



Get real on Swachh

Responsibility must be fixed on State governments to end manual scavenging

Despite the most stringent penal provisions in the law against manual scavenging, it continues in parts of India. The recent order of the Madras High Court asking the Centre and the Tamil Nadu government to ensure the strict enforcement of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, in the wake of the death of 30 people engaged in the activity in the State in recent years, points to the malaise. Evidently, the vigorous national campaign for the rehabilitation of those engaged to manually clean insanitary latrines, and urban structures into which human excreta flows without sewerage, has been unable to break governmental indifference and social prejudice. Manual scavenging persists mainly because of the continued presence of insanitary latrines, of which there are about 2.6 million that require cleaning by hand, according to the activist organisation, Safai Karmachari Andolan. In spite of a legal obligation to do so, State governments are not keen to demolish and rebuild old facilities lacking sanitation, or conduct a full census of both the latrines and the people engaged in clearing such waste. The Central government, which directly runs the self-employment scheme for the rehabilitation of these workers, has reduced funds from ₹448 crore in the 2014-15 budget to ₹5 crore this year. High allocation in the past has not meant substantial or effective utilisation. This is incongruous, as sanitation is high on the agenda of the NDA government, and the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's favourite programmes, to which the public is contributing a cess.

A determined approach to end the scourge requires a campaign against social prejudice that impedes solutions in two ways. Many communities still regard the inclusion of a sanitary toilet as ritual and physical pollution of the house, and even the less conservative are ready to accept only large, expensive and unscientific structures much bigger than those recommended by the WHO. More pernicious is the entrenched belief in the caste system, that assumes Dalits will readily perform the stigmatised task of emptying latrines. Clearly, the law on punishment exists only on paper. Change now depends on the willingness of the courts to fix responsibility on State governments, and order an accurate survey of the practice especially in those States that claim to have no insanitary latrines or manual scavenging. Raising the confidence level among those engaged in manual cleaning is vital; even official data show their reluctance to take up self-employment. Empowerment holds the key to change, but that would depend on breaking caste barriers through education and economic uplift. Compensation sanctioned for the families of those who died in the course of the humiliating and hazardous work should be paid immediately; only a fraction of those with verified claims have received it.

Erdogan's excesses

A year after he defeated a coup, Turkey's President continues to tighten his grip

Last July, hundreds of thousands of Turkish citizens hit the streets to defend democracy when a faction of the military tried to seize power through a coup. It was a rare occasion of unity in Turkey's otherwise fractious politics, with most parties denouncing the coup bid and Opposition politicians rushing to the government's defence. The coup was defeated, leaving President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a much stronger position. Mr. Erdogan could have used the victory to usher in a new chapter in Turkey's democracy. He could have introduced more reforms, expanded human rights and corrected the past wrongs of his government, which contributed to the military unrest in the first place. But what happened was exactly the opposite. Mr. Erdogan launched a purge in the name of taking on the coup-plotters. The government blamed Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Turkish Islamic preacher, for the coup, and said the crackdown was aimed at removing Mr. Gulen's "parallel structure" from the government. But the nature and scope of the crackdown suggested it was targeted at more than just Mr. Gulen's supporters. The government imposed a state of emergency as soon as the coup was defeated; it is still in place. More than 50,000 people have been jailed over the year. Twelve MPs, including Selahattin Demirtas, a Kurdish politician and former presidential candidate, and at least 120 journalists are behind bars. Around 100,000 people have been dismissed from state service.

Even as the country was grappling with the post-coup purge and the emergency, Mr. Erdogan went ahead with a referendum to change the Constitution. He won the vote, setting off a process to transform Turkey from a parliamentary democracy to an executive presidency. Domestically, his strongman image and a conservative agenda that appeals to the religious Turks lend support to his policies. Internationally, Mr. Erdogan's Turkey is too important a regional power for most countries to antagonise over rights violations and authoritarian tendencies. Though there is occasional criticism, the West is keen to get along with Turkey, a crucial NATO ally. So Mr. Erdogan may have found this an opportune time to leave his mark on Turkey. But how long can he rule by undermining its institutions? In power since 2002, his AK Party-led government has started showing signs of stress. This year's referendum scraped through by a narrow margin. The Opposition, especially the Republican People's Party, is trying to mobilise supporters. Its leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, recently led a 'March for Justice' from Ankara to Istanbul. The security situation is precarious, with a civil war raging in the Kurdish-populated southeast and jihadists targeting cities. Today, Turkey needs stability and unity most. But Mr. Erdogan's excesses endanger both.

