



The past catches up

The SC rightly rules that extra-judicial killings cannot be overlooked owing to lapse of time

By ordering an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation into more than 80 cases of suspected extra-judicial killings in Manipur, the Supreme Court has reiterated the principle of accountability as an essential part of the rule of law. These cases involved either suspected fake encounters or the use of excessive or retaliatory force. The court has rightly rebuffed an attempt by the government to stall any probe into these deaths on the ground that they were too old to be raked up now. It has taken the view that the killing of a person who was possibly innocent cannot be overlooked owing to mere lapse of time. The state cannot take advantage of its own inaction and scuttle a probe by citing the delay as a reason. Last year, the court had ruled that the armed forces cannot escape investigation for excesses even in places where they enjoy special powers, and that the legal protection provided by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA, will have to yield to the principles of human rights. It is surprising that even after this ruling on petitions demanding an inquiry into 1,528 deaths in counter-insurgency operations in Manipur, the Attorney General had argued against the court ordering an investigation into some specific instances. In fact, he had come up with the unpalatable argument that inquiries conducted by the authorities in Manipur were biased in favour of the citizens owing to local pressure and the ground situation. The court stood firm in its assessment, deprecating the suggestion that all inquiries were biased and motivated.

The court's order is yet another reminder that AFSPA has contributed to the climate of impunity in States where it is in force, especially in Manipur, and this may trigger a fresh demand for its repeal. The situation under AFSPA is so hostile to the concept of human rights that in many of these cases there was no inquiry at all. In some instances, the First Information Report was against the victim and not against the alleged perpetrators. It will not be easy for the investigators to get to the bottom of these incidents. It is possible that the special team to be constituted by the CBI Director will find witnesses hard to come by and face difficulties in gathering evidence in many cases. However, that cannot be a reason for denying or putting off a formal criminal investigation as required in law. Justice will be served if there is successful prosecution in at least some cases. Another worrying aspect in the domain of human rights is that the National Human Rights Commission has been reduced to a "toothless tiger". It is grossly understaffed despite its increasing workload, and many State governments show little respect for its guidelines and instructions. The court's directive that the Centre take note of the NHRC's concerns and remedy the situation could not have come a day too soon.

A looming threat

All children diagnosed with TB must get paediatric fixed-dose combination drugs

About 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine Indian cities have been diagnosed with tuberculosis, 9% of them with multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB), highlighting the silent spread of the disease. Though the actual prevalence of MDR-TB among children in India is not known, the results from a limited number of children tested in this sample, under the Revised National TB Control Programme, is worrying. According to a 2015 study, of the over 600 children who had tested positive for TB in four cities, about 10% showed resistance to Rifampicin, a first-line drug. Since the incidence of TB among children is a reflection of the prevalence of the disease in the community at large, the high prevalence of both drug-sensitive TB and drug-resistant TB in children from these nine cities is a grim reminder of the failure of the health-care system to diagnose the disease early enough in adults and start them on treatment. Very often, children who test positive for TB have been in close contact with adults with the disease in the same household. With up to a couple of months' delay in diagnosing the disease being the norm, there is a continuing threat of TB spreading among household contacts and in the larger community. In line with World Health Organisation guidelines, the RNTCP requires all household contacts, particularly children, of a newly diagnosed pulmonary TB patient to be tested and started on treatment if needed. Children below six years of age in the household of a newly diagnosed patient are required to be given the drug Isoniazid as a prophylactic even when they do not have the disease.

A proactive approach to testing helps in early and correct diagnosis of all contacts and in cutting the transmission chain. Unfortunately, as several studies have shown, the RNTCP guidelines on contact screening are heeded mostly in the breach. The results from this limited study should now compel the government to take up contact screening more urgently. In 2010, WHO had revised the dosage of certain TB drugs for children. Fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs that take into account the revised dosages for children were finally made available in late 2015. The FDCs are meant for treating children with drug-susceptible TB and cannot be used to treat children who require second-line drugs or who have MDR-TB. After more than a year's delay, a few months ago India finally introduced FDCs in six States. The remaining States will be covered by the end of this year. Adherence to treatment will improve, and correct dosage for children weighing less than 25 kg will become easier when child-friendly FDCs become available throughout the country. Using the Xpert molecular diagnostic test to screen children with TB is a positive step and should be welcomed, but all the diagnosed children should be guaranteed paediatric FDCs. It would be unethical to deny them this lifeline.

