, is valid elsewhere too. One part of this phenomenon is the struggle to sustain one's aspiration and the other part is living with frustration.

It is quite common these days among parents in all districts of M.P. to send their sons and daughters to towns such as Bhopal and Indore for coaching. As a broad spectrum industry, coaching now represents an acceptable way of spending much of your youth. It fills time and protects you from feeling constantly frustrated. Countless young men and women find themselves in a formidable situation that offers neither a choice nor the hope that something will eventually turn up. Coaching classes provide access to a peer group where everyone is faced with a similar, chronic crisis. Lakhs of students from rural and semi-urban areas spend their youth getting coached indiscriminately for competitive entry into an

ever-shrinking opportunity market. Every year, a new army of candidates for coaching is spewed out by rural schools. Many get absorbed in the coaching industry itself, or in its ancillary industry of private tuition.

Rural alienation

Despite better connectivity by road and phone, villages continue to be alienated from the state's imagination. The former Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, once said that migration from rural areas has a positive side to it because the state's services are more accessible in cities. His belief that change in the rural-urban ratio of population will accelerate development is widely shared. It underpins development planning, especially the project of 'rural development'. In a historical study of the Indian village, Manish Thakur has demonstrated how the term rural development represents an essentially colonial view of the village. This view also enjoys political and academic consensus. According to this view, modernity for the village can only mean its merger in the urban landscape. The legitimacy granted to panchayati raj has not diminished the political isolation of the village. The recent protests in Mandsaur and surrounding areas show that higher productivity and relative prosperity have not given the farming community any political clout or relief from uncertainty.

Education could have been a means of integrating the rural into the larger political community symbolised by the nation. This did not happen for several reasons. To begin with, schools in rural areas remained neglected and attempts

to improve them never gained momentum. Policy focus remained on selecting the talented from among rural children through schemes such as Navodaya Vidyalaya. The larger cohort of rural children suffered the consequences of low budgeting and poor staffing. The message that rural children received and absorbed was that they must change their behaviour and values in order to become good citizens. Education of the rural child has failed to depart from the stereotype which associates modernity with city life. Education has, indeed, exacerbated the rural-urban asymmetry, deepening the alienation of the rural citizen.

Farmers or peasants?

An instructive aspect of the media coverage of the recent unrest in rural M.P. and Maharashtra is the disappearance of the distinction between farmers and peasants. Most people involved in agriculture in India are small-scale peasants. The term 'farmer' refers to the minority with substantial landholdings. Those who died in Mandsaur at the hands of the police were in all probability peasants, not farmers. Among the tens of thousands who have committed suicide out of despair, perhaps most were peasants. Their despair must be read and respected in the larger picture of visionless development. The loans they had failed to repay were minor by urban standards. Their distress reminds us that India has become morally blind in its hasty leap into what it believes to be modern.

Krishna Kumar is a former director of NCERT

Climate-proofed and inclusive

Projects to help people adapt to climate change should not inadvertently worsen living conditions of the poor



SUJATHA BYRAVAN & DEBAPRIYA DAS

How will future climate change affect the poor and how does one address both poverty and climate change? This is a conundrum faced by policymakers in India and other developing countries. Moreover, 'climate-proofing' sustainable development efforts is important; that is to say, current efforts should remain relevant in the face of future climate impacts.

Among development practitioners, a paradigm shift has taken place in the last three decades or so: income alone is no longer considered as being sufficient to estimate and address poverty. One can have assets and a reasonable income and yet be poor in terms of education, nutrition, health and other living conditions. Nevertheless, in India and many other countries, governments continue to use income or consumption to estimate poverty, with specified thresholds associated with the 'poverty line'.

On this basis, using consumption expenditure data, the erstwhile Planning Commission estimated poverty in India to be at 22% of the population in 2011-12.

Dimensions of poverty

People living in poverty in various parts of the world share multiple

conditions and life circumstances that have been measured and studied as a proxy to assessing poverty. Following the work of Amartya Sen, in particular, and other welfare economists and political philosophers, the dimensions that are considered often include living standards, assets, health, income, consumption and status in their societies. Thus, measures such as nutrition, quality of the floor and roof of houses, access to energy services and drinking water, level of education, jobs, and social conditions such as caste all become relevant when one tries to understand the different manifestations of poverty.