No common ground on the Doklam plateau

China and India see the stand-off very differently — it's important for the Special Representatives to meet



M.K. NARAYANAN

The Doklam plateau has become the unlikely scene of the latest India-China imbroglio. The region falls within Bhutanese territory, but this is now questioned by China. The Chumbi valley is vital for India, and any change is fraught with dangerous possibilities. The incident stems from differences between Bhutan and India on the one hand and China on the other as to the exact location of the tri-junction between the three countries.

In 2007, India and Bhutan had negotiated a Friendship Treaty to replace an earlier one. According to the revised treaty, the two countries are committed to coordinate on issues relating to their national interests. The terms of the 2007 Friendship Treaty are somewhat milder than the one it replaced, which provided India greater latitude in determining Bhutan's foreign relations, but there is little doubt about the import of the revised treaty.

Cartographic aggression

China's current claims over the Doklam plateau should be seen as yet another instance of cartographic aggression, which China often engages in. It is, however, China's action of building an all-weather road on Bhutan's territory, one capable of sustaining heavy vehicles, that has prompted Bhutan and India to coordinate their actions in their joint national interests, under the terms of the 2007 Friendship Treaty.

Many of the points involved in the current stand-off are disputed or disputable. The Sikkim (India)-China border was the only settled segment of the nearly 4,000-km-long India-China border. It adheres to the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890, signed between Britain and China, though the exact location of the tri-junction is today in dispute. The Indian side puts it near Batang La, while China claims that it is located at Mt. Gipmochi further south.



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

The Bhutanese are rather equivocal about China's claims, acknowledging that Tibetan graziers had free access to the Doklam plateau and the Dorsa Nala area, but accept the fact that the tri-junction is at Batang La.

China has long eyed this area. It has been keen to establish its physical presence in a region that it claims belongs to China according to the 1890 Convention. With China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) gaining momentum, and completion of infrastructure programmes such as the Lhasa-Shigatse Railway, China appears to have turned its attention to the Doklam plateau, eyeing an opportunity to establish a strong presence close to the Indian border.

The Doklam plateau has indirectly figured in the several rounds of border talks that have been held between China and Bhutan. Reliable reports suggest that China is not unwilling to make generous concessions to Bhutan in return for a mutually acceptable border settlement. Thus, China appears willing to make concessions in the north, in return for land in the west, comprising the eastern shoulder of the Chumbi valley which incorporates the Doklam plateau.

It would be a serious mistake to treat the present incident as another run-of-the-mill border incident on the pattern of incidents reported from different points on the disputed Sino-Indian border. There are substantial differences, for in-

stance, between the current incidental stand-offs such as the ones in Depsang and Chumar, or even for that matter, the 1986-87 Wangdung incident near Sumdorong Chu in Arunachal Pradesh.

Neither side appears to be in a mood to cede ground regarding the dispute. The rhetoric from the Chinese side has been unusually shrill with China laying down 'conditionalities' that "India should withdraw its troops to the Indian side of the border to uphold the peace/tranquillity of the China-India border areas as a precondition for essential peace talks". Implicit threats of an even more serious situation developing, leading to even more serious consequences, if India did not step back have also been made. The rhetoric seems to convey the message that these are not empty threats.

Unintended consequences

China may have temporarily halted its road construction programme, but it appears determined to hold on to its position. India is equally clear that it cannot afford to back down, as of now, having gone to Bhutan's assistance at a time of need. With both sides intent on a show of strength, the potential it has to provoke an incident with unintended consequences is quite high.

China and India see the Doklam stand-off very differently. For China, the issue is one of territorial 'sovereignty'. For India, the issue is

one of national security. Both appear irreconcilable. China is generally not known to make concessions when it comes to aspects of territorial 'sovereignty'. The entire saga of the Sino-Indian border dispute hinges on this, with China unwilling to make territorial concessions regarding areas over which it once claimed suzerainty. India, for its part cannot be seen to be compromising on its national security. This would be the case if Chinese claims to the Doklam plateau are accepted and the tri-junction is accepted to be further south at Mt. Gipmochi. It would bring China within striking distance of India's vulnerable 'Chicken Neck', the Siliguri Corridor, the life-line to India's Northeast. This has always been seen as India's 'Achilles heel', and ensuring its security has figured prominently in India's calculation from the beginning. The possibilities and consequences are both immense and serious.

