



Perform or perish

A Cabinet reshuffle that was unusually free from political considerations

For a change, performance, and not political expedience, seems to have dictated the nature and extent of the shuffle in the Council of Ministers. A few of the poor performers have been shown the door, notably Ministers of State Bandaru Dattatreya and Rajiv Pratap Rudy, and some of the better performers among the Ministers of State have been elevated to Cabinet rank, including Nirmala Sitharaman, Piyush Goyal and Dharmendra Pradhan. Kalraj Mishra probably lost out because of the age factor, an indication that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is serious about the 75-year-rule. Four of the entrants are former civil servants, and two of them, Hardeep Singh Puri and Alphons Kanthanam, are not even MPs. As Ministers with independent charge, their mandate will be to single-mindedly focus on results without having to worry about nurturing a constituency or reporting to a career politician. After her eventful stint in the Commerce Ministry, Ms. Sitharaman was rewarded with the Defence Ministry, making her only the second woman after Indira Gandhi to hold the portfolio. But the choices are also an indication of the small talent pool before Mr. Modi. At the time he was sworn in, he included in his team Arun Jaitley and Smriti Irani despite their having lost in the Lok Sabha election. Manohar Parrikar was asked to resign as Chief Minister of Goa to assume responsibility as Defence Minister, only to be sent back after the BJP all but lost Goa in the Assembly election this year. V.K. Singh, a former Army Chief who joined the BJP just before he was given the party ticket, was made Minister of State for External Affairs. Suresh Prabh, who was sidelined in the Shiv Sena, was persuaded to join the BJP and given the important portfolio of Railways. And now, despite his offer to resign after a series of rail accidents, he was asked to wait and then made Minister for Commerce and Industry.

Of course, it will be far from the truth to say that nothing but performance has mattered. Ms. Irani, who was moved out of the Human Resource Development Ministry after a string of controversies, retains the key Information and Broadcasting portfolio. Uma Bharti was divested of her pet portfolio of River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation but got Drinking Water and Sanitation instead. The mercurial Ms. Bharti would have been a difficult person to keep out, and the change of portfolios is a political compromise. However, by choosing to ignore the claims of the BJP's allies, and by making no attempt to correct imbalances in regional representation, Mr. Modi succeeded in creating the impression that he had nothing in mind other than picking the best person for each job. In neglecting political claims he actually sent the political signal he wanted to: that he is his own man and that he will have the team he wants.

Back to the ballot

With the Kenyan presidential vote annulled, the election body must fix processes quickly

The Kenyan Supreme Court's annulment of the presidential vote is a bitter-sweet victory for an ethnically divided country exasperated by the brutal violence that has marred successive polls. Friday's decision is a challenge to the election commission, which needs to repair its tarnished reputation. It is also a challenge to the political parties, which need to find a dignified way of settling election disputes. President Uhuru Kenyatta's opponent, Raila Odinga, a three-time contender, alleged that the integrity of the polls was compromised during the cumbersome data transformation process, from ballot boxes to computers. The violence that followed the declaration of the results exacerbated tribal divisions, and left at least 20 people dead. It was not of the order of the post-poll violence in 2007, when more than 1,000 people were killed and for which several politicians faced trial at the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity. The 2013 campaign, held under a new constitution, was equally chaotic and controversial and the final verdict was challenged by Mr. Odinga. Despite an overhaul of the poll mechanism, this year there was increased scepticism over the prospects for free and fair polls following the murder of a top official from the electoral body. Given the absence of the institutional prerequisites of a functioning modern democracy, there is the real danger of a steady erosion of popular legitimacy for any form of representative government. But there is a positive dimension to Kenyan politics. Governments have deferred to the principle of periodic renewal of the popular mandate ever since the country returned to multi-party democracy in the 1990s. This is in stark contrast to the practice in some African nations where incumbents resort to constitutional fiat to stay in office almost indefinitely.