Back to the classroom

Evidence-based policing is gaining credibility by the day — India's police force must be exposed to it



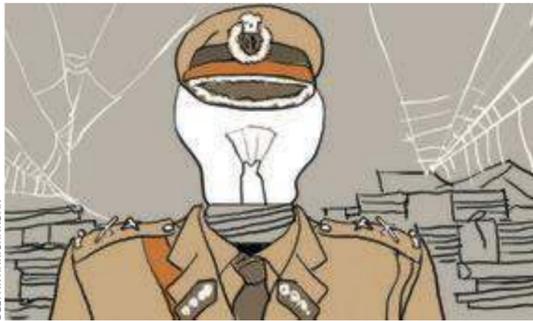
R.K. RAGHAVAN

In a recent article in an American newspaper, the doyen among police scholars, Prof. David Bayley, expressed his anguish over what he considered to be a crisis in U.S. law enforcement. In his view this was caused mainly by three factors: race, police training and guns. There was an undeniable need for reform, but the prospects for this happening were bleak because of a multitude of factors, including the size of police forces, lack of political and community support.

The Indian police is exactly in the same situation. People are dissatisfied with the quality of service they are getting from the grass roots. They are frustrated with the same old alibi trotted out by the police: political interference. Do rudimentary courtesy to the public at a police station, registration of an FIR when a complaint is received, and acting against harassment of women in public spaces all need political direction? Not at all. The system therefore needs drastic restructuring, beyond cosmetics, in order to make policing more professional and more acceptable to the common man. Look at what other professions have done. In my view, the analogy here should be one with public health service. Despite its many faults, cost being a main drawback, our medical services have improved vastly through sheer professionalism backed by learning from experimentation.

How to professionalise

Those propounding evidence-based policing, a movement launched more than a decade ago both in the U.S and the U.K., often



DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

refer to success in the area of health care to strengthen the case for experiment-based law enforcement. Their plea is unexceptionable, especially in India, where the popular image of the police is not flattering. This is despite some remarkable work done by policemen at the cutting edge level. Notwithstanding some token efforts initiated by a few dynamic IPS officers in the larger cities, there is an overall reluctance to experiment with measures that could transform the police from a traditional outfit into a sleek modern force that is constantly looking for ways to upgrade delivery of its service.

A recent international conference organised by the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge University was the occasion for some serious brainstorming on the issue of how to infuse some fresh thinking into the twin problems of maintaining public order and combatting conventional crime. In effect, the task was how to make the police shed their slumber and arbitrariness in reacting to field developments and make them acquire a fresh mindset to cope with the dire needs of a society under attack.

On the face of it, the subject may appear clichéd. In reality, however, the task of policing the community has become far too complex to permit the smug feeling that throwing increased manpower and use of new technology

in themselves would be enough to steady a deteriorating situation. If this were so, policing all over the world would be in clover. The fact is, even in countries that have a strong legacy of clinical public administration, there is increasing disenchantment with the way the police handle major crises. This again leads us to only one question: can things improve with a greater scientific approach, and not necessarily the use of gadgets, to day-to-day police operations?

Simply put, policing has acquired many new connotations and a certain immediacy which cannot brook any delay. Terrorism and cyber attacks in particular are heightening the levels of fear of the community. How well have the police responded to this serious challenge to stability?

Stop muddling along

Talking to friends in the police across countries and continents, I get the feeling that many police leaders have thrown in the towel and are just muddling along. I may be accused of generalising and being cynical, but the basic truth is that policing has become far too routine and mechanical at a time when there is need for a drastically different response to events. Reactive policing was adequate to a community as long as it had its fundamentals unshaken. We are now living in tumultuous times, where

violent crime grips major cities across the globe. How else would you account for the increasing number of homicides in an otherwise placid State such as Tamil Nadu? Here, anyone speaking against a rival political faction or a rival caste group now faces imminent threat. This in a region where there was until recently a fear of the law and an esteem for the police's capacity to swoop on the offenders in quick time. Now, hired goons rule the day, and the police are afraid of them.

Styled as a conference on evidence-based policing (EBP), the gathering of academics and active police leaders at Cambridge endorsed the imperative to fine-tune traditional styles, which placed an emphasis solely on the mechanical use of police resources rather than an intelligent application of available skills.