Some countries, such as Mexico, Chile and Colombia, use several dimensions to record poverty using the MPI (Multidimensional Poverty Index), a versatile tool developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) that looks at the dimensions of education, health and standard of living, giving them all equal weightage.

Each dimension includes several markers or indicators that are measured to recognise deficiencies in each. Those who are deprived in at least a third of the weighted indicators are regarded as poor. Measures such as MPI help us to estimate not only how many people are poor, but also the quality and depth of their poverty. One can also estimate the number of people who are likely to become poor as a result of slight additional deprivations, as well as those who are in extreme poverty. The most recent MPI for India calculated using India Human Development Survey data of 2011-12, estimates that 41% of the people were multi-dimensionally poor.



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The adverse effects of climate change that are anticipated in South Asia are droughts, floods, heat waves, sea level rise and related problems such as food shortages, spread of diseases, loss of jobs and migration. These will harmfully affect the poorest and further deteriorate the quality of their lives. Numerous studies have shown that the poor suffer the worst effects from climate variability and climate change. One can understand these relationships by recognising that severe storms damage inadequately built houses; floods wash away those living on riverbanks; and the poorest are the most affected by severe droughts that lead to food shortages and higher food prices.

Projects and programmes designed to help people adapt to the effects of climate change should therefore not inadvertently worsen the living conditions of the poor. Adaptation programmes ought to be designed so that challenges faced by people living in poverty are recognised and reduced. Development policies that consider the context of climate change are often

called "climate proofing development". But even the experts do not know how this should be done for specific sectors, policies, or particular local situations. Multi-dimensional understanding of poverty becomes important in this context of research and policy.

Multiple vulnerabilities

If one were to estimate the various vulnerabilities for poverty at district levels and then overlay expected climate change impacts for these areas, future local problems due to the combination of these would become clearer for policymakers. It may of course be impossible to predict, with great certainty, the precise impact of future climate change at the local scale and estimate how these may interact with current shortcomings in particular dimensions of poverty. Yet, there is already enough general understanding from different parts of the world to take a commonsensical approach to addressing the combination of multiple vulnerabilities.

If we learn for example that a district with severe nutritional deficiency might anticipate extended periods of drought from climate change, then the focus ought to be on improving local food access and to combine this with managing water efficiently to prepare for future water shortages. Similarly, proposed improvements in sanitation and housing ought to factor in the increased likelihood of future flooding events in low-lying areas and use appropriate design strategies that are resilient to water-logging.

In 2015, countries agreed to

meet 17 universal goals, officially known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs have targets and indicators that cover a broad range of concerns for human welfare. They include food security, education, poverty alleviation, access to safe and adequate water, energy, sanitation and so on.

The deadline for reaching the SDGs is 2030. This will be a big test for India and other developing countries because these are in fact the major development challenges that the poor countries have been confronting for decades. India is taking the SDGs quite seriously and the NITI Aayog has been coordinating activities relating to their implementation, and emphasising their interconnected nature across economic, social and environmental pillars.

Yet, it is critical to recognise that climate variability and climate change impacts can prevent us from reaching and maintaining the SDG targets. Measuring poverty through its different dimensions, along with the consumption measures, would help policymakers figure out which aspects of poverty expose the poor and exacerbate their vulnerability to climate change.

Through such a process, India could also serve as a standard for other poor and developing countries that are beginning to think about inclusive "climate proofed development".

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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.

The GST era

In the long run, GST will turn out to be the game changer for the Indian economy (Editorial, "Midnight makeover", July 1). Tax compliance is bound to show a significant improvement while the size of the informal economy will reduce. With ready availability of real time data, government policies will be targeted better to produce the desired results. The GST will have a favourable impact on the price of essentials, provided tax benefits are passed on to consumers. However, the question remains whether the business community is prepared for this sea change. Will it willingly embrace it and cooperate or are we, as in the case of demonetisation, looking at chaotic times ahead?