For all these reasons, the Kenyan court's decision for a repeat election appeals to common sense, despite its characterisation by some as relatively peaceful. The return, to be held within 60 days, is of course bound to raise genuine doubts about the efficacy of the electoral mechanism to undertake another mammoth and expensive operation, with no guarantee of a clear result. Mr. Odinga's supporters are naturally enthused about another chance at the hustings; but there would be few takers for any more outcries of foul play, whatever the outcome. In an assertion of judicial independence, the court has taken a calculated gamble on the country's democratic future. Politics should commensurately evolve to a level of accountability where the habit of exploiting traditional loyalties gives way to respect for human rights and observance of the rule of law. Kenya is in the midst of a prolonged drought, and many face the risk of starvation. Kenyans need, above all, a stable government committed to mitigating their sufferings.

Economy outlook still cloudy

An immediate stimulus is needed to regain the momentum to get India back to 8% growth



AJIT RANADE

The government's move this past week to publish economic data for the April to June quarter of this year needs a look. The real growth of GDP, i.e. after removing the impact of inflation, was only 5.7%, much lower than expected. For the past six consecutive quarters, the growth rate has gone down steadily, from 9.2% at the end of the quarter ending March 2016, to 7.9%, 7.5%, 7.0%, 6.1% and now 5.7% at the end of the June quarter.

This steady declining trend in the growth rate is all the more troublesome because the economy otherwise enjoys a rather conducive combination of macroeconomic parameters. Inflation has been moderate, and touched a low of 1.5% recently. Both trade and fiscal deficits are moderate and manageable. So they don't eat up investible resources or precious foreign exchange. Even the interest rate has been cut repeatedly over the past year and a half. The inward rush of dollars is at a peak, both in financial markets (stocks and bonds) and as direct investment. No wonder the stock market index is at an all-time high. Even oil prices, the bane of the Indian economy, have been stable and comfortably low. Finally, the monsoon has been normal. So despite these favourable macro factors, we have not managed to convert them into a higher growth rate.

As cautioned in the Economic Survey tabled recently in Parliament, it looks as if the growth rate will be below 7% this fiscal year. That would be a potential loss of 1% growth, which we can legitimately



aspire for. In nominal terms, one percentage less of growth translates into a loss of ₹1.5 lakh crore of national income. This is a notional loss, or is rather what might have been. It also signifies millions of jobs not created.

If you look closer at the numbers, you find that manufacturing growth at 1.2% is the lowest in the past five years. It's the lowest since we switched to a new methodology (based on Gross Value Added). Some of this downward movement was caused supposedly by the suspension of manufacturing activity prior to the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in July, and consequent de-stocking of inventory. But it is also corroborated by data from commercial banks. From April to August bank credit shrank by 1.8%, i.e. negative growth. This is the lowest it has been for at least 13 years. If you remove retail loans such as housing and other personal loans, credit to industry might actually be shrinking. This was flagged back in April also when the annual credit flow from banking for the previous fiscal year clocked a multi-decadal low. A State Bank of

India report said that credit growth for the year ending last March was the lowest in 63 years!

A telling metric

The GDP is measured in at least two different ways. The first is by looking at the production side while the second is by looking at the spending side. We look at the aggregate of all spending, whether on consumption, or by foreigners buying our exports, or on investments into new factories and projects. In addition we also have government spending. The growth in GDP can be traced to the growth and vigour of each of these components. Investment, which is between 30 and 35% of the total pie, needs to grow at least in double digits. Investment in future capacity creates GDP growth of the future. It needs to be led by the private sector. Currently, that component is barely growing at 1.5%. This is the single most telling metric. As a result, capital formation (the basis of future growth) is steadily declining for several years. Private sector investment has practically come to a standstill. Despite the push for

'Make in India', reforms for improving 'Ease of Doing Business', increased access to electricity, improvement in infrastructure and private investment are not picking up. This must become the big priority. Initiatives such as Housing For All, Smart Cities and Digital India give room for huge opportunities for private entrepreneurs. Of course the corporate sector and banks have been affected by the twin balance sheet squeeze wherein corporates are over-leveraged, and banks have mounting bad loans. Whether the new insolvency code and regulator and the Reserve Bank of India's aggressive intervention will crack this puzzle remains to be seen.

