



Uncertainty ahead

Nawaz Sharif's disqualification could set up a spell of political instability in Pakistan

The disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from holding public office, by the Pakistan Supreme Court in the Panama Papers case, leaves a huge political vacuum in the country. This is the third time Mr. Sharif's premiership has been cut short. If his first two terms were ended by the country's powerful military, first forcing him to resign and then overthrowing his government in a coup, this time it was through a formal legal process. The Supreme Court invoked a controversial Article of the Constitution that requires politicians to be "honest" and "righteous". The court ruled that Mr. Sharif was dishonest in failing to disclose in his 2013 election nomination papers his association with a UAE-based company and therefore was unfit to continue in office. The court also referred money-laundering allegations against Mr. Sharif and his children to the National Accountability Bureau, the anti-corruption regulator. While Opposition politicians, especially the Tehreek-e-Insaf's Imran Khan who filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the Sharif family, have welcomed the ruling as an endorsement of accountability, there are some worrying legal and procedural questions about the Supreme Court's decision. For instance, should it have waited for the full investigation into the corruption allegations before disqualifying him?

At the practical level, the focus is on whether Mr. Sharif's exit will fuel political instability. A seasoned politician with immense popularity and experience in dealing with the military, he upheld his authority in his third term despite sustained pressure from the generals. There were occasional flashpoints, but the military largely refrained from showing its hand. It had chosen to exercise its powers over the executive indirectly, to avoid public disenchantment of the sort that undermined its image during the years of Pervez Musharraf's presidency. Over the last four years Pakistan has had a spell of relative economic stability, an easing of the electricity crisis and a drop in terror attacks. But now that Mr. Sharif is gone, it is not clear how the military will deal with any resultant political instability or executive frailty. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz has quickly named Shahbaz Sharif, the former Prime Minister's brother and the Chief Minister of Punjab, as his successor to ensure a smooth transition as well as to stop its rivals from gaining from a prolonged crisis. But the younger Sharif, who had a run-in with the military last year, has big shoes to fill at a challenging time. With Pakistan going to the polls next year and the opposition, mainly Mr. Khan's PTI which is in effect the king's party, trying to turn corruption into a galvanising electoral issue, Shahbaz Sharif will take charge while the country is virtually in campaign mode. All this is happening at a time when Pakistan is coming under increased pressure from the United States to act against militants, and while border tensions with India and Afghanistan continue to remain high. Even with his brother's backroom support, Shahbaz Sharif will have his plate full.

Congress in disarray

The desertion of six MLAs reveals a deeper malaise in Gujarat's main opposition party

More than three decades after it last won an outright majority in the Assembly election in Gujarat, the Congress was tipped by many to make 2017 a breakthrough year in the State. Its rival, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, no longer boasts a strong regional leader: Narendra Modi moved over as Prime Minister, and his successors, Anandiben Patel and Vijay Rupani, have not managed to step out of his shadow. Also, after five consecutive victories, the anti-incumbency factor hangs heavily over the BJP. But, as before, the Congress does not seem to have the stomach for a head-to-head fight with the BJP in Mr. Modi's home ground. The first hints of a crisis began innocuously enough: with the Congress Leader of the Opposition in the State, Shankersinh Vaghela, unfollowing party vice-president Rahul Gandhi and senior leader Ahmed Patel on Twitter. What looked like a pressure tactic to earn nomination as the Congress's chief ministerial candidate soon turned into open defiance, and eventually ended in a parting of ways. Mr. Vaghela, who joined the Congress in 1998 after deserting the BJP in 1996, seems to have resented the influence wielded by Mr. Patel, a confidant of the Nehru-Gandhi family, within the Congress organisational structure. Once he quit the Congress, the stage was set for an open revolt when Mr. Patel was re-nominated for a Rajya Sabha seat from Gujarat. As six members of the legislature deserted the party, the Congress was in panic mode. In normal circumstances a party in the opposition would not be alarmed at the switching of sides by a few MLAs. But the Congress, which lays great store by Mr. Patel's backroom manoeuvring skills, evidently thinks it cannot afford to see him defeated, and flew the remaining 44 MLAs to Karnataka. Whether or not the Congress managed to portray the BJP as a party poaching on its MLAs, it sent out the message that its MLAs are susceptible to offers, in whatever form, from the other side.