Diplomacy should ordinarily have been the way out, but relations between India and China are far from cordial at present. Even at the highest levels, there are few signs of a thaw. No bilateral meeting took place between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in Hamburg earlier this month. There were no consequential meetings subsequently, including during the BRICS conclave.

India must read proper meanings into China's unwillingness to hold talks at the highest level. China is categorically laying down difficult pre-conditions for talks, though India is open to the idea of discussions without pre-conditions. These are well reflected in the differences seen between the high voltage Chinese reaction and the measured response of the Indian side.

The play for Bhutan

One implication could possibly be that the Chinese wish to convey the impression that this is an issue between China and Bhutan, and it does not recognise the India-Bhutan 'special relationship' which provides an Indian guarantee for Bhutanese sovereignty. Another is that the Chinese believe that on their own they can make peace with Bhutan and it is India's 'inter-

ference' that is complicating matters. China can be expected to pursue this line vigorously from now on.

The geo-political situation, meanwhile, is in a state of flux. Scope for mediation from quarters friendly to both countries is, hence, limited. If anything, China seems to be more advantageously placed than India. India's friends are most unlikely to pressurise or persuade China to step back. This leaves India to play a lone hand.

The only silver lining is that both India and China, though for different reasons, are reluctant to engage in an open conflict — one that could prove detrimental to both. The Chinese economy is slowing down at present and the main preoccupation is to regain its past momentum. China is also preparing for its 19th Party Congress, at which Xi Jinping hopes to establish full control. It is, hence, anxious to avoid any kind of major distraction. India's reluctance again centres on the economy. Its concerns are that a conflict would stymie economic growth. Both, therefore, have valid reasons not to provoke a conflict.

If the deadlock is to be broken, and if diplomacy is ruled out for the present, other measures will need to be considered. One available option is the Special Representative Meeting (SRM) that was set up primarily to deal with border issues. Over the past decade and a half, the SRM has been enlarged to some extent to deal with strategic issues. The issue of the Doklam plateau may not fall neatly into either compartment, but it does not prevent the two countries from pursuing this option.

It will not be the first time that the SRM has been used in this manner to deal with knotty problems outside border matters, and I can personally vouchsafe for this. As of now, it appears to be the only viable and meaningful option to tackle the impasse. The Special Representatives should, hence, urgently establish contact and work out a modus vivendi that would ensure a solution without loss of face for either side.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

Partners in regional security and prosperity

Australia and India can ensure that the Indo-Pacific region remains anchored to a resilient rules-based order



JULIE BISHOP

Australia and India share converging interests and similar outlooks on the strategic changes taking place in the Indo-Pacific region and globally. Building on our historic ties, cultural links and extensive people-to-people connections, our bilateral relationship is strengthening. India is Australia's ninth largest trading partner, with boundless potential for growth.

Our Indian-origin residents are the fourth largest group of overseas-born Australians, representing close to 2% of our total population. They make a strong contribution to our country across all fields — business, science and medicine, education, arts and culture and sports.

In June, we demonstrated our strong naval ties when the Australia-India Exercise (AUSINDEX) was conducted for the second time, this time off Australia's west coast.

During my visit to India this week, I will reiterate our shared commitment to ensuring the Indo-Pacific region — the most dynamic in the world — remains peaceful and increasingly prosperous.

Keeping the peace

Australia is committed to working with India and other nations to ensure our region continues to be underpinned by a predictable and resilient rules-based order. The existing post-World War II order has underpinned the extraordinary economic growth we have seen in many parts of the world, and more recently in our region. It has allowed Indo-Pacific states — large and small — to pursue their national and collective interests, while also providing the mechanisms to resolve any disputes peacefully.

Increasingly, however, this rules-based order is under pressure. Strategic competition is leading to unilateral action. Rising nationalism is leading to a narrower conception of national interests, and a more transactional approach to negotiations.

As democracies, Australia and India have systems of government where leaders are accountable and the rights of citizens are respected.



GETTY IMAGES

These democratic principles and practices, when translated into foreign affairs and the engagement between nations, are the essence of an international rules-based system. We need to build and strengthen international institutions that promote cooperation and manage competing interests in fair and transparent ways, in order to maintain regional and global stability. Peace and security in the region will also be consolidated if countries have an economic stake in maintaining good relations.

Australia is determined to strengthen regional prosperity by maintaining our open, integrated regional economy, underpinned by liberalised trade and investment. Australia and other countries in the region have opened our economies to one another, and have integrated trade, production and investment in a dynamic regional economy, to

the benefit of all. India's growing economic weight has the potential to help lift standards of living in India as well as contribute to prosperity in the wider Indo-Pacific.