Strengthening rupee

Another significant challenge to the domestic industry is the ever-strengthening rupee. Since January the rupee is 7% stronger compared to the American dollar. It is stronger than its Asian peer currencies too, including China, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. This directly hurts our export prospects. Since last October, our export growth has begun showing positive growth, after a long phase of negative growth for 18 months. But thanks to the strong rupee, this trend is weakening. Indeed our exports are barely up 12% since January, whereas imports are up more than 30%.

More importantly, the strong rupee hurts the domestic industry since cheaper imports flood the country and eat into the market share of domestic players. The GST regime has given an extra advantage to importer traders since the countervailing duty that they now pay as GST can be offset against other taxes, a concession which was not available earlier. The big jump in imports is also captured in the June quarter of GDP data, which also show a worrying jump in gold imports, again thanks to a

strong rupee. It's no use saying that since India is a net importing country, our exchange rate should be stronger. If we remove gold imports, a large part of which is not for consumption but as store of value, then our trade deficit will be much smaller. Besides most of our other imports are oil or capital goods, both of which are price inelastic. The rupee needs to be weakened or else it will hurt domestic manufacturing even more.

Looking at demonetisation

Finally, one must not forget the continuing adverse impact of demonetisation. The first half of the last fiscal year, that is the period prior to demonetisation, recorded a real growth of 7.7%. The present April to June quarter's growth at 5.7% certainly includes the negative impact on the informal and rural economy. Investment and consumption spending which were postponed due to cash shortage might recover. But jobs that are lost are lost forever. Even the Economic Survey warns about the deflationary impact of low agricultural prices. The agriculture sector GDP shows nominal GDP growth to be lower than real GDP, which is very unusual. It means that farmers' incomes will be depressed, and doubling of farm incomes in five years becomes that much more of a distant dream.

Perhaps in the coming quarters we may see a rebound. That will crucially depend on a big pick-up in manufacturing and private investment spending. The big structural reforms of GST, the new insolvency code, the new monetary framework and Aadhaar linkage are measures which will show results in the medium to long term. What we need is an immediate stimulus to re-inject the momentum to get us to 8% growth.

Ajit Ranade is an economist

Investing in the ecosystem

If valued properly, natural capital can maximise the benefits of economic growth and development



RANA KAPOOR

In April 2016, while inaugurating the third Asia ministerial conference on tiger conservation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to nature. Invoking the Buddha, he said, "The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness. It affords protection to all beings, offering shade even to the axe-man who destroys it." He went on to emphasise the importance of reimagining the country's natural ecosystems as its 'natural capital' and factoring in the economic, social, cultural and spiritual value of ecosystem services into the calculation of true economic growth and development.

Vast economic contribution

Natural resources are a critical yet often ignored part of our country's national infrastructure. Boasting 11% of the world's floral and faunal species, India is one of the 17 most ecologically diverse countries. Blessed with every major ecosystem, these biomes directly contribute billions of dollars to the Indian economy, annually. The financial value of India's forests, for ex-

ample, which encompass economic services such as timber and fuel wood, and ecological services such as carbon sequestration, is estimated to be \$1.7 trillion.

With increasing economic activity, natural capital assets are on the decline, directly affecting the quality of life and potentially giving rise to future inefficiencies in the economy. 'Earth Overshoot Day', a figurative calendar date when humanity's total annual resource consumption for the year overshoots the earth's capacity to regenerate it, has advanced every year at an alarming rate. This year it was observed on August 2.