But beyond the election of Mr. Patel, what should worry the Congress is the longer-term impact of the desertion from its ranks. With the Assembly election due by the end of the year, the party needs to galvanise its cadres and functionaries. But over the years, Mr. Modi seems to have succeeded in portraying a cloak of invincibility; he is now a larger-than-life figure in Gujarat, after having served as Chief Minister for a record 12 consecutive years. Long periods out of power can breed a sense of helplessness and inability in a party. In looking too closely at the here-and-now of the Rajya Sabha election, and not enough at the big picture of the approaching Assembly election, the Congress seems to have missed a trick in Gujarat.

Pakistan sticks to a sad tradition

Nawaz Sharif is clearly a flawed man but the manner of his removal from office is even more flawed



HUSAIN HAQQANI

The decision by Pakistan's Supreme Court to disqualify Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif reaffirms the iron law of Pakistani politics: a politician can amass wealth and engage in corruption only as long as he does not challenge the ascendance of the country's powerful national security establishment. Although Mr. Sharif has ostensibly been disqualified over the so-called Panama Papers, which exposed holders of offshore bank accounts, the verdict against him has little to do with the revelations in the Panama Papers.

Mr. Sharif and his family have definitely expanded their assets several fold since his entry into politics more than three decades ago as a protégé of the Islamist military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq, and the former chief of the notorious Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). But he was not put on trial for corruption and convicted. Instead, the Supreme Court acted politically, as it often does, and created a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) that included military intelligence representatives. The JIT's job was ostensibly to uncover the trail of the Sharifs' wealth and the Supreme Court used the JIT's findings to determine that Mr. Sharif could no longer fulfil the constitutionally mandated qualifications for his office.

When he ended Martial Law, General Zia had added several provisions to Pakistan's Constitution, some of which related to moral qualifications for membership of parliament. Their purpose was to give the all-powerful national se-



GETTY IMAGES

curity establishment a constitutional instrument to control the political process even after the military's withdrawal from direct political intervention. Those provisions have finally been invoked to rid Pakistan of a meddlesome Prime Minister.

Articles of expediency

During the 1990s, civilian Prime Ministers who failed to toe the line in key policy areas could be dismissed by the President, who was always a reliable establishment figure. After three dismissals, twice of the army's bete noire Benazir Bhutto and once of Mr. Sharif, the civilians got rid of Article 58-2(b) of the Constitution that authorised the President to unilaterally dissolve Parliament and dismiss Prime Ministers. The absence of the establishment's safety valve paved the way for General Pervez Musharraf's military coup in 1999.

Aware that the 21st century is less conducive to direct military takeovers than preceding decades, Gen Musharraf reintroduced the notion of presidential dismissal before sharing power with civilians again. The civilians dispensed with it again in a consensus constitutional package in 2008. Since then, Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution, inserted by Zia and ironically kept alive with the support of Mr. Sharif and Pakistan's religious

parties, have been cited as the means whereby the establishment can keep politicians on the straight and narrow.

In its judgment disqualifying Mr. Sharif, the Supreme Court has found him in violation of Article 62 (1)(f) that demands that members of Parliament be "sagacious, righteous, non-profligate, honest and Ameen". The last of these, "Ameen", meaning 'the keeper of trust' is one of the attributes of Prophet Muhammad, which by definition is a hard standard to meet for any Muslim who deems the Prophet 'the most perfect' human being. Ordinary mortals can easily be found in violation of that noble standard.

By claiming the right to disqualify any elected representative of his/her office for not meeting such exacting standards of probity, the Pakistani Supreme Court has arrogated to itself the authority similar to that of Iran's Guardian Council, which vets all candidates for elective office. The Council routinely disqualifies politicians on grounds that they are not sufficiently dedicated to Islamic values.

Setting a precedent

The disqualification of Mr. Sharif sets the precedent for future judicial coups. That does not mean Mr. Sharif has not amassed wealth beyond explainable means or does not

have property across the world that might have been acquired through questionable transactions. But corruption must be dealt with by legal means, not on the say of rival politicians or intelligence operatives operating without being subject to laws of evidence.

If legally admissible evidence of corruption had existed, there would have been a trial, not direct intervention by the Supreme Court, which should only be the court of final appeal in criminal matters. So what is really going on? Pakistan is simply keeping its sad tradition that disallows politicians to ever be voted out of office by the voters who elected them to that office in the first place.