A new phase of investment

Australia welcomes India's ambitious reform agenda, including the recent introduction of a Goods and Services Tax, and stands ready to lend support, drawing on our own experience. Economic growth and prosperity in the region will also require continued investment in infrastructure.

Increasingly, China is lending its enormous economic weight to a new phase of investment in the region and beyond. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank — which Australia and India joined as founding members — has a role to play in funding infrastructure. Likewise, Japan makes a significant contribution to investment, both commercially and through development banks. We endorse the concept behind these investments — of enhancing connectivity, in land, air, sea and cyber. The more connected our region, the more business opportunities there will be for the private sector, including Australian firms. To ensure these infrastruc-

ture investments are cost-effective and economically viable, competition, transparency and accountability in decision-making are of critical importance. We look forward to India liberalising its trade and investment regime further to realise its economic growth prospects and increase its influence in the region. India's economic and strategic rise is widely welcomed by the region, and globally.

India is also fully committed to supporting the role of key regional institutions and to strengthening collective leadership. While less developed than the extensive regional architecture in Southeast and East Asia, the regional architecture of the Indian Ocean is increasingly promoting coordinated approaches with South Asia, in response to shared interests and emerging challenges. India and Australia need to increase our bilateral cooperation and our collective efforts with other like-minded countries. Together we can shape a future region in which strong and effective rules and open markets deliver lasting peace and prosperity — free markets and free people.

Julie Bishop is Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs

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.

Naidu as VP

There is no doubt that Venkaiah Naidu, now the BJP's vice-presidential nominee, is 'one who has no enemies' ("Venkaiah Naidu is NDA pick for VP", July 18). His cordial relations with one and all across the political spectrum, trouble-shooting and oratorical skills as well as a calm temperament are rare political virtues. However, one fails to understand why the BJP wants to relieve him from active politics. Only time will tell whether the step is a mistake or a sharp move by the BJP.

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO, Hyderabad

With this move, the BJP may have made it clear its political intent to push hard in the south ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. The step also assumes

significance considering that the NDA is unlikely to get a majority in the Upper House till 2019. Mr. Naidu's long innings in politics and his ability to maintain a good rapport with the Opposition parties should help him steal a march over the Opposition's candidate, Gopal Krishna Gandhi.

N.J. RAVI CHANDER, Bengaluru

Tackling a slowdown

The kind of prognosis and remedies proposed in the article, "After globalisation's promise" (July 18), are unlikely to have any impact on our current crop of policymakers, swayed as they are by the winds from the West and their inability to look beyond the framework set by neo-liberals. Public investment cannot pick up as long as the monetary policy focusses exclusively on

inflation control — ignoring other equally important objectives such as growth and employment — and there is overwhelming concern over the fiscal deficit due to the potential impact on foreign investments. As the RBI has to offer explanations if inflation goes beyond the laid-down narrow band, caution is bound to be its watchword.

MANOHAR ALEM BATH, Kannur, Kerala

Honesty not required

The "prompt transfer" of prison officials including Deputy Inspector General of Police (Prisons) D. Roopa, who highlighted instances of special privileges provided to AIADMK general secretary V.K. Sasikala, in return for ₹2 crore is nothing but an affront to diligent officials. Apart from demoralising

upright officials, it will only encourage more corrupt behaviour. Citizens have a right to know whether prisons are functioning as havens for hardcore criminals or serving the purpose for which they have been created. It would also be beneficial for public servants in charge of such facilities to have hotline access to the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister. If this is the manner in which a diligent public servant is treated for whistle-blowing, it also serves as a reminder of the pathetic state of the administrative in India.

NAVINA R., Chennai

At a time when most officials are pliant and mired in corruption, upright officers are the need of the hour and need public support. The public must exert pressure on the

government to rescind the transfer orders. If some of the officials say they stand by their revelations, it is the responsibility of the government to prove them wrong.

V.S. JAYARAMAN, Chennai

Wimbledon reforms

It is interesting that the media, especially sports journalists, have missed the growing call for reforms in the way Wimbledon is held. The tournament is losing its sheen with an increasing number of injury-prone top players, which is in turn

disappointing thousands of fans so eager to watch good and proper tennis. Sunday's men's final could hardly be called a good match. Data show that the problem is more on the men's side, according to a recent article in *The New York Times*. Perhaps the calendar for Wimbledon needs to be changed so that players are fresh and ready to show their best playing skills at the world's premier tennis event.