As we approach the limits of natural capital stocks, we need to rethink the cascading effects that this would have on the economy, the environment and society. Scientists have identified nine earth system processes to have boundaries which mark the safe zones, beyond which there is a risk of 'irreversible and abrupt environmental change'.

Four of these boundaries have now been crossed — climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land system change and altered biogeochemical cycles, such as phosphorus and nitrogen cycles. This means that human activity has already altered the balance of a few delicate equilibriums, the effects of which are reflected by changing weather patterns, accel-



erated extinction events for both flora and fauna, and global warming. This stresses the need for a comprehensive evaluation system that takes these undesirable side-effects of economic activities into account.

As the biggest contributor to the economy, business needs to consider evaluating its impacts and dependencies as it would have a direct impact on capital assets and wealth. This translates to broadening valuation and risk management to include natural capital, as it is currently not reflected in market prices. In addition to shareholder wealth, holistic development calls for maximising returns from other key areas such as physical capital, human capital, natural capital and social capital.

If valued properly, natural capital has the potential to optimise resources and thus maximise the net benefits of economic growth and development. There is often a

chance of ignoring or undervaluing natural capital, effectively leading to projects with far higher negative externalities compared to the benefits. It is necessary that we are cognisant of the limitations of natural capital and its role as a primary support system for the economy.

Valuing natural capital would require internalising externalities and taking into account the myriad economic and ecological products and services that natural ecosystems make possible. Undertaking natural capital valuation can offer businesses a number of opportunities.

Risk mitigation

Natural capital risk is one of many risks that an organisation faces, and a thorough natural capital assessment can help integrate this risk into risk management committee deliberations, legal and reputational risk framework. Projects can be reassessed on the basis of their vulnerability to impacts and dependencies associated with the value chain. Companies can consider environmental stress tests for issues such as natural disasters, air pollution, resource scarcity and climate.

Natural capital thinking can also create opportunities to innovate and adopt newer, more efficient technologies. One Californian fashion company demonstrated this by

developing a unique waterless ozone technology to address water shortage challenges during a four-year-long drought. The company was able to reduce its water use and water bills by 50%, saving at least \$1,300 per month.

While findings from externality assessments are restricted to internal business decision-making, going forward, externality valuation can also contribute towards enhancing organisational transparency by informing stakeholders about the potential future risk to business and preparing proactive responses to these risks.

Unlike the economic value of goods and services, the intangible nature of natural assets is mostly invisible and hence remains unaccounted for. While it may be difficult to put a price tag on nature, unchecked exploitation of scarce natural resources and an inadequate response to India's unique climate challenges can be a very costly mistake. Making natural capital thinking the norm requires a strong policy push and the adoption of valuation frameworks such as the Natural Capital Coalition's Natural Capital Protocol. Integrating natural capital assessment and valuation into our economic system is critical to usher in a truly sustainable future for India.

Rana Kapoor is MD and CEO, YES Bank and Chairman, YES Global Institute

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 reshuffle

A few changes in the all-powerful PMO would have been far weightier than the cabinet reshuffle exercise. Only a few among the common people are really bothered about which portfolio is reallocated to whom. With nothing much to showcase as a significant recast, the appointment of a political lightweight as the new Defence Minister is now being trumpeted as "women's empowerment". With 'governance' reduced to one-man show, even the induction of the new faces hardly helps in achieving an image makeover for the government. It was an out-and-out BJP revamp with no representation even to parties which have recently aligned themselves with the BJP. It would be misplaced optimism if we tend to believe that the reshuffled cabinet despite being "reinforced with 4 Ps" would take us on the path to 'acche din'.

G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthancode, Kanyakumari

Reshuffling cabinets have turned out to be monotonous exercises thanks to the omnipresent caste factor, State representations and, of course, coalition compulsions. All parties have mastered the art of packing elders off to take up gubernatorial posts and appointing lightweights to party positions. One had thought Mr. Modi would have veered off the beaten path, but he has only disappointed us. Perhaps the dearth of talent among BJP MPs is one of the several reasons for his inability to pick and choose the best ones.