Known as the father of EBP, Prof. Lawrence Sherman, the leading light of the Institute of Criminology, is a relentless crusader, who holds that mindless policing to appease the polity is wasteful and misdirected. He and his fellow scholars are pushing for rigorous experiments on the field and appraising their findings against the realities of the daily fight against crime. In their view, a controlled experiment will throw up any number of facts that could help sharpen police professionalism. They draw from the remarkable progress that medical science has made in recent decades by encouraging bold experiments.

Prediction and prevention

There are two areas in which EBP could deliver. These are prediction and prevention. The strategy is one of identifying 'hot spots' of crime and spotting problematic individuals in a community. The former task requires an analysis of events which are either crimes by themselves or border on crimes defined by law. There are certain geographic areas in each police juris-

dition which report more incidents than others. EBP goes beyond statistics and pinpoints the time and opportunities presented to a potential offender. As the seminal essay 'Broken Windows' carried by the *Atlantic* magazine several years ago pointed out, where there is public apathy and civic neglect, the prospects of crime are high. Fixing a street light that is not burning for several days, for instance, is an action that could contain crime. EBP studies phenomena such as these and highlights findings that are germane to crime prevention. Similarly, monitoring patterns of behaviour of a class of individuals who had come to the adverse notice of law enforcement is a logical way to predict whether they will again lapse into crime. Despite the unfairness in targeting those who had indulged in anti-social behaviour in the past and keeping a tab on their day-to-day activities, there is an expected benefit of being able to predict future criminal behaviour. It is not as if every convict will go back to crime once set free. Several studies have strengthened the belief that recidivism is not uncommon, and that many future crimes can be foiled by pinpointing who, more than others, could be expected to offend once more. There is a certain inexactitude in this approach that one should learn to live with.

These are the fundamentals to EBP, a discipline that is gaining credibility by the day. To dismiss it as pure academic hogwash would be irrational and blind to a fast deteriorating scene marked by high crime. I strongly believe that exposing our police officers to this concept would make them more professional, something that would certainly enhance the Indian police's image, which is currently dismal.

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Changing contours of the Darjeeling agitation

It is important to recognise how the current stir has a dynamic different from those of the past



MARCUS DAM

The changing contours of the stir for a separate Gorkhaland state that has gripped the hills of Darjeeling, and what is now the fledgling district of Kalimpong, is in striking contrast to previous agitations in the region. This has impacted the very dynamics of popular support for the agitation, the strike now having entered its fifth week. So far the stir has claimed at least seven lives. Having renewed the statehood call, it is now the leadership of a political conglomerate, comprising disparate groups, spearheading the agitation which appears to be under pressure from their foot soldiers to come clean with an action plan without compromising the Gorkhaland demand.

Issue of credibility

Fresh in public memory is how many leaders have played the Gorkhaland card for self-aggrandisement. And as if to allay any misgivings over their intent, a "fast-unto-death" programme has been announced by senior leaders, giv-

ing a new twist to the turn of events.

At stake is their credibility even as the common refrain of the rank and file is that they should not settle for autonomous bodies as was the case in the past. The protracted agitations of 1986-88 had culminated in the setting up of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) only to be subsequently wound up and lead to the establishment, in 2012, of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). The GTA, which has survived agitations since its inception, is now tottering. The argument bandied about among the movement's supporters is that neither lived up to expectations raised in the course of the respective campaigns. Though the sponsors of the agitation publicly vow that there will be no climbdown, the question is whether this is a bargaining counter.

It has also been decided that the agitation will continue indefinitely. But what has added to collective anxiety is the ban on Internet services. This move by the authorities, initiated shortly after the strike in mid-June, is purportedly designed to pre-empt those spearheading the agitation from canvassing for public support. This has led to widespread resentment, which is being tapped into by the movement.

In the face of such odds, what is



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discernible is a sense of growing exasperation among the people with the powers that be on outstanding political issues. There are distinct signs of a growing restiveness that find expression whenever processions in support of the Gorkhaland demand have been brought out, with those from surrounding "kamans" and "bastis" (villages) joining ranks with the townspeople. On at least two occasions, children too have been drawn in, and the West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights has taken up issue. As in past agitations, the call for a "boycott" of those declining to participate or supporting the cause looms large.

At the political level, there are the fractious relations between the major players: the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) and its allies sponsoring the movement, the

West Bengal government and the Centre. Whether the GJM will be able to carry forward the ongoing agitation without its momentum waning, as happened in the past, only time will tell. But jettisoning the statehood demand could cost it its support base. As for the State government, a division of West Bengal is not an option as things stand, whoever may be in power. Such are the apparent irreconcilables in a region where the statehood issue seems set, at least for some time to come, to continue being the principal axis around which hill politics revolves.