ALISTAIR MCGOWAN, Bengaluru

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the athletics story, "Rain spoils Shankar's London dream" (July 18, 2017, Sport), the height that Shankar cleared was wrongly published as 2.33 m in the results column in the early editions. The correct figure is 2.23 m, as given in the text.

In a report on motorsports, "Samrat snatches early lead" (July 18, 2017, Sport), Sandeep's timing should have been 2:45:26 and not 2:46:35 as published.

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THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | K. ULLAS KARANTH

'We are slow to adopt science for conservation'

India's leading tiger conservationist says the government should get out of the business of surveys and leave it to scientists and researchers

JACOB KOSHY

K. Ullas Karanth, an expert on tigers, is the director of the Wildlife Conservation Society-India Programme. In the early 1990s, Mr. Karanth pioneered the technique of using camera traps as a method to get an estimate of India's tiger population. Despite having been on the boards of several government organisations, he's also a trenchant critic of government's conservation policies. In an interview, he explains why India shouldn't be complacent about the success of 'Project Tiger' and how several areas of wildlife conservation in the country continue to be neglected.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has estimated a rise in the number of tigers killed in the first half of this year compared to the same period last year. Is it a matter of concern?

■ As a rough estimate, there are, say, 3,000 tigers in India, 1,000 of whom are females capable of breeding. They breed on an average once in three years and produce a litter of three. You are adding about 750-1000 tigers a year. Assuming that it's a stable population, it should also roughly be the number (of tigers) dying. Moreover, we only detect a fraction of them (during census). Many die and you don't even know they are dead.

The real concern is whether these deaths are due to poaching and if they are being killed inside protected zones where the breeding is taking place. This has to be monitored carefully with rigorous methods, and, unfortunately, the government authorities don't do a good job.

Right now, at least in government circles, there's a great sense of optimism about the rise in tiger numbers. The latest government figures estimate 2,226 tigers, which translates to 60% of the world's tiger population of about 3,890.

■ What is the basis for this optimism? When we started 'Project Tiger' in the 1970s, we were supposed to have

had about 2,000 tigers and after fifty years you have 3,000. Sure, it's better than other countries but you can't say you've done a great job.

What in your estimate would be a 'great job'? Is there an ideal figure that we should have?

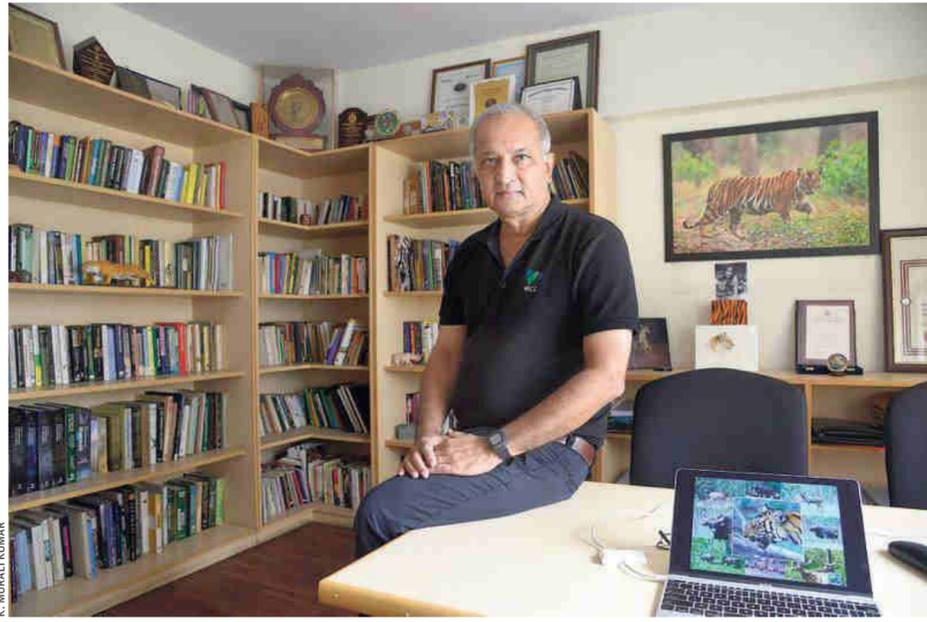
■ We have roughly 3,00,000 sq. km of forest suitable for tigers and we have only about 10% of it capable of holding them naturally. This can be much higher...

Last year the government announced plans to double the tiger count by 2022...