GANAPATHI BHAT Akola, Maharashtra

NEET impact

Medical college aspirant Anitha's death is an inconsolable loss (Some editions, "As anger boils over, police battle protesters across State", September 3). The Central and State governments have to share a substantial part of the blame

as they kept her hopes high based on a 'one-year exemption'. A certain amount of statesmanship by those in authority could have helped in finding a way out of this crisis by averaging State Board examination marks along with NEET marks. The authorities have also completely failed to prepare students for NEET. In this entire episode there has been a total lack of a human face.

N.G.R. PRASAD, Chennai

It is unfortunate that an aspiring young Dalit student ended her life as she could not secure a seat in medical college as a result of NEET rankings. The vast majority of students in our country, who are also from poor, rural and semi-rural areas, are used to a State syllabus-based system. Admission to medical college on a CBSE-based syllabus is not practical in a multi-lingual country such as India. Not all of them can afford

expensive private coaching. Admissions to professional and in this instance medical colleges should be based on a more rational and unbiased system.

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA, Bengaluru

What's happening now is that some political parties are trying to gain maximum political mileage out of her death. They are setting a bad precedent with their thoughtless remarks against NEET and the various governments. A State or the country has to generate courageous students. Man, they say, cannot control external circumstances, but he can change his attitude to face them with aplomb. The media, political parties and governments should leave no stone unturned in creating students of a high calibre and maturity.

S. RAMAKRISHNASAMY, Ranipet, Tamil Nadu

There has been widespread criticism by Opposition parties that the

NEET mode of admission has deprived many aspiring candidates from the lower strata of society of a medical seat. The introduction of NEET has been on the anvil for many years. The lethargic attitude of the government in preparing students for the eventuality is to be blamed for the present state of affairs and fuelled by the Opposition exerting pressure to have an exemption from NEET to score brownie points. With all States deciding to go with NEET, the Tamil Nadu government found itself on a weak wicket. Whipping up emotions would not be in the best interests of the student community who should be counselled to face the inevitability of NEET with determination. Attention has to be paid to improve the quality of education.

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

My heart goes out to the girl's family. I hope a tragedy like this never happens

again anywhere. If the NEET is here to stay, then the government has to come up with the ways and means to ensure that most meet the grade by providing study material and coaching to those who cannot afford it.

PRASANTH G. NARAHARI, New York

Being cautious

The quiet diplomacy between India and China that ultimately ended in a de-escalation was based on a principle of stopping "differences becoming disputes". We should not chest-thump over the de-escalation as China is no doubt increasing its military activities in and around the Indian Ocean and has made a number of transgressions into territory claimed by India. Claims and counter-claims cannot be ignored as it is clear that China wants Doklam-like chaudrons to keep simmering.

GANTI SAI VISWANATH, Hyderabad

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And then there were nine

Constitutions are enlarged and strengthened when courts act as brakes against majoritarian authoritarianism



SANJAY HEGDE

In early 2014, Fali Nariman said to me in the corridors of the Supreme Court, "A government with an absolute majority will see a conformist judiciary." Shortly thereafter, India elected a government with an absolute majority in Parliament.

Mr. Nariman prophesied based on past experiences. During the Emergency, the Supreme Court held in *ADM Jabalpur* that the fundamental right to life could be taken away or suspended. When asked by Justice H.R. Khanna if the right to life had been suspended during the Emergency, the then Attorney General, Niren De, had replied, "Even if life was taken away illegally, courts are helpless." Four judges then succumbed to government power and failed to protect the citizen; Justice Khanna was the only dissenter.

The shame of that surrender has often been invoked against every judge who has subsequently held office. Justices Y.V. Chandrachud and P.N. Bhagwati, who were part of that Bench, apologised for that judgment after demitting office. But, as Salman Rushdie wrote: "Shame is like everything else; live with it for long enough and it becomes part of the furniture." Judicial pusillanimity in the face of an authoritarian government was not entirely unexpected.