In the last seventy years, all Pakistani Prime Ministers have either been assassinated, dismissed or forced to resign by heads of state with military backing, or deposed in coups d'etat. Mr. Sharif is the second Prime Minister, after Yousuf Raza Gilani, to be sent home by an activist Supreme Court amidst an orchestrated media furor. Ironically, Mr. Sharif was installed as Prime Minister in 1990 by the military in intrigue that was exposed decades later. That intrigue involved the army creating the multi-party alliance, Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (JI), through the ISI and funding Mr. Sharif and others with money taken from corrupt businessmen. At that time, the Pakistani establishment deemed Benazir Bhutto 'a security risk' over her avowed desire to change attitudes towards India and the rest of South Asia.

Mr. Sharif fell out of the army's favour when he decided to assert himself in the conduct of foreign and national security policy after becoming Prime Minister. He was ousted once by the President and a second time by the army chief in a coup. Elected for a third time, he has now been sent packing

through the Supreme Court. He is clearly a flawed man but the manner of his removal from office is even more flawed.

The India connection

During the Panama Papers saga, Mr. Sharif was accused in social media of being an Indian agent and rumours swirled of his alleged investments in India and 'secret partnerships' with Indian businessmen. This reveals the real cause of anxiety with him, which could not be rumours of corruption because that did not bother the establishment when it initially supported him.

The role Mr. Sharif played in the late 1980s, as the establishment's Cat's Paw, has now been taken over by cricketer-turned politician, Imran Khan. There is no guarantee, however, that if Mr. Khan ever comes to power he would not meet a similar fate when he insists on making policy instead of being content with having office and implementing the establishment's prescriptions. Just like the IJI-ISI intrigue was fully uncovered decades later, we will probably find out details of the intrigue leading to Mr. Sharif's ouster several years later too.

Unfortunately, Mr. Sharif's ouster is unlikely to stem the tide of widespread corruption in Pakistan. It might also not be the end of Mr. Sharif, who could possibly win another election in his Punjab base. But the episode proves again that Pakistan is far from being a democracy where the law takes its course, institutions work within their specified spheres and elected leaders are voted in or out by the people.

Husain Haqqani, Director for South and Central Asia at the Hudson Institute in Washington DC, was Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States from 2008 to 2011

High premium, doubtful returns

It is not clear how Nitish Kumar's shifting alliances will give him an electoral edge



SANJAY KUMAR

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar may think that his political move of first resigning from his grand alliance (Mahagathabandhan) with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress and then very quickly joining hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to form a new government is a master stroke. He may have thought that breaking away from the RJD by adopting the high moral ground on the issue of corruption would go in his favour, boosting his image as a leader who believes in no nonsense politics. He has also managed to retain his chief ministership by forming a new alliance with the BJP. Assuming that there are no hiccups, the ties could continue even after 2020 when the next Assembly election is due.

What Mr. Kumar has failed to realise is that his image as an honest leader may have been boosted

nationally, but his move towards the BJP within hours of breaking up with the RJD has also projected him as being an absolute opportunist leader. His two widely acclaimed positive traits, of honesty and integrity, are turning out to be a liability for him. His image is of a clean politician, and he may seem to be crumbling under its weight. What he has not realised is that in his commitment to fight against corruption, he has ended up making a compromise on the issue of secularism which is no less dangerous than corruption for democratic governance.

A different politics

The politics of Bihar is a bit different from the politics of Delhi. It may be possible to mobilise a sizeable number of urban voters with a clean image and we have seen that happening in Delhi in recent years. But this may not be possible in a primarily rural and caste-based society such as Bihar where identity plays an important role in electoral mobilisation. At this moment, Mr. Kumar is certainly the most popular leader in the State, popularly known as "Sushasan babu" but having such an image is not enough



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

to win election. Even when the Mahagathabandhan contested the election under his leadership, the electoral performance of his own party, the Janata Dal (United), was poor when compared to the performance of the RJD.

Contesting an equal number of seats, the RJD managed to win 80 with 44.2% votes per seats contested, while the JD(U) managed to win 71 seats with 40.5% votes per seats contested. The Congress managed to win 27 seats contested with 39.3% votes per seat contested. Mr. Kumar has been the Bihar's Chief Minister since 2005, with his success linked to political alliances. While the 2005 and 2010

victories were in alliance with the BJP, his win in 2015 was a result of the Mahagathabandhan. The JD(U) was a major partner in 2005 and 2010, winning 88 and 115 seats, respectively. In the votes polled per seat contested, the BJP was only 2 percentage points behind the JD(U), while in 2010, the vote share of the BJP per seat contested was higher by 1 percentage point.