VIJAI PANT,
Hempur, Uttarakhand

■ As far as consumers are concerned, suffocating on

account of various taxes, a unified tax structure is bound to provide some relief. In Kerala for instance, a highly consumerist State, it is estimated that additional revenue to tune of ₹3,000 crore annually is expected to flow in. Another potentially welcome development is that infamous tax postings – the hotbed of corruption – will no longer be lucrative.

B. VEERAKUMARAN THAMPI,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ The government has showcased the GST reform as another tryst with destiny. India's freedom at midnight in 1947 was simply nonpareil – it coalesced the hearts and minds of millions of people into an effusive outburst of celebration. By contrast, the present path-breaking tax reform has created many discordant voices in the very trading and business community for whom the benefit is meant ("Day One: Price cuts,

peevs over returns filing", July 2). Though the Prime Minister acknowledged in his speech the contributions of the Opposition, it was too little and too late. Nothing would have been lost for the ruling party if it had heaped fulsome praise on the UPA government for pioneering the GST. Alas, magnanimity in thought, word and speech is no more to be seen in Indian politics.

V. NAGARAJAN,
Chennai

Climate of hate

As things stand today, we Indians have taken it upon ourselves to obliterate the difference between 'vigilant' and 'vigilantism'. The epidemic of hate crimes and lynchings of the minorities cannot be explained otherwise. Mob violence and the murders of fellow countrymen in the name of 'cow vigilantism' may have prompted the Prime Minister to finally break his silence, but is that enough?

Crying hoarse over barbaric and shameful acts has no meaning. The absence of concrete action against the perpetrators of these crimes can only be seen as an overt endorsement of the act. What a come-down for a country that had gained its independence from the yoke of colonial imperialism, preaching the doctrine of non-violence all along. A citizen's vigilance, intellectual vigilance and media vigilance can definitely act as the biggest deterrent to the forces of darkness.

PACHU MENON,
Comba, Margao, Goa

Border rumblings

The tense atmosphere at strategic points on the India-China border reflects the need to expeditiously settle the decades old boundary dispute. While India has begun flexing its foreign policy muscle *vis-à-vis* its adversarial neighbours, China's

repeated aggressive attempts to foment trouble for India on multiple fronts will be at the heart of its strategic policy to contain India. New Delhi must prevail upon Beijing that the resolution of its boundary disputes and identification of settled borders constitutes one of the core agendas in its bilateral relations.

BIBHUTI DAS,
Katrill, Cachar, Assam

Tech and jobs

It is disconcerting that the concentration of massive technological power in the hands of a few tech-czars and their companies is being used to flaunt a Utopian vision of an artificial intelligence (AI) takeover of the planet ("Ground Zero" - "Slowdown in Software Central", July 1). The suggestion of Silicon Valley entrepreneur Vinod Dham that India should seize the AI opportunity should be viewed with

trepidation because the current trajectory of automation is wholly technology-centred where computer systems will almost entirely displace the human workforce. Techno-sceptics and sane voices in the technological world have been waging a losing battle in support of human-centred automation. It is possible to design systems where the speed and precision of computers will complement the active engagement of human workers.

The concept of adaptive automation, where roles and responsibilities are switched between computers and human operators, will, according to technology critic Nicholas Carr, "inject a dose of humanity into the working relationships between people and computers".

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

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BOOK EXTRACT

'Inequality changes the system'

There are various mechanisms by which government policy can be influenced



SURESH NAIDU

Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century* is the most-widely discussed work of economics in recent history. At its centre is the argument that due to the powerful forces generated by the underlying dynamics of wealth, it is most likely that we are heading to a future where inherited wealth will shape economic structures, and lead to widespread inequality. But is his analysis on target? In *After Piketty*, a cast of economists and social scientists raises several questions, and gets an answer from Piketty. Economist Suresh Naidu asks whether Piketty has said enough on the complex nature of wealth, and suggests that the super-wealthy often use their influence to ensure better returns. An extract from 'A Political Economy Take on W/Y'.