Pattern of retreat

The last three years have seen a rather conservative Supreme Court, which bears testimony to Mr. Nariman's aphorism. The court chose to render ineffective challenges to demonetisation by referring the issue to a Constitution Bench. When lawyers beat up former JNU Students' Union President Kanhaiya Kumar and journalists in the precincts of Patiala House, a mere stone's throw away from the Supreme Court, the court chose to swallow its wrath. The court's refusal to investigate the Birla-Sahara diaries, or to allow Harsh Mander's plea to challenge Amit Shah's discharge in a criminal case, all fit into this pattern of retreat. Possibly the sole exception was when the court struck down the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTO

At a time when civil liberties seemed to be again imperilled, people wondered whether the court would firmly stand on the side of the citizens who claimed that their fundamental right to privacy was being taken away by the Aadhaar database.

In response to the citizens' challenge, the Supreme Court was told by the government that there existed no fundamental right to privacy. The government's stand was based on *M.P. Sharma* (delivered by eight judges in 1954) and *Kharak Singh* (delivered by six judges in 1962). Both these decisions had seemingly held that there was no fundamental right to privacy in the Constitution. Later decisions of smaller Benches had, however, held and proceeded on the basis that there did exist such a right.

At least two generations of Indians grew up assuming that a fundamental right to privacy existed. But because of diverse judicial opinions, the matter had to be considered by a Bench of at least nine judges. Assembling nine judges is not an easy task given the abnormal workload and administrative disruption it causes the court. It took nearly two years for a Bench to be constituted, by which time the administration tried to compulsorily impose Aadhaar on every sphere of human activity.

The government took an extreme stand that no fundamental right to privacy existed and that the later judgments were wrongly decided. It was a submission of the sort characterised by Lord Atkin in his 1948 dissent in *Liversidge v. Anderson*, as an argument that "might have been addressed acceptably to the Court of King's Bench in the time of Charles I." The government lost the argument 9-0.

The nine-judge Bench has unanimously held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right and clarified years of somewhat uncertain case law on the subject. It has unequivocally held that the doctrinal premise of *M.P. Sharma* and *Kharak Singh* stand invalidated. Nearly half of the 547-page judgment has been written by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud who has recognised that "the right to privacy is an element of human dignity". Perhaps, even more crucially, Justice Chandrachud (joined by all the others on the Bench), has explicitly overruled the *ADM Jabalpur* judgment to which his father was a party. The judgment is also remarkable for its stinging criticism of the court's view in *Suresh Koushal*, which had upheld the validity of Section 377 of the IPC. The challenge to Section 377 is pending before a different Bench.

What the judges held

Justice J. Chelameswar writes a wonderful enunciation of the rationale behind the Constitution, its Preamble, and the fundamental rights chapter. He points out that provisions purportedly conferring power on the state are, in fact, limitations on the state's power to infringe on the liberty of citizens. Crucially, after holding that the right to privacy is a fundamental right, he states that the right to privacy includes, among other things, freedom from intrusion into one's home, the right to choice of food and dress of one's choice, and the freedom to associate with the people one wants to.

Justice S.A. Bobde holds that privacy is integral to the several fundamental rights recognised by the Constitution. He holds that in case of infringement, the state must satisfy

the tests applicable to whichever one or more of the fundamental rights is/are affected by the interference. He also traces the right to privacy to ancient Indian texts including the *Grihya Sutras*, the *Ramayana* and the *Arthashastra*.

Tracing the right to privacy to the Preamble and the fundamental rights chapter of the Constitution, Justice A.M. Sapre holds that the right to privacy is born with the human being and stays until death. He also holds that the unity and integrity of the nation can only be ensured when the dignity of every citizen is guaranteed through privacy.