The inability of the JD(U) to attract votes which could win it an election is mainly because the party does not have a core base. The Yadavs, and to a great extent Muslims, have been core supporters of the RJD, with more than 65-70% of Yadavs having voted for the RJD in different elections. The two groups, roughly 16-17% each of the population, form a sizeable vote bank for the RJD. The BJP may only have the upper castes (15% of the population) as its core base in Bihar but they have always stood behind the party; 85% of them voted for the BJP during the 2014 Lok Sabha and 2015 Assembly elections.

The repercussions

Lok Janshakti Party leader Ram Vilas Paswan has a strong presence

among the 16% Dalit voters in Bihar. The two non-Yadav upper Other Backward Classes, the Kurmis and the Koeris, are the only core supporters of the JD(U) but their numbers are not enough – together they constitute roughly 5-6% – to give the JD(U) an advantage over other parties. The lower OBCs, who roughly account for 25% population, are a divided lot but in the recent Lok Sabha election, shifted towards the BJP. Many of them did vote for the Mahagathabandhan in 2015. With Mr. Kumar forming a new alliance with the BJP, large numbers of them may tilt towards the new alliance. But how much he gains from this remains to be seen. I wonder whether even the upper castes, unhappy with Mr. Kumar for breaking the alliance with the BJP earlier, would be willing to vote for him in future elections. All in all, Mr. Kumar has been able to save his chair, but the premium he has paid is huge. The damage it has done to Opposition unity is even bigger.

Sanjay Kumar is a professor and currently Director, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) Delhi. The views expressed are personal

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 Bihar wicket

It is ironic that Bihar from where Jayprakash Narayan's vision of a total revolution took off is today a quagmire of political intrigues triggered by unscrupulous power brokers ("The curious case of Nitish Kumar", July 29). What a fall for Mr. Kumar who has shown his true colours. As far as the Congress's Rahul Gandhi is concerned, his epiphanic outbursts past the event are amusing. If he knew, as he now claims, about what was coming, what was he doing to avert the crisis? The political naivety of Mr. Gandhi has cost the Congress heavily. The BJP's strategists have all the more reason to exult in the vein of *veni, vidi, vici* with the Nitishes everywhere giving them more than a helping hand.

SATISH C. AIKANT, Mussoorie, Uttarakhand

Sober and erudite

The interview by Opposition nominee for the vice presidency, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, has revealed himself to be an equanimous and enlightened personality who speaks with the courage of conviction ("Assert the right to criticise, but do it with courtesy", July 28). While accepting that patriotism and nationalism are great phenomena he draws a line when they become hyper-varieties. It is a refreshing thought especially when the term 'patriotism' has become a much maligned one by both rightists and ultra-leftists. He has no quarrel with 'patriotism' unless it turns out as 'hatritism' – a term famously coined by the

■ Nitish Kumar's walking out of Bihar's Grand Alliance extinguishes the last flicker of hope in the secular camp to take on the BJP-led NDA in the 2019 general election. Opposition leaders across the spectrum were looking up to Mr. Kumar to repeat the V.P.

Singh magic but their hopes have been dashed. With Rahul Gandhi still to find acceptability as a leader of any potential grouping, Mr. Kumar was the ideal choice due his "impeccable" image. Whether the break-up is a masterstroke or a huge miscalculation, only time will tell.

P. ARIHANTH, Secunderabad

Choosing the VP

As a reader of *The Hindu* for the past 45 years, I was appalled by the article by Peter Ronald deSouza ("The Vice President's mien", July 24). That one of the vice presidential candidates is the grandson of Rajaji and Gandhiji has no relevance. Is he saying that the grandsons of great men are great and those of anti-socials will be anti-socials? The way one leads one's life is purely based on the individual capability. If the writer is so charged about the need for a consensus candidate, he should pose the question to Congress leader Sonia Gandhi. What prevented her from getting off her pedestal and discussing the issue with the Prime Minister? The writer's attack on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is strange. Does he know the humanitarian aid the RSS has been involved in in times of distress? By allowing publishing such articles, *The Hindu* is giving credence to the talk that it is anti-BJP. There should be equal opportunity for