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After Piketty: The Agenda for Economics and Inequality
Edited by Heather Boushey, J. Bradford Delong and Marshall Steinbaum
Harvard University Press/Penguin Random House. ₹1,099

Thomas Piketty's book has two intertwined arguments.

The first, the "domesticated Piketty" is a very standard model. It has stochastic and heterogeneous saving rates and uninsurable and undiversifiable rates of return on asset positions. It has competitive markets. It has a production function with a capital-labor elasticity of substitution that is greater than 1. It has a social welfare function that is egalitarian-meritocratic. This domesticated Piketty is an economist's delight. It combines a positive, quantifiable model of the economy with testable predictions in the context of a well-defined social objective function. It derives an optimal policy prescription. It is articulated in papers with co-authors. It yields a formula for the optimal wealth tax as a policy outcome.

It is, however, institution-and-politics free, and makes Piketty's project look like an (impressive) extension within a standard macro public finance framework.

I worry that this domesticated Piketty is an ill-suited model for the purposes for which Piketty seeks to use it. Piketty seeks to study the historical variation in wealth inequality. He seeks to place in their proper perspective the institutional changes that explain empirical variation in the

economy's wealth-to-annual-income ratio (W/Y) and thus of wealth inequality. These include: the role of financial markets, market structure in general, and intrafirm bargaining over revenue. But the model of domesticated Piketty has, for these three at least, relatively little light to shed.

Wild Piketty

But there are shoots of something else breaking through: a "wild Piketty."

The wild Piketty suggests a different perspective. It sees the economy through a lens in which capital is the alchemy of today's income transmuted into secure claims on future income that are then bought and sold on asset markets. In this view, institutions of corporate governance, financial firms, labor market institutions, and political influence do most of the work in determining both W/Y and the distribution of wealth. This wild Piketty argument is hinted at in various places in the book, interviews and sundry papers. It is a view of capital as an institutionally defined set of property rights that are then transacted on asset markets. This is where the ideas in Piketty's book tangential from the perspective of the domesticated Piketty model – the ideas about corporate governance, the specula-

tions about foreign investment and weak property rights in Africa, the musings on whether slaves are net wealth or not – become the main story. In this view, capital is a set of property rights entitling bearers to politically protected rights of control, exclusion, transfer, and derived cash flow. Like all property rights, its delineation and defense require actions of state power, legal standardisation and juridical legitimacy. In the last instance, capital includes the ability to call on the government to secure the promised flow of income against potential violators, be they burglars, fugitive slaves, copyright violators, sit-down strikers, or delinquent tenants.

The political economy view would help us to write chapters in Piketty's book that are missing from the text but that are essential to fill in gaps in the wild Piketty argument – chapters on finance, market power, and endogenous policy making. We can understand the institutions and property rights that allow capital to accumulate as endogenous to the political system, and as the result the balance of political power across social groups.

Prominent among these institutions is the organisation of the financial sector. Wealth is a price-weighted sum of otherwise incommensurate assets, and those prices are determined in financial markets, which aggregate flighty expectations about the future into prices today. Extensive, if not efficient, financial intermediation comes along with a high wealth/income ratio. The assets are themselves used to organise production with workers to produce goods and services sold to consumers, and the income flow accruing to owners of those assets depends on the wages paid to those workers and the prices charged to those consumers. Protect-

ing the future flows of income accruing to the assets requires deploying the state in a variety of ways, not just via the tax system. This induces feedback loops where inequality in income today moulds a political system that preserves that inequality tomorrow.

Finally, the political economy view lets us see more clearly what is normatively problematic about wealth inequality. Piketty writes in various places that wealth inequality and a society of renters is undemocratic, but the links are unspecified. Why should extreme inequality of wealth necessarily imply inequality of political power? But when wealth is understood as police-backed paper claims over resources, rather than the resources themselves, the undemocratic nature of wealth inequality becomes much clearer.

In some ways, the commercialized politics of the twenty-first century offers entirely new tools for super-wealth to manage the political system:

"We have "markets in everything." The wealthy can purchase educational reform, the charity of their choice, think tanks, legislative language, political influence, and endless public broadcast of their ideas. Campaign contributions are a good place to start, with there being evidence that political donations a) are a normal good, and b) have, at the top, a wealth elasticity close to 1. This suggests that as the wealth distribution becomes more skewed, the campaign contribution distribution will also become more skewed.