Justice S.K. Kaul's opinion makes a strong case for the horizontal application of fundamental rights. He observes that "digital footprints and extensive data can be analysed computationally to reveal patterns, trends, and associations, especially relating to human behaviour and interactions and hence, is valuable information." He expresses concern over the use of such data to "exercise control over us like the 'big brother' state exercised."

Justice Rohinton Nariman has rejected the Union's argument that the right to privacy is not a fundamental right in a developing country where people do not have access to food, shelter and other resources. He holds that the right to privacy is available to the rich and the poor alike: "Fundamental rights, on the other hand, are contained in the Constitution so that there would be rights that the citizens of this country may enjoy despite the governments that they may elect. The recognition of such right in the fundamental rights chapter of the Constitution is only a recognition that such right exists notwithstanding the shifting sands of majority governments."

In a mature democracy, conformist judiciaries are not always guaranteed to governments with a popular majority. Constitutions are enlarged and strengthened when courts act as brakes against majoritarian authoritarianism. The larger security of the state lies in the protection of every individual's freedoms. The judges of the Supreme Court, as sentinels on the qui vive, have stood tall and repelled yet another attack on citizens' liberties. Fali Nariman and Y.V. Chandrachud's anxieties and reverses of the Emergency era may just have been put to rest.

Sanjay Hegde is a senior advocate of the Supreme Court

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Verification is a pre-publication process

The ombudsman comes into the picture later



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

In "Why I write", George Orwell contended that whenever his writing lacked political purpose, it became lifeless and was "betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally". My column's purpose is to elaborate on the core elements of journalism. This column too would be betrayed into purple passages and decorative adjectives if it strayed from this objective. My study of social media, the problems of algorithm editing, and the role of technology companies was never about technology, but about how information reaches the public domain.

It is common knowledge that a Readers' Editor (RE) comes into the picture only at the post-publication stage. Some have argued that the new initiatives taken by technology companies to flag fake news stories show that their role is similar to the role of the RE. This argument is flawed. Newspapers have a fairly robust verification process before publication. Each copy is scrutinised by at least four pairs of eyes before it reaches readers. It is not impulsive rhetoric that is pushed into the public sphere, which is the case with posts on social media.

In fact, there is evidence that Facebook's flagging system, introduced last December to address hoaxes and fake news, is having the opposite effect. The platform's press release had said: "We've started a program to work with third-party fact-checking organisations that are signatories of Poynter's International Fact Checking Code of Principles... If the fact-checking organisations identify a story as fake, it will get flagged as disputed and there will be a link to the corresponding article explaining why. Stories that have been disputed may also appear lower in News Feed. It will still be possible to share these stories, but you will see a warning that the story has been disputed as you share... It's important to us that the stories you see on Facebook are authentic and meaningful."

The Irish slavery case

A recent example shows how this objective has failed. Facebook's fact-checking organisations, the Associated Press, and Snopes.com flagged a story on Irish slaves that appeared on a local Rhode Island web-

site. And then something strange happened. There was unbelievable traffic to the story, and it went viral in the U.S. A section that is opposed to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement began deploying the Irish slavery story in a perverse manner. The core issue is not about the difficulties faced by Irish immigrants to the U.S.; it is about the meaning of the word 'slavery'. Irish historians have for years been explaining the difference between the plight of Irish immigrants and that of African-Americans; the difference between indentured servitude and chattel slavery. Their explanation that King James II did not issue a Royal proclamation in 1625 that led to Irish slavery because he was born in 1633 was lost in the amplification of lies.



What does this terminological distinction mean to a citizen? Talking to *The New York Times*, Leslie Harris, a professor of African-American history at Northwestern University, said: "An indenture implies two people have entered into a contract with each other but slavery is not a contract. It is often about being a prisoner of war or being bought or sold bodily as part of a trade. That is a critical distinction."

But the flagging did not help to bring out this nuance; it only reaffirmed existing silos and echo chambers. A bunch of conspiracy theorists pressed the alarm button saying that this was a move to silence this story.