interviewee himself. AYYASERI RAVEENDRANATH, Aramulla, Kerala

someone from the Opposition to issue a rebuttal. SARANGAN RAMASWAMY, Bengaluru

The abortion law

Deficiencies in the abortion law have put a 10-year-old pregnant child through the grind of the judicial system ("Not just a question of weeks", July 29). This is not the first incident of its kind and, as things stand, will not be the last. In the past few years, there has been a string of cases of women approaching courts to terminate their pregnancies beyond the 20-week limit. Judicial pronouncements in these cases have also been somewhat inconsistent. In a country where violence against woman is so common, it is our laws that are failing them. How many more women and children must suffer before our legislators understand that our abortion laws need to change? SAUMYA SHARMA, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Washington" (July 30) and "5 more quarries to be tapped for water" (July 29, all Tamil Nadu editions), show that there is a gross mismanagement of traditional water management systems in Tamil Nadu and Chennai city. It is a paradox that after the massive flood of 2015, the city is now in the grip of a punishing drought that continues well into 2017. And it is unlikely that the monsoon in 2017 will help the city tide over the crisis. As a region wholly dependent on a good northeast monsoon, planners cannot afford to be complacent. Most of the innumerable dams and irrigation channels in the State remain bone dry or have reached dead storage levels. One cannot blame a poor monsoon season either.

For a pot of water The series of reports, "MMC hostels go without water" (July 30), "A moi virunthu in

Tamil Nadu is a top groundwater exploiter whereby the extraction of groundwater outstrips recharge. Therefore the conservation of groundwater needs to be given topmost importance. There needs to be constant vigil over and maintenance of small water bodies which are in abundance across the State. This should be carried out through the year and not be announced as a hurried response to a prevailing drought situation. Waterbodies should be viewed in a comprehensive manner which is extremely important in Chennai. Waning interest in rain harvesting in Chennai is most unfortunate. RAM SUBRAMANIAM, Chennai

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

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: In the report headlined "CAG spots weaknesses in missile defence system" (July 29, 2017) the reference to *Bharat Electricals Limited (BEL)* should be corrected to read *Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)*.

The second deck headline of a Life page story, "Colour-blind flatworms can still choose between colours" (July 29, 2017), was: "NCBS research provides clues to genes and molecules linked to eye regeneration." It should have read *inStem* research instead of *NCBS* research.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

Anatomy of the Trump presidency

It is an indictment of the U.S. political system, which gives far too much power to the executive



SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM

In an earlier article in this newspaper ("Understanding the Trump phenomenon," August 5, 2016), I suggested that it was necessary to take Donald Trump's candidacy and its implications more seriously than many were doing then. Six months into the Trump presidency, the American media remains fascinated with the new "reality show" that has entered the White House.

As every small skirmish, move and tweet is given inordinate scrutiny and attention, it is easy however to lose sight of the big picture. What have we, in fact, learnt about the United States in the months since November 2016? How is this new information going to be useful in understanding the future path of the U.S., as well as its ongoing relationship with the rest of the world? Here are some suggestions and speculations.

The one-third advantage

The first point to be taken note of is that, despite the widespread disapproval of Mr. Trump in the media and the political and intellectual classes, he still has an approval rating in excess of 35% with the American public. Given Mr. Trump's rather erratic conduct so far, there seems no reason to believe that this rating will fall much further, no matter what he does. A small part of this can be accounted for by "legitimism", that is, the need to support an authority figure. But far more important is the suggestion that over a third of the American public is currently made up of inflexible, hardcore right-wing and populist elements. Racism surely plays a role here too. The presidency can be won for the Republicans by adding roughly 15% of votes to this core constituency. In contrast, the Democratic Party does not have a solid base that measures up to this demographically. For them, to drum up numbers in the high-40% or more is thus a more difficult task. As American demography evolves, this could change, but only by the 2030s.

Second, the American electoral system as such is irrevocably broken, and yet there is no collective desire to fix it. In 2000, George W. Bush lost



Working the crowd: U.S. President Donald Trump at an event in Youngstown, Ohio, last week. • GETTY IMAGES

the popular vote to Al Gore by about 5,40,000 and yet won the election (this was the first time that it had happened since 1888). In 2016, Donald Trump then lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by a far larger margin of over three million votes. Still, currently there is no broad move afoot to reform the system, on the part of either major party, or to ensure that this does not happen again. This is in part because of American cultural hubris, which does not allow them to admit that their electoral system is far inferior to, say, that in use in France.

A third point concerns Mr. Trump's domestic agenda. Too much attention has been focused so far on the trench warfare regarding health care. So far, it has proven impossible to replace 'Obamacare', an ironical fact given that many of those who would have been adversely affected probably voted for Mr. Trump. At the same time, Mr. Trump has already placed one conservative Supreme Court judge, Neil Gorsuch, and may have a chance to effect still more changes. He has significantly turned back the clock on environmental legislation. By 2020, he will have effected many other major domestic policy changes in one or the other fashion. Again, this is an indictment

of the American political system, which gives far too much power to the executive, and even to a President who has lost the popular vote.