Sikkim's stand

Sikkim also appears to have positioned itself in the emerging political configuration. Though it has long been clear where the sympathies of Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling lie in the scheme of things, his open support to the Gorkhaland cause by making public a letter dated June 20 to Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh has created ripples, and come as a shot in the arm for the GJM and its partners. Not only has West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress expressed suspicions about the hand of the Bharatiya Janata Party, an electoral ally of the GJM, in the goings-on but it has also alleged that the agitation is being backed by insurgent groups as well as some for-

eign influences. What makes Mr. Chamling's announcement intriguing is its timing. His landlocked State's lifeline to the rest of the country passes through the hills. And like the Darjeeling hills, Sikkim too has begun suffering the fallout, beginning with disruptions in essential supplies.

There is also little doubting that the statehood movement enjoys considerable support among the people in Sikkim, particularly the Nepali community. This has prompted political observers to wonder whether the developments are a manifestation of a larger pan-Nepali phenomenon with its own set of dynamics in a geopolitically sensitive region. The hills of north Bengal, Sikkim and Nepal share common borders; the last two share borders with China.

Amid the growing unrest and political turmoil, what is clear is that gone are the times of grandstanding by the principal players. Viewing the situation through the wrong end of the telescope, wherever they may be positioned, cannot facilitate any solution to the crisis. The need for a fresh interrogation of the unfolding reality cannot be more urgent.

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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.

Data on deliveries

Inspection of private hospitals empanelled with the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) alone will not serve the purpose of curbing C-section surgeries as one of the criteria to be eligible for availing the CGHS facility is that the expectant mother has to be a Central government employee or a dependant of a Central government employee in CGHS-covered areas ("Give data of C-section and normal deliveries: Maneka", July 15).

In a country like India, more than half the women who are of reproductive age may not fall under this bracket. Moreover, the hospitals they reach out to for their obstetric and gynaecological needs may not be under the purview of a childbirth audit.

The government should use various family welfare mediums to educate its citizens regarding the benefits of normal birthing

vis-à-vis a C-section. Perhaps counsellors can be appointed at health-care centres to provide an insight into why the risks of a C-section far outweigh the benefits. A caesarean, as the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends, should be done based on a medical need where it is life-saving for the mother and baby.

VARIAR YAMINI VINOD, Singapore

Taking to Twitter

The report, "Twitter trouble: railway officials complain as passengers tweet their woes" (Some editions, July 13), about Twitter being used by passengers for every single problem ranging from dirty toilets at stations and trains to requests for diapers for children travelling on a long distance trains in remote parts of the country, leaves one incredulous. Is "a no diaper" situation akin to a medical emergency? Unfortunately, the practice of responding to frivolous

requests over social media was started by the Minister himself and now the officials are finding the problem unmanageable. There is no doubt that the Railways must focus on being an efficient, convenient and safe transport for all and not act as a nanny to a select few passengers who travel in comfort and have the facility to tweet. Every train must be manned by a train superintendent who can be approached by all passengers.

V. KRISHNAMACHARI, Mumbai

GM concerns

The conventional foods that we eat have been tested by evolutionary forces for thousands of years and consumed for millennia without causing harm to humans ("Left, Right, Centre: 'Should we grow GM crops?'", July 7). Even though the U.S. is the largest user of GM products, the public still have a sceptical view of them. Many food

packages in the U.S. in fact prominently say that their products are rBst free (for milk), non-GMO and gluten free. GM crops are not pesticide or herbicide-free either.

Arbitrary use of chemicals and unproven advantages of GM crops have alarmed beekeepers especially as the free pollination service provided by insect pollinators, mainly bees, is estimated to be worth \$216 billion. Interestingly the next big battle on the horizon will be around genetically edited plants, also known as CRISPR (or Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) technology. The paradox of India's agricultural policies is that it is still unable to conserve its present food grain output or ensure the welfare of our farming community. How will the introduction of GM crops improve their welfare with costlier seed, fertilizer or pesticide use? When we are

unable to save traditionally produced food grains, can we store these surplus grains with our poor pricing, transport, storage and market access?

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA, Bengaluru

Wimbledon 2017

The French Open is closely followed by Wimbledon by which time top-ranked players arrive at the London event with injury concerns. Unfortunately, this year's Wimbledon recorded the highest number of pull-outs due to injury that robbed the tournament of its glitz. Novak Djokovic retiring from the tournament at an advanced stage of the tournament was a big disappointment while Andy Murray was in visible pain against Sam Querrey.