■ These are unrealistic statements. If we haven't doubled them in the last 30 years, how can it be done in five years? It's loose talk. To even begin achieving that, we have to expand the protected area network. It can't be done by merely declaring areas where there are no tigers as tiger reserves. Several tiger reserves have no tigers. The NTCA (under the Environment Ministry) has become a bureaucracy, it seems.

We have done a good job in channelling more funds and putting in sincere efforts for tiger conservation compared to other Asian countries. This was specific to the 1970s and '80s when there was no money. Now things are actually quite easy. Rural incomes have gone up... Hardcore poachers don't hunt as much as they used to.

As someone now outside



K. MURALI KUMAR

the government system, what do you think should be done?

■ Well, I don't consider myself outside the system because I was on the National Wildlife Board and NTCA for many years and I have tried to change the way they function but I have failed. It's an extremely rigid bureaucracy.

For one, we are spending too much money in too few sectors and that's generally true of wildlife conservation in India, not only of tiger conservation. Some tiger reserves have budgets of ₹ 10 crore when the job can be done in ₹ 2 crore. This (lopsided funding) attracts the worst elements of bureaucracy to come here. Places like Bandipur, Nagarhole and Ranthambore reserves – these spectacular ones – are examples of those flush with funds and boast large tiger habitats.

You need money for, say, relocation and resettling of foresters; but, beyond that,

spending money on areas such as procuring water for reserves (during droughts) and mangroves. This needs to be fixed first.

Recently, the government has got the go-ahead from the National Board of Wildlife to interlink the Ken and Betwa rivers by building a dam and a canal. This will inundate a portion of the tiger reserve but the government holds that there are no tigers in that particular stretch of forest and that the water needs of the drought-prone Bundelkhand region have to be kept in mind too.

■ We have 90% of the country for river interlinking. I'm saying: please think carefully before you undertake major projects in the remaining 10%. The fact is we have tapped out our hydropower potential and are going on developing more and more... Reserves like Panna are

We are the 10th largest economy in the world. We should have at least 5,000-10,000 tigers and not pat our back with 3,000

among our last few. We need more water-use efficiency and cannot just dam every river.

So having a dam over there is a threat to the tiger habitat?

■ Well, it won't wipe out the tigers there but the proposed reservoir is massive and Panna is among the few good reserves that we have. So we should have seen if there were alternative locations or if a suitable alternative site could have been established to compensate for the loss of forests.

Is poaching as big a threat to tigers – and other wildlife – as it was a few

decades ago?

■ Law enforcement has worked to an extent, else we wouldn't have had any tigers left. However this efficiency is again uneven. In the Northeast, for instance, law enforcement is practically non-existent. This is due to a number of social and cultural factors. The attention should be over there rather than pumping more and more money into reserves where there are enough resources in place.

In places such as Kaziranga, we have poachers who come in with AK-47s. In some States like Madhya Pradesh, forest officers even today don't have a right to bear arms... this is ridiculous. What are they going to do with sticks? While the threat of poaching has dramatically reduced, in the east of India it's still as bad as it was in the 1980s.

Is it because government has failed to step up

SINGLE FILE

Let the 'game' begin

'Game of Thrones' will remain a media and cultural fixture for some time

G. SAMPATH

A *New Yorker* cartoon was doing the rounds on social media on July 16, the day the much-awaited Season 7 of the TV show *Game of Thrones* premiered worldwide. It showed two women in a cemetery, standing amid a bunch of headstones.

The epitaph on one tombstone reads, "Chantal K Lolos: Finished Mad Men and Gilmore Girls, halfway through Friday Night Lights." Another says, "Louisa Lee Gomez: Was on 2nd-to-last episode of Breaking Bad." A third one: "Leelah Freemie: Just Getting Into Game of Thrones." Contemplating these inscriptions, one of the women says thoughtfully, "They still had so much TV ahead of them."

If this cartoon is funny, it is because it only slightly exaggerates an obvious truth.

In the 21st century, for a great many people, it is TV that makes life worth living. And for these entertainment junkies, *Game of Thrones* (GoT) is ultimate television. HBO's adaptation of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series of epic fantasy novels made its debut in 2011. Over six seasons, it has grown from strength to strength, steadily widening its fan base, and setting new viewership records. The Season 7 premiere this week temporarily crashed the HBO website, with more than 10.5 million fans logging in.