American power abroad

The fourth point is more crucial still, and concerns the projection of American power abroad. Since the end of the Cold War, and the emergence of the unipolar American-dominated system around 1990, speculation has gone on regarding the nature of potential challenges to it. These could come from other state-systems, such as China, or the European Union, or from unclassifiable systems and forms, such as al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. But few could have predicted that the real challenge would come from within the U.S. itself. Yet, this is what has happened. The Trump administration appears singularly unconcerned with, and inept in dealing with, foreign policy, and after all its core internal constituency is firmly 'isolationist' in its inclinations. The State Department is today in utter disarray. The Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, is from the petroleum industry and seems out of his depth; so that rumours even surface regularly of his imminent resignation.

Based on the past six months, it

seems likely that by 2020, the systematic projection of American power on a global scale would have shrunk considerably.

Whatever the direct reality of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections, there can be no doubt that this outcome suits the Putin regime well. The Russian view appears to be that any political system that is naïve enough to be manipulated from the outside deserves what it gets anyway. It could even be argued perhaps that the fresh emergence of a multipolar world is no bad thing. A system largely managed by an inept U.S. diplomatic apparatus is hardly attractive, even to the U.S.'s erstwhile allies across the Atlantic.

To sum up, the Trump presidency is the product of a flawed political system that will obstinately not admit its flaws. In spite of this, it will surely have a significant impact over the medium term, both domestically and internationally. On the domestic front, it may be possible to turn some things back, depending of course on the outcome of the 2020 U.S. election. Where the impact is likely to be lasting, and not really reversible, is on the international front.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam is Professor of History at UCLA

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

A portrait of the readers' editor as Oliver Twist

Is it possible to work out a systematic relationship between academic research and journalism?



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

It has been a truly exciting journey – writing 250 columns and addressing nearly 5,000 queries from concerned readers. The defining element of this journey has been the chance to reflect on the craft of journalism and its intrinsic value as a public good. There was not a single query that did not force me to look at the fundamentals of the narrative in the public sphere.

I was driven to literature, philosophy, law, ethics and an entire oeuvre of theories on journalism during the past five years to earnestly address the questions from readers, without fear or favour. At a deeper level, I am grateful for this opportunity to look at journalism, which in the words of Gabriel Garcia Marquez is the best job in the world, both from a practitioner's perspective and a readers' perspective.

Australian philosopher David Chalmers in his 1996 book *The Conscious Mind* raised some important questions: what is the relationship between brain and mind? What is the nature of subjective experience? Why do we have vividly felt experiences of the world? Why is there someone home inside our heads? He repudiated the pure neurological explanations of this wonder, which is as complex as time, space and matter.

Brain, mind, consciousness

I have a penchant for analogical learning. I could not resist grafting Mr. Chalmers's idea onto journalism. If the brain is the newspaper, then the mind is the reader and consciousness is the relationship between the newspaper and the reader. It poses the same intractable challenges in understanding as of that in the relationship between brain and mind.

The sheer multitude of possibilities makes the task of a Readers' Editor difficult but also stimulating. A new perspective, which one had never encountered as a reporter, springs up in unsuspecting moments. From the quaint to the commonsensical, from the profound to the commonplace, there is a new light that readers shine on some of the certitudes that guided one's work for decades. The communications I receive have made me less affirmative and more interrogative.

This inquisitiveness has rendered me into

a modern day Oliver Twist. I ask readers: "Please, sir/madam, I want some more." The courage to ask also flows from the fact that the editorial team has been responsive to the voices of readers and has the mental and psychological framework to make amends where necessary, to incorporate good suggestions and to accept criticism as healthy feedback.

The 'Slater village' studies

I also have a request to the editorial team. In the early 1990s, when India opened its economy and the liberalisation process was subjected to competing rhetorical scrutiny, two economists, S. Guhan and J. Jeyaranjan, asked me to look at the lives of the people more closely to understand the efficacy of any policy change. They introduced me to the 'Slater village' studies.