Tennis, like any other individual sport, is both physically and mentally demanding. Young Garbine Muguruza's maiden Wimbledon title by beating an ageing Venus Williams in the final has a few messages to offer ("Sport" page - "Muguruza eclipses Venus", July 16).

Advancing age is a critical factor as progressive slowing down of movements, despite strenuous training, impedes success. This leads to unplanned, untried and unsuccessful strategies. This was how one felt when Williams failed to win two set points in the first set and not even one game in the second set.

V. LAKSHMANAN, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: In the FI Standings, the thirteenth name was wrongly given as Sebastian Grosjean instead of Romain Grosjean (Weekend Sport, July 15, 2017).

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When too much is too little

The issue of food wastage must be fully understood, so that an effective strategy can be drawn up



SANJAY KUMAR

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought up the issue of food wastage on his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme about two months ago, he endorsed a valid point when he asked people not to waste food. Though he raised an extremely critical issue of national importance, he could also have used the occasion to propose some government-led mechanism to handle it.

He was right to an extent when he linked food wastage to people's behaviour. However, there are wastages which happen in any case due to food's perishability and the absence of an effective distribution mechanism and legal framework. Looking at the scale of problems, it is wise to frame a comprehensive strategy by combining the efforts of the government and private sectors and civil society. The government can create a time-bound task force under Niti Aayog, with experts from different sectors, to frame a national policy to tackle this gigantic issue, which can recommend the legal framework to support initiatives to reduce food loss and waste. As a nation, we need to give priority to tackling this issue so that we can handle the social, economic and environmental ill-effects of wastage of food.

One third of food wasted

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), "One third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year." It also states: "Food is lost or wasted throughout the supply chain, from initial agricultural production to final household consumption." The losses, it says, represent "a waste of resources used in production such as land, water, energy and inputs, increasing the green gas emissions in vain".

Food wastage has multiple socio-economic and environmental impacts. In a country like India, not only is food scarce for many poor families, it is a luxury for many others. Though hunger cannot be tackled directly by preventing food wastage, a substantial amount of food that is wasted in our country can feed many hungry people. India



Hunger amidst plenty: A storage facility on the outskirts of Amritsar. ■ AFP

ranks 97th among 118 countries in the Global Hunger Index for 2016. About 20 crore people go to bed hungry and 7,000 people die of hunger every day; wastage of food is not less than a social delinquency. According to one estimate, 21 million tonnes of wheat are wasted in India every year. A recent study by the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, revealed that only 10% of food is covered by cold storage facilities in India. This, coupled with poor supply-chain management, results in significant wastage, both at pre- and post-harvest stages, of cereals, pulses, fruits and vegetables.

The wastage of food entails loss of considerable amount of resources in the form of inputs used during production. For example, 25% of fresh water and nearly 300 million barrels of oil used to produce food are ultimately wasted.

The increasing wastage also results in land degradation by about 45%, mainly due to deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices, and excessive groundwater extraction. Wastage results in national economic loss. To put a monetary value to the loss in terms of wastage, India loses ₹58,000 crore every year, to quote *The CSR Journal*.

The energy spent over wasted food results in 3.3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide production every

year. Decay also leads to harmful emission of other gases in the atmosphere; for instance, decaying of rice produces methane. Food waste emissions have a major impact on climate change and result in greater carbon footprint.

Laws to encourage donation

Many countries have legislation providing for global best practices, such as the 1996 Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act in the U.S., which was intended to encourage donation of food and grocery products that meet quality and labelling standards by protecting the donor and the recipient agency against liability, except in the case of gross negligence and/or intentional misconduct. France has taken a lead by becoming the first country in the world to ban supermarkets from destroying unsold food, forcing them instead to donate it to charities or food banks or send it to the farmers to be used as fertilisers in crop production.

In India, there are many civil society, private sector and community initiatives aimed at distributing food among the poor. The government is also committed to securing availability of food grains for two-thirds of the 1.3 billion population, under the National Food Security Act, 2013. While securing food for all or feeding them through such initiatives is important,

addressing wastage of food in all forms is equally critical to complete the cycle of food sufficiency and food sustainability. There are initiatives such as India Food Banking Network (IFBN), which is promoting the concept of collaborative consumption with support from the private sector and civil society organisations. Such initiatives, creating networks and channels of distribution between those who have surplus food and those who are in need of them, are necessary.