GoT has devoted fans who wake up at six in the morning to catch the first episode of a new season. And there are those who shut themselves in a room for three days so they can binge watch six seasons over one long weekend. It has turned millions of otherwise law-abiding citizens into rampaging pirates, gleefully downloading content from file-sharing platforms. And these are people for whom the word 'season' signifies not so much a weather pattern as a fresh dose of their favourite entertainment.

Widespread craze

What explains this mania? Is it the escapism? Is it the show's harkening back to the fairy-tale world of our childhood – a world of kings and queens and castles and dragons? Is it the extraordinary production values, amply aided by the best that CGI can offer?

While the reasons behind its incredible appeal would continue to be debated, the craze is widespread enough to make GoT a global media and cultural fixture for some time to come. Harvard, for instance, has recently started offering a GoT-inspired course on myths and the medieval universe. Management experts are publishing articles on leadership lessons that women can learn from the likes of Cersei and Daenerys. And GoT has made a significant contribution to both tourist revenue and foreign investment in the countries where it has been shot – from Croatia to Spain, Ireland and Morocco.

And happily, for all these fans and the billion-dollar industry that feeds on the worldwide fandom, the latest season, on the evidence of episode 1, looks set to meet, if not surpass, their expectations. The opening episode ends with the insurgent queen posing a question, "Shall we begin?" Taking it as an invitation, a worldwide chorus has already responded with a resounding "Yes!"



CONCEPTUAL
Earnings power
FINANCE

The ability of a business to generate earnings from its core operating activities. Since earnings eventually translate into free cash flow for the owners, earnings power is a useful concept for investors trying to value a business. To arrive at the earnings power of a business, investors usually take a look at the historical earnings record of the business and then adjust it for the effect of extraordinary, one-off items – thus getting a fair idea of its probable future earnings. Adjusted earnings can thus present a better picture to investors of the ability of a business to sustain its earnings record.

MORE ON THE WEB

Gopalkrishna Gandhi vs. Venkaiah Naidu
<http://bit.ly/VPpoll>

NOTEBOOK
Diary of a dangerous month

Sights and sounds from the Darjeeling agitation

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

As we went up the Hill Cart Road to Darjeeling, wondering when the monsoon would arrive, a fellow traveller reminded us: the weather and the politics in the hills can change in an instant. And even though it was hard to miss the underlying tension, with posters of "Gorkhaland Banam Bangal" (Gorkhaland versus Bengal) along the picturesque road, on the surface there seemed to be a semblance of normalcy.

After the violence on June 8 that happened even as the West Bengal government held its Cabinet meeting, there was a call by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) to boycott government offices. Shops and commercial establishments, however, were still open, with tourists freely moving. Things took a turn for the worse after June 15 when the GJM, angered by the raid on its chief Bimal Gurung's house, called for an indefinite shutdown.

But more than the chro-

nology of events that led to the deadlocked, Darjeeling presented images, sounds and anecdotes that gave a sense of the anger brewing in the hills. The most haunting of all were images of smoke billowing from burnt police vehicles on Leborg Cart Road; bloodstains that could not be washed away after brief spells of rain; and men and young boys with faces covered taking on the security forces with slings and stones.

There were other sights and sounds too: the slogans in support of a separate State renting the air at Chowk Bazar, suggesting it was no manufactured display of organisational might but a spontaneous outpouring of anger; boys from reputed Darjeeling boarding schools narrating how from the school windows they saw a man being stabbed and describing the burning sensation in their eyes after tear-gas shells were fired; the courage and determination of a young journal-

ist, in her mid-twenties, who refused to leave though the car she was travelling in and most of her video equipment were set on fire; public offices, being torched, and reduced to embers. Older folks in Darjeeling talked of how the situation had been in the 1980s and why they were now ready to face the ordeal of another shutdown, provided a "real solution" emerged.

We heard a young police officer explaining to a group of journalists how society gets the police it deserves, pointing to the injuries sustained by women constables in a violent stand-off.

When we were leaving the hills, the roads were deserted; only a few people, mostly daily wage earners, were trudging down the 70 km stretch from Darjeeling to Siliguri. Suddenly, we saw a vehicle with a local licence number. The wind-shield was smashed. The owners said they did not plan to have it repaired, at least not till peace returned.

policing in these regions?

■ That and also due to cultural practices. A vast majority of the people hunt and also management systems don't have adequate control... in Nagaland, as it's well-known, government officials have to pay protection money to rebel groups. In such a social environment, how can wildlife conservation be prioritised? They have legal power but no effective power.

Do you think too much money is being spent on tiger conservation and not on other wildlife, say leopards?