In 1915 Gilbert Slater, professor of Indian economics, felt that one of the tasks of an economist in India is to understand poverty and doing village studies was the right way of doing it. His *Some South Indian Villages* was published in 1918. Economists have been revisiting these villages since then, at regular intervals, to understand agrarian changes. Mr. Guhan, in association with anthropologist Joan Mencher, revisited one of the villages, Iruvelpattu, near Vilupuram in 1982-83, to produce insightful working papers.

Between 2010 and 2012, John Harriss, Jeyaranjan and K. Nagaraj conducted studies in two of the five villages in Tamil Nadu. These studies, also known as longitudinal research, capture the dynamics of change, which are constant and incremental and hence not visible at first glance.

In a very small way, I incorporated this in my journalism. I began visiting Uthiramerur, an Assembly constituency that had the unique distinction of electing a candidate from the winning party for nearly half a century, a record that was broken only in 2016. Being a political reporter, I visited with concerns of a psephologist: Which party has gained ground? What is the equation between the alliance partners? What is the level of anti-incumbency in the constituency? However, I could also see many elements of change documented in the longitudinal research of Mr. Harriss, Mr. Jeyaranjan and Mr. Nagaraj. They were the first to suggest that rural society in Tamil Nadu is in a sense "post-agrarian".

It is possible to work out a systematic relationship between academic field research and journalism?

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

The autonomy façade

It is time for Prasar Bharati to shed its pretence and become officially 'sarkari'

ANURADHA RAMAN



The Prasar Bharati Corporation is neither fish nor fowl, as editorials and opinion articles have pointed out. This mix-up in identity is due to the peculiar existential crisis the corporation finds itself in. Called an autonomous corporation by an act passed in Parliament, it is so only in name as neither the employees – numbering around 27,000 – nor the government have wanted to let go of the 'government's premier broadcaster' tag.

A controversy surfaced again last week when media reports said that the corporation had issued an order to its news divisions asking them to subscribe to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-backed Hindustan Samachar news agency after terminating its long-standing subscriptions of PTI and UNI news services. This was subsequently denied.

'No corporation' movement

A talk with its employees will reveal that they don't want the corporation tag any more. It doesn't mean anything. At the very least, a 'sarkari' tag ensured a government accommodation. The orders were clear. The director general was the boss and his boss was the Information and Broadcasting Minister. Orders flowed from here to Mandi House which housed Doordarshan. Then came the corporation tag in 1997 and it has since then become difficult for the once-formidable All India Radio and Doordarshan to shake the label off. However, it has meant very little on the ground.

This is as good a time as any to debate whether the government needs a channel of its own. There are obstacles to that as recommendations from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) have ruled that State governments cannot have channels of their own. Hence, rules have been flouted as the clamour for a 'sarkari' channel only increases. In this day and time when most media houses are only too willing to do the government's bidding, what will another channel achieve?

Greater role clarity

A 'sarkari' channel would leave the viewer under no illusion when it comes to the source of the news, its veracity and its presentation. A government channel would ensure that the Minister heading it would have the employees under her thumb. When in government, both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have had problems adjusting to the 'autonomous corporation' status, not knowing where to draw the line. Governments headed by both the parties have had senior Indian Information Service officers appointed to keep a close watch on news and other programmes even after Prasar Bharati was declared autonomous. Further, the CEOs at the helm so far have been bureaucrats.

Perhaps it's time to drop the pretence of autonomy and restore the glory to the official broadcaster. Perhaps it's time to bring back 'Her Master's Voice' again.



CONCEPTUAL

Loss aversion PSYCHOLOGY

A phenomenon that causes people to avoid taking risk, even though it could lead to gains that are disproportionately higher than losses. Loss aversion is explained by the fact that losses cause more pain to people than an equivalent amount of profits. It was first proposed by Israeli-American behavioural psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky in 1984. Loss aversion has been attributed to evolutionary reasons that cause human beings to value goods that they already possess more highly than goods that they don't yet possess. Consequently, losses lead to more pain than profits.

MORE ON THE WEB

Video: It's 30 years since Indo-Lanka Accord was signed
http://bit.ly/2waqK5y

SHELF HELP

Of rivalries and evolution

How the Larry Bird-Magic Johnson rivalry spurred the NBA to new heights

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

Sporting rivalries are at their best when the protagonists offer a sharp contrast in their winning ways. The Jackie MacMullan-edited book *When the Game Was Ours* is an ode to the sharpest rivalry in professional basketball, between Larry Bird and Earvin Johnson, whose teams, the Boston Celtics and Los Angeles Lakers shared seven National Basketball Association championships between 1980 and 1987 (the Lakers won four).