The government needs to do more and should play a larger facilitating role. The Prime Minister's call to the nation needs to be followed up with further interventions. There is an urgent need to understand the complexity of the problem and then to devise a national-level strategy to combat it so that surplus of food can be turned into an advantage instead of resulting in wastage. Hunger and food wastage are two sides of the coin. The cycle of hunger cannot be broken without channelising the wasted food to help the needy. Without stopping wastage of food, we cannot do justice to millions of hungry people, our economy and the planet.

Sanjay Kumar is the India Country Director of Harvard South Asia Institute. Views are personal

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Readers are our mirrors

We invite readers for Open House discussions so that we can look at ourselves in them



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

Last week, a score and five senior journalists and editors from across South Asia were in Kathmandu for two different events. One was on borders and the other was on labour migration. The journalists were from different platforms: print, radio, television and online. But they were curious about the efficacy of news ombudsmen in this region. They wanted to know about *The Hindu's* decade-long experience in having an independent news ombudsman.

A journalist from Sri Lanka, a thorough professional and a friend for nearly three decades, cited my former editor Vinod Mehta's book, *Mr. Editor, How Close Are You to the PM?* – which had argued for maintaining an adversarial relationship between those in power and those who are mandated to run news organisations – and posed three main questions and a supplementary one. What is the nature of the relationship between the Editor and the Readers' Editor? Whose decision is final? Do readers gain from this institutional mechanism? If yes, what do they gain and how?

Editor-ombudsman relationship

The answers for the first two questions are self-evident. The equation between the Editor and the Readers' Editor is neither adversarial nor convivial. In this relationship, the governing code is to respect the remit and not to indulge in overreach, one where the principles of journalism are upheld without undermining the authority of the Editor.

Once the perimeter is clearly drawn, the decision-making process becomes clear to all stakeholders. The Editor is the final authority in deciding what to publish. And, in post-publication, the decision of the ombudsman is final and binding.

"What readers gain?" is a difficult but unavoidable question. The gains are both tangible and intangible. The obvious tangible gain is that there is a mechanism that enables a visible mending process to correct any errors that happen in this deadline-driven profession and to retain the position of this legacy newspaper as a paper of record.

The intangible gains are trust and credibility. An ombudsman is an active listener. In my case, I do not rely only on the mail we receive on a daily basis or on comments that appear below the line for most of our stories

to understand the readers. I realise that most readers write only when they strongly approve or disapprove of a particular story. But, the readers do engage with the newspaper as a whole. They are the *raison d'être* for a newspaper. Their views are nuanced and varied. Very often I receive conflicting and contending views from readers. How does one decide which reader is right?

Despite the fact that my livelihood is dependent on written words, I rely on the grand old oral tradition to understand readers. I take poet and storyteller Joseph Bruchac's words to my heart to do my work: "The image of an oral telling may be caught on paper, film or in digital format, but recordings are not the word shared live. The



presence of teller and audience, and the immediacy of the moment are not fully captured by any form of technology. Unlike the insect frozen in amber, a told story is alive. It always changes from one telling to the next depending on the voice and mood of the storyteller, the place of its telling, the response of the audience. The story breathes with the teller's breath."

My task is not only to listen to readers but to also convey their opinions with all its textures, layers and complexities to the editorial team. The idea of an Open House between readers and the senior editorial team of this newspaper flows from this unflinching faith in oral tradition. The physical presence of readers amidst the editorial staff becomes a silo-breaker. The fifth Open House is scheduled in Delhi this weekend. The warmth in this dialogue can never be captured by any innovation of Silicon Valley.

In his novel *Identity*, Milan Kundera talked about the need to maintain the wholeness of the self. For him to ensure that the self does not shrink, "memories have to be watered like potted flowers, and the watering calls for regular contact with the witnesses of the past, that is to say with friends." He wrote: "They are our mirror; our memory; we ask nothing of them but that they polish the mirror from time to time so we can look at ourselves in it." Readers are our mirrors and we invite them so that we can look at ourselves in them.

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SINGLE FILE

Cash is not trash

The all-out war on cash transactions is not wise economic policy

PRASHANTH PERUMAL



A public sector bank is the latest to join hands in the war against cash. A report released by the State Bank of India last week states that thanks to demonetisation, India has seen a huge increase in digital payments using cards. If not for demonetisation, it says, the economy would have taken three more years to achieve the level of digitisation that it has since November.