■ Leopards are smaller (than tigers) and spread over a much-wider area. I would disagree with "too much" money being spent on tigers but there is certainly a lack of attention to several other key species. These include, for instance, wolves and the buster because they don't share a tiger habitat. There's some truth to it but not a black and white situation.

Is it ever possible that we would go back to less than 1000 tigers given developmental pressures in India? Are those days well past?

■ My own sense is that we are well past those days. When I was growing up in the 1950s in the Western Ghats, tigers were gone. You wouldn't see a track... the pressures were immense. Wage labour was ₹ 3 for a man, there was no protein in diets and people hunted because they needed meat, logging was rampant. Now the scenario has dramatically changed. The number of people dependent on land has come down, wages have improved, there are other sources of meat. You have chicken and don't have to walk miles to hunt a civet. Today, there are developmental pressures, such as

the Ken-Betwa project, but development has also served to reduce pressures on wildlife.

However, that said, we are the 10th largest economy in the world, so much science... we should have at least 5,000-10,000 tigers and not pat our backs with 3,000.

What is a major obstacle to achieving this?

■ That government is slow to adopt good science for conservation purposes. I invented the technique of using camera traps for counting tigers in 1993 and it's only now that it has become a standard practice. It took a commission, chaired by the Prime Minister, where forest officials were ordered to stop the previous methods of estimation (such as counting pugmarks). However, it is still not being done the right way. They combine data from incomparable data sets. Basically, the government should get out of the business of surveys and leave it to scientists and researcher institutions. The other key hurdle is the lack of access to data. Organisations like the Wildlife Institute of India (an autonomous institute under the Environment Ministry and based in Dehradun) have unbelievable amount of money given to a dozen scientists. I know this as I used to be on the Governing Board. They end up monopolising all research, from bustards to tigers... nothing substantial seems to result from it.

However, researchers from non-governmental, reputable institutions such as the National Centre for Biological Sciences and the Indian Institute of Science face great difficulties to get permissions (to visit parts of forest) for research. Recently, a young scientist from IISc collected a dead skunk, or a similar animal, and he was arrested. It's not just me alone but there is a general barrier to research.

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 19, 1967

Varsity teaching in local languages

The Government of India has decided that regional languages should be the media of instruction in universities and the programme for this should be completed within five years. A sum of Rs. 18 crores has been set apart from a scheme to translate all books on scientific and technical subjects into Indian languages. Of this Rs. 5 crores will be for Hindi books and Rs. 1 crore each for other regional languages. The Union Cabinet, which at its meeting to-day [July 18] decided in principle to switch over to regional languages as media of instruction at all levels of education, will adopt a formal resolution incorporating its decision on August 14, one hundred years after the demand for regional languages being made the media of instruction was voiced in the country. The Union Education Minister, Dr. Triguna Sen, is expected to announce the Cabinet decision in the Lok Sabha to-morrow [July 19, New Delhi]. The Cabinet also decided in principle that linguistic minorities should be given all facilities and encouragement to start their own educational institutions. The Union Education Ministry will shortly begin to work out details for a smooth switch-over. Dr. Sen, it is understood, is keen on ensuring that standards of education are not affected by the new policy.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 19, 1917

New Secretary of State.

The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw E. Wacha, President, Bombay Presidency Association, has sent cablegrams [July 18] to Mr. Lloyd George and to Mr. Montague on the appointment of the latter as the Secretary of State for India. The cable to the former expresses great gratification of the Association at the appointment. In the cable to Mr. Montague the Association congratulates him and expresses hope that India's political progress will be substantially advanced under his guidance.

Commenting on Mr. Montague's appointment, the "Times of India" says: He has visited India, knows many of its leading men so that by comparison with most Secretaries of State he starts at a great advantage. On the other hand he has the disadvantage of having committed himself in advance to opinion which may lead more ardent reformers in this country to expect too much of him. It is particularly noticeable that only last week he spoke during the debate on Mesopotamia Commission when he urged that a policy was wanted of greater responsibility on the part of the Indian Government towards the people of India and consequently less responsibility at home.

DATA POINT

In the line of duty

A total of 297 Army and 30 Air Force personnel have been killed in the three years, 2014-16, while performing their duty. Here is a services-wise look at the number of those killed and injured

	Army		Navy		Air Force	
	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured
2014	77	118	0	0	13	0
2015	109	107	0	0	0	0
2016	111	111	0	0	17	0

SOURCE: RAJYA SABHA QUESTIONS