Indeed, Lee Drutman documents an increasing share of traceable individual campaign contributions (close to 25%) coming from the "1% of the 1%," which is around 30,000 people. But from Brazil to Brussels, and from Washington to Beijing, money and promises of money grease the wheels of politics, sometimes detected, sometimes eliciting a brief round of outrage, sometimes not. It is difficult to celebrate "markets in everything" and not expect generalized corruption as the result. When speech and broadcast media are themselves allocated on markets, and the means to contest elections are allocated via the cash nexus, it is a short step to policy being set by the median dollar.

Suresh Naidu is associate professor of economics and political affairs at Columbia University

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

An open-and-shut case

The objective of the RE's office is to uphold the core values and the cardinal principles of journalism



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

The manuals and the terms of reference for a news ombudsman do not offer any clues to deal with the emotional toll this job takes as a natural corollary. It is left to the individual Readers' Editor to evolve a personal code to deal with it. I draw my strength from the old philosophical school of stoicism and Leo Tolstoy's words: "If so many men, so many minds, certainly so many hearts, so many kinds of love." How does one make sense of the queries, debates, controversies, and the many kilobytes of sparring over three widely different news items published in this newspaper: a column on ethical challenges posed by sting journalism, a report on Aryan migration based on studies in genetics, and a feature profile of an actor in which he said that "upma must be declared the national dish"?

For readers to get a sense of the multiple pulls generated by the digital platforms and the 24x7 news channels for a legacy media organisation like *The Hindu*, let me first explain the upma controversy. Tamil actor-director R. Parthiban was profiled in the Metro Plus supplement. He spoke about his early days spent in poverty, and said it was upma, a dish that requires few ingredients, that was his staple diet and that it should be declared the 'national dish'. However, one of the 24x7 news channels picked up the story to discover, or rather invent, a "culinary chauvinism" and an "attempt from deep south to impose a particular food habit across the sub-continental sized country". What should a news ombudsman do when a colourful idiom used by an artist to bring out the cruelty of poverty becomes the theme for a manufactured controversy? I chose to ignore it.

Dealing with responses

My column on sting journalism referred to the 'Ground Zero' section of this newspaper as an example of contemporary, rigorous journalism, and I cited the report on Aryan migration as an example of a story that can never be substituted by sting operations. This was conflated with my next column in which I had dealt with complaints against the 'Ground Zero' story on Aryan migration.

One of the readers, Subramanyam, commented: "I do not understand why the RE should take cudgels on behalf of an author whose article has been criticised by readers. These are between the author and the critics

and no RE has any role to interpose himself/herself in this affair unless some readers had brought some objection to the notice of the RE. If the RE wants to intercede like this, it makes the very idea of 'Readers' Editor' questionable and makes one wonder whether he/she is an RE or an ER (Editor's Reader). By referring unnecessarily and irrelevantly to this article in your 'sting vs. investigative journalism' column, you betrayed a certain mindset and this, again, unnecessary intervention now on behalf of the author lends more credence to that betrayal. Criticism or applause for an article is in the normal course of events unless somebody notifies the RE of grave errors etc. Did that happen here? Or, is this needed to pre-emptively 'justify' the editorial judgment?"

Mr. Subramanyam is right in ascertaining that the column betrayed a certain mindset.



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The mindset of a RE is to uphold the core values and the cardinal principles of journalism, and to permit an independent space to document facts, ideas and research, immaterial of whether it creates resonance or dissonance with a section. Tony Joseph's article on Aryan migration was taken up for close scrutiny because readers wrote to this office questioning the veracity of the article. And there was a method to all the criticism as most of them drew their arguments from Anil Kumar Suri's counter-article. It was no longer between the author of the article and the readers, as Mr. Subramanyam suggests. It was a formal query from multiple readers. Hence, it was incumbent on an RE to examine the article. This is neither an act of interceding on behalf of the author nor a pre-emptive act to justify the editorial judgment.