The underlying logic is that citizens are somehow irrationally obsessed with the use of cash, and, hence, the enlightened officials in government are duty-bound to wean them off it, even if it requires administering cruel shocks like demonetisation. Note that it is unanimously agreed by experts that a cashless world offers many undeniable benefits. In a world where all, or at least most, transactions are digital, the government would be able to track any transaction. This would help prevent tax evasion, thus increasing tax revenue, and also help in dealing with criminal transactions.

What is ignored is the fact that when the government cracks down on a preferred method of transaction among citizens, the result is a net economic loss to society. After all, it is not some superstition that holds back citizens from using digital cash. Instead, there are often some good economic reasons for them to choose to deal in cash over other forms of money.

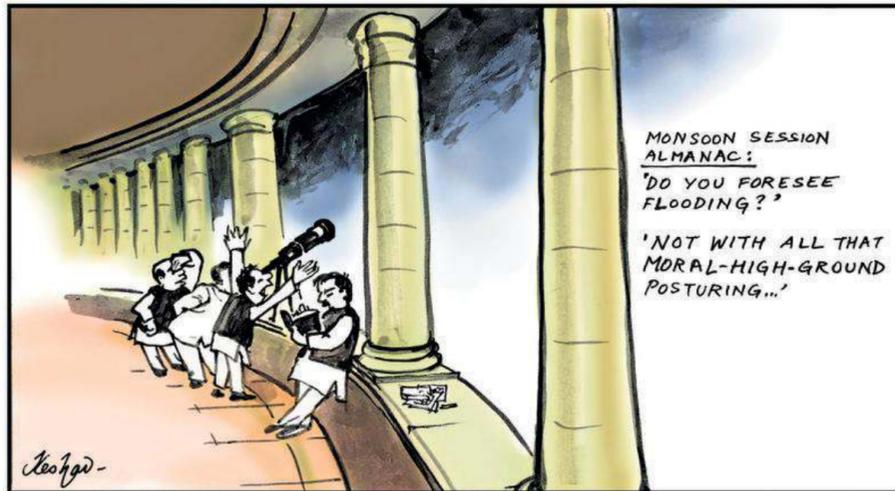
Low-value transactions

For one, physical cash often offers the easiest and cheapest way to deal in many low-value transactions. It might, for instance, make no economic sense for small businesses to build the infrastructure required for digital payments, or for poor households to pay the price for it. Many businesses and consumers might automatically adopt digital technology as its costs drop. Forcing them to prematurely adopt technology will only be harmful to their interests.

Two, a broad brush has been used to paint all untaxed cash-based economic activity as a crime that needs to be punished, but it should be remembered that cash actually allows several beneficial economic transactions to thrive. In the absence of cash, a lot of these useful activities would be crushed under the weight of harmful government policy. It is no coincidence that many legitimate economic activities get pushed into the underground economy only under draconian regimes.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the preference for cash among citizens has traditionally worked against the plans of governments to pursue inflationary policies. In fact, American economist Kenneth Rogoff, a prominent advocate of the war against cash, has spelt out clearly that cash stands in the way of central banks pursuing a negative interest rate policy (NIRP). Simply stated, if citizens are allowed to encash their deposits to escape a situation like NIRP, it would threaten the stability of the banking system.

Cash thus acts as a natural check on inflationary government policies. It is no wonder that cash has been turned into an evil zombie, which it is clearly not.



CONCEPTUAL

Nirvana fallacy

LOGIC

The fallacy of criticising a solution to a problem because it is imperfect and does not match up with other perfect, but unrealistic, solutions. It is also known as the perfect solution fallacy. An economist who criticises economic liberalisation for being an imperfect solution to poverty, for instance, would be guilty of the nirvana fallacy if the more attractive solutions he proposes are too impractical. The criticism levelled against the use of umpiring technology in games like cricket, citing imperfections in the performance of such technology, is also an example of the perfect solution fallacy.

MORE ON THE WEB

The Hindu Science Quiz on Asteroids and meteorites
<http://bit.ly/THScienceAsteroids>

SHELF HELP

Looking at China

A reading list to help understand the border stand-off

SUHASINI HAIDAR

The India-China stand-off at the Doklam plateau, that has continued for more than a month, has sparked many memories in India, and there are a number of books written over the past half century that one can turn to to get a better sense of where relations between the two countries are headed.