Bird and Johnson are co-authors of the book; they recollect how each of them drove the other to competitive heights during their careers – beginning from their college rivalry to their respective stints in the NBA. By the end of their competitive careers, they had become close friends, underlining how much respect they had for each other. The garrulous Johnson, known as 'Magic', was a speedy, effervescent and

restless passing savant who was unusually effective as a point guard despite being 6-feet-and-9-inches tall. Bird offered a sharp contrast – he was introverted, was somewhat slow in his lateral movements, but he was highly effective as a shooter and offered clutch scoring, rebounding and passing skills as a 6-feet-10-inches forward.

There was the other thing that differentiated them – race. 'Magic' was an African American born to an urban worker in the industrial State of Michigan. Bird was born in a poor rural family in French Lick, Indiana. Their rivalry excited a generation of Americans to take to basketball as a vocation and expanded its scope as a spectator sport. The NBA took off as a profitable venture in the 1980s during the Bird-Magic era.

Soon, basketball in the NBA became a globalised sport, with scores of foreign players plying their

trade in the league and millions of viewers glued in to watch the best of the games on TV the world over. Much of it is due to the influence of one show-stopping athlete, Michael Jordan, whose spectacular brand of basketball as a shooting guard gave the NBA the fillip to garner worldwide viewership. The best analysis of his career was provided by David Halberstam in his book, *Playing for Keeps*.

Today, the NBA has reached its epitome of professionalism. It is no longer just a spectator sport that thrives solely on athleticism and superstardom. It has undergone an analytics revolution with the influx of studious statistical-minded talent to aid teams to optimise hiring of talent and in strategising. *Basketball on Paper*, by Dean Oliver, one of the pioneers in basketball analytics, is a good place to begin to understand the 'moneyballisation' of basketball.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 31, 1967

Rice for Kerala: MPs suspend dharna

The 15 Opposition M.Ps. from Kerala to-day [July 30, New Delhi] suspended their sit-in-strike before the residence of the Prime Minister following the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assurance that special efforts would be made to satisfy the food requirements of Kerala. To-day [July 30] was the second day of the M.Ps. agitation (Dharna) demanding adequate rice supplies to Kerala. Earlier in the day, Mr. N. Sanjiva Reddi, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, assured the M.Ps. after talks with the Prime Minister, that something concrete would be done in the matter. It was made clear to them that Andhra would despatch at least 1,750 tonnes of rice in the next few days to Kerala. Mrs. Gandhi also contacted the Andhra Chief Minister on the telephone and got an assurance that this quantity would be despatched in a day or two. Mr. Jagjivan Ram, Union Food Minister, will visit Andhra to explore the possibility of speeding up rice supplies to Kerala.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 31, 1917

Fan accident case: suit dismissed

At the High Court to-day [Bombay, July 30] Mr. Justice Kajiji delivered judgment in the suit filed by Mrs. Blanche Edith Catesy, a nurse and midwife, against Messrs Mongini Brothers for the recovery of Rs. 15,000 as damages and cost. The facts of the case briefly are as follows: On the 4th May 1916, the plaintiff and her daughter went to the defendants' restaurant to have lunch and when they were seated at the table, the waiter switched on a fan overhead. The plaintiff wishing the fan to be stopped... the waiter switched it off. The fan immediately fell down with armature and severely injured the plaintiff. She was seen to the hospital where her wounds were attended to. The plaintiff alleged that she was under medical treatment owing to the accident for one month, had to incur expenses on that account and was incapacitated from carrying on her profession. Under the circumstances she claimed Rs. 15,000 as damages. The defendants admitted the accident but they did not admit that there had been any injury to her body. They denied that the fall of the fan had been due to any negligence on their part as alleged by the plaintiff.

DATA POINT

Africa-bound investment

The bulk (90%) of Indian Overseas Direct Investments (ODIs) to Africa in the current decade has been made in Mauritius, the preferred jurisdiction for routing investments to the continent. Mozambique ranks high, with an investment of approximately \$2.65 billion (largely in extractive industries). Overall, investments to Africa constituted 21.8% of the ODIs from India. A look at the top five destinations

Country	Total ODIs (Apr. 2010-Mar. 2016)	Ratio of overall ODIs in Africa (%)
Mauritius	37,800	90.4
Mozambique	2,657,10	6.4
South Africa	300,70	0.7
Tunisia	190,40	0.5
Egypt	167,50	0.4

SOURCE: LOK SABHA QUESTIONS