The issues I examine are clearly open-and-shut cases where I look only at the journalistic yardsticks – accuracy, verification, and proper sourcing. I consciously refrain from wearing any ideological blinkers. This column neither endorses nor repudiates any argument of any hue as it celebrates the plurality of ideas and voices.

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SINGLE FILE

The Merkel manoeuvre

She allowed the vote on same-sex marriage while personally opposing it

RADHIKA SANTHANAM



In a historic vote on June 30, the German Parliament approved same-sex marriage even as German Chancellor Angela Merkel voted against it. "Marriage is between a man and a woman," she said, adding, "I hope that the vote today not only promotes respect between different opinions but also brings more social cohesion and peace."

Despite her personal reservations, it was a statement by Ms. Merkel earlier in the week that triggered the vote. At a talk organised by woman's magazine *Brigitte*, she was forced to confront an issue that she has long been avoiding. "When do I get to call my boyfriend my husband?" a young man asked her. In response, she recounted how moving it was for her to see a lesbian couple take care of eight foster children. "It is a question of conscience rather than something that I push through with a majority vote," she said. Martin Schulz, leader of the Social Democratic Party that is in coalition with Ms. Merkel's Christian Democratic Union and who is her main opponent in the forthcoming election, immediately seized upon this statement to fulfil his own campaign promise. "We will push through marriage equality in Germany," he tweeted. "This week."

The legislation may seem surprising in its swiftness "but it wasn't unexpected", said Gabriela Luensmann, board member of the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany and a human rights lawyer. "We've been campaigning for 25 years now. It's finally time to celebrate."

It has taken a surprisingly long time for Germany, a country with a thriving LGBTQ culture, to reach this stage. Pressure has always been there: 13 other countries in Europe, including Ireland, a staunchly Catholic nation, have already legalised same-sex marriage. And it is not as though the German public was opposed to it. In January, Germany's Anti-Discrimination Agency found that an overwhelming 83% of Germans support same-sex marriage. Politicians across parties too have always spoken in favour of it.

A tightrope walk

Despite this, the Bill lay dormant for long because of resistance shown by a section of the ruling Christian Democrats. The CDU's conservative views towards same-sex marriage were at odds with the way Germany is perceived outside: as an open democracy whose Chancellor is the new 'leader of the free world'. That the party overcame this niggles is a clever, perhaps even deliberated, move before the elections. By allowing the vote to happen but underlining that she is personally not for it, Ms. Merkel has tactfully endeared herself to both conservatives and liberals. This tightrope walk and her penchant to spring surprises is what frustrate her opponents. Last week, Mr. Schulz complained that Ms. Merkel is "systematically refusing debate on the future of the country".

Whether the Chancellor's change of mind this time is opportunistic, pragmatic, or genuinely sensitive to the needs of the people is debatable. "But it's heartening," Ms. Luensmann said, "that Conservatives are moving forward with us."



CONCEPTUAL

Catch-up growth

ECONOMICS

The rapid economic growth experienced by poor countries, which helps them to close their income gap with rich countries. Catch-up growth has been attributed by economists to various reasons. One of them is the fact that technology and other know-how are usually readily available from rich countries, which poor countries can easily exploit for their own benefit. Otherwise, poor countries would have to reinvent these useful technologies, which takes time and resources. Countries like Japan and Germany after the Second World War, and India and China in the last few decades experienced catch-up growth.

MORE ON THE WEB

Video: How the Sunderbans is losing its mangrove forest?
http://bit.ly/SunderbansMangrove

SHELF HELP

The great wall of Kafka

Why a master's nightmarish stories still make sense

SUDIPTA DATTA

The Italian essayist and journalist Italo Calvino may have disapproved of the term 'Kafkaesque' being used constantly to refer to just about anything, but there's perhaps no better adjective to describe the present, an incomprehensible world of flux and uncertainty, of social and political anxieties. How can the nightmarish situations of Franz Kafka's stories in *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, *The Castle* not be taken to symbolise the loneliness of modern man not in control of the world around him in anymore?