Accounts of 1962

Among them are several accounts of the India-China war of 1962, what led to it, how the tide turned against India, and what lessons can be learnt. A.G. Noorani's *India-China Boundary Problem, 1846-1947*, published in 2010, is an essential read, providing a balanced view to understand the boundary problem.

A less-balanced view, critical of India and particularly dismissive of Jawaharlal Nehru's actions is by Neville Maxwell. *India's China War* is no less interesting for its anecdotes of the time. Few during the

current crisis with Bhutan have pointed out, for example, that in 1958, Pandit Nehru too had said in Parliament, "It is India's responsibility to go to the aid of Bhutan."

J.P. Dalvi's personal account, *Himalayan Blunder: Curtain-raiser to the Sino-Indian war of 1962*, has long been criticised for laying the blame for India's lack of preparedness at the government's door. An unusual source of information about the build-up to the war at the time also comes from *Abode Under the Dome*, by Thomas Mathew, that chronicles among other visits the four visits by Zhou Enlai to India between 1954 and 1960, when he stayed at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

For more serious and descriptive accounts of the war as well as the tensions that followed over the decades between India and China, three books stand out for their deep research: Srinath Raghavan's *War and Peace in Modern India*, Arjun Sub-

ramaniam's *India's Wars: A Military History, 1947-1971*, and Pravin Sawhney and Ghazala Wahab's *Dragon on Our Doorstep: Managing China Through Military Power*. In terms of the boundary negotiations, the most authentic narration comes from Shivshankar Menon, who, as joint secretary on the desk, Ambassador to China, Foreign Secretary and National Security Adviser, handled the issue closely. He devotes a riveting chapter in his memoir *Choices: Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy* to the China boundary settlement process.

Finally, there are a series of books that look not just at how India and China can cooperate, but how their rivalry plays out geopolitically: Martin Sieff's *Shifting Superpowers*; Anja Manuel's *This Brave New World*; Raghav Bahl's *Superpower? The Amazing Race Between China's Hare and India's Tortoise*; and Bill Emmott's *Rivals*.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 17, 1967

Arabs & Israelis reach accord

Fighting is reported to have ceased in the Suez Canal area after fierce land and air clashes yesterday [July 15] and action by United Nations Truce Supervisor, Lieut.-Gen. Odd Bull. The U.A.R. agreed to observe a cease-fire from 23-00 local last night [July 15]. Clashes had already ceased three hours earlier, Cairo Radio said. The cease-fire was proposed by Gen. Bull following a telephone call from the U.N. Secretary-General U Thant, usually reliable sources here [Cairo] said. The sources said that Gen. Bull told U Thant that the Israelis had requested the cease-fire. U.N. observers began supervising the cease-fire in the Suez Canal area to-day [July 16], faced with the immediate task of trying to establish where the dividing line between Israeli and Egyptian forces runs. Israel has already proposed to Gen. Bull that the cease-fire line should run midway through the 100-mile long waterway, since Israeli and Egyptian forces are in control of the respective two banks.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 17, 1917

Meeting in Bombay.

A well attended public meeting was held this evening [July 16] at Moraji Goculdas Hall [in Bombay] under the auspices of the Home Rule League to pass a resolution of confidence in Lord Hardinge. The Hon. Mr. Jinnah presided. In opening the proceedings Mr. Jinnah said that Lord Hardinge had appealed not only to the verdict of British public but to the verdict of Indian people also. Lord Hardinge said that India had been "bled white." Only a statesman of his type, a Viceroy of his calibre, who knew well the pulse of public opinion, could have achieved that result. India submitted to be "bled white" because they had a statesman who shared their sorrows, who understood their thoughts and who had liberal and generous ideas of the national progress of India. Continuing, Mr. Jinnah said: To-day although India was ready to make any sacrifice unfortunately they noticed in various provinces a policy of repression. It was to be regretted that the present Viceroy sat quiet in the clouds of Simla when the policy of repression was going on.

DATA POINT

Doubling down on renewables

India has increased its renewable energy capacity in the last decade at a rate marginally higher than the world rate. China nearly tripled its capacity during the same period. A look at the change in renewable energy capacity in the BRICS countries and the U.S.

Country / Region	2016 Capacity in MW	% increase since 2007
World	2,007,685	102.6
China	545,916	267.5
U.S.	214,766	99
Brazil	122,951	51.4
India	90,748	116.8
Russian Federation	51,350	9.4
South Africa	4,069	395

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