Kafka, who was born on this day, July 3, in 1883, was a German-speaking Jew in Prague, which was then ruled by an Austrian emperor but would eventually be overrun by Czech nationalists. Questions of identity – who am I? – are at the heart of Kafka's world. The unforgettable first line of *The Metamorphosis* (1915) – "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy

dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" – has come to denote an individual's total sense of befuddlement at being placed in a situation not of his own making but having to suffer its aftermath nevertheless, not least the neglect of people he thought loved him.

In *The Trial* (1925), Joseph K., a bank clerk, is arrested and tried for a crime he is unaware of. "If this was a comedy he would insist on playing it to the end," Joseph K. says at the beginning of his ordeal. It's not possible to find this remotely funny anymore as too many seem to have been arrested without doing anything wrong. As David Pryce-Jones writes in his introduction to *The Trial*, "The individual is at the centre of it, a unique being, no doubt at the mercy of sinister elements and of men both wicked and stupid. Though closed in from all sides, the individual like Joseph K., has to live it out alone." And while

the "human condition may not be as random, as guilty, as weirdly callous as Kafka portrays it... at certain times and for certain people, it is far worse."

The Castle (1926) begins with K, a land surveyor, arriving in a village which lies in the shadow of the Castle, shrouded in snowy mists, to look for some documents. But neither is his presence acknowledged, nor his task respected. Will he ever be accepted? As Pietro Citati writes in *Kafka*: "His writing is a roll of the dice flung into the void, which simultaneously hazards opposing hypotheses, to exhaust the mind's possibilities." And yet, that his stories would never have seen the light of day was a real Kafkaesque possibility. Friend and biographer Max Brod famously disobeyed Kafka's death wish to have every manuscript burnt. On the eve of the Nazi occupation of Prague, Brod left for Israel with a small suitcase containing Kafka's manuscripts.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1967

'Gorkha League threat to Bengal govt.'

The Gorkha League, a constituent of the 14-party United Front Government of West Bengal, will not support the U.F. Government if it again extends the time-limit for the surrender of the Left Communist extremists of Naxalbari area beyond July 4. The Gorkha League which held a joint meeting with the local committee of the Samyukta Socialist Party last evening [July 1, Darjeeling] accused the United Front of "looking for a chance for a total pardon of the criminals at Naxalbari and other disturbed areas by extending the deadline for their surrender to July 4". The meeting, which was presided over by an old member of the Gorkha League, Mr. P.T. Lama, also condemned the activities of the extremist elements.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 3, 1917

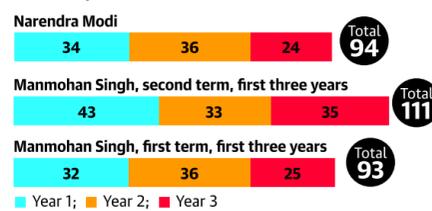
Sir D. Tata's Injunction Application.

At the [Bombay] High Court to-day [July 2] a notice of motion was taken out at the instance of Sir Dorab Tata, who, it was stated, was the purchaser of the war loan lottery ticket No. 15315, against Mr. E.F. Lance, Acting Secretary, W.I.T. Club, Mr. J.M. Fiamji Patel, one of the members of the Club, and other members, and Mr. Hally of Assam, calling upon them to show cause why they should not be restrained by an order and injunction from withdrawing No. 15315 from the lottery, and that pending decision of the suit they should not be restrained by an order and injunction from paying the amount of any prize drawn by ticket No. 15315 or any ticket substituted in place thereof to the third defendant.

DATA POINT

Overseas record

A look at the number of days spent abroad by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his predecessor Manmohan Singh in the first three years of their tenures



Region-wise break up

Region	Manmohan Singh, UPA 1	Manmohan Singh, UPA 2	Narendra Modi
Africa	4	9	5
Central Asia	0	0	11
East Asia	6	15	7
Europe	38	27	20
Latin America	9	0	3
North America	14	30	15
South Asia	12	15	23
South-East Asia	10	12	4
West Asia	0	3	6

DATA COMPILED BY JANANA VENKATRAMAN