The *NYT* story titled "Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too" documents how far-right groups lie by taking up specific atrocities committed against black slaves and substituting the Irish for the actual victims. One of the most quoted instances by these groups is the 1781 Zong massacre, which was the killing of 130 African slaves. But *InfoWars*, a pro-Trump website, claimed that the victims were in fact Irish and inflated the death toll by adding a zero.

The Irish slavery story is a clear wake-up call to platform companies, which have now become publishers, to have systems in place that process information before it reaches the public sphere, and not indulge in cosmetic post-publication flagging.

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SINGLE FILE

Celebrate, but introspect

Devendra Jhajharia's Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna should make us proud. But will it change the way we treat para-athletes?

MARTAND JHA



For the first time in India, a Paralympian, Devendra Jhajharia, has received the country's highest sporting honour, the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna. Jhajharia, a Javelin thrower, shot to fame when he won his first gold at the 2004 Athens Paralympics Games after which he improved his own record to clinch another gold at the Rio Paralympics Games in 2016.

This honour will surely give a boost to young para-athletes given that the Indian public as well as the government have been ignorant of, or apathetic towards, the successes of our Paralympians even though these sportspersons won more medals in Rio than their Olympic counterparts.

This apathy was seen recently when a contingent of 46 hearing-impaired athletes returned to India after winning five medals, including a gold, at the Deaflympics held in Turkey. The athletes were in the news not because of their achievement but because they refused to leave the airport seeing that there were no sports officials or ministers to felicitate or even welcome them. After six long hours, a project officer with the Sports Authority of India finally went to meet them reportedly.

This is not surprising as Paralympics are not taken seriously in India as they are in other countries. As a result, media coverage of events and achievements is either limited or completely absent. Last year, for instance, the Rio Summer Paralympics weren't even broadcast on Indian television. A golden opportunity was foregone to popularise these sports and familiarise the public with the names of para-athletes. How many even know of Devendra Jhajharia or Mariyappan Thangavelu?

Struggles before and after the event

While non-disabled sportspersons in cricket, and now perhaps tennis and badminton, search for good infrastructure and sponsors, sportspersons with disabilities find these struggles more difficult. Take the case of Kanchanmala Pande. The blind athlete was forced to beg in Berlin to take part in the Para-Swimming Championships as the money sanctioned to the athletes there by the government failed to reach them. Pande went on to win a silver and qualified for the World Championship.

The woes don't end there. Para-athletes, even after winning medals, find it difficult to sustain themselves. It is not enough for the government to confer awards; it needs to go a step further and ensure that these sportspersons have job security in return for the pride and honour that they bring to the nation.

Of course, this attitude is not just towards para-athletes; it is a reflection of how society treats persons with disabilities. While this is a moment to celebrate, it is also a moment to introspect. Conferring a medal should not make us glaze over the larger problem. Unless we learn to treat para-athletes on par with sportspersons without disabilities, our jubilation must be restrained.

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CONCEPTUAL

Lost decade

ECONOMICS

This refers to the last decade of the 20th century when the Japanese economy witnessed economic stagnation after the bust of its housing bubble. Some even include the next decade of low growth to claim that Japan lost two decades of potential economic growth due to the lack of appropriate spending by the government. Critics have argued that the size of Japan's GDP does not project a complete picture of its economy as its total population has continued to shrink over the years. In terms of per capita GDP, for instance, Japan in the last few decades has managed to grow at about the same pace as the United States although its overall GDP has not reflected as much growth.

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Full list of Union Cabinet and Council of Ministers

<http://bit.ly/CabinetMinistersList>

SHELF HELP

Diana, 20 years later

A recap of old and new books about the Princess of Wales

SUHASINI HAIDAR

August 31 marked 20 years since that moment past midnight when Princess Diana was killed in a car crash in Paris, and yet the interest in her life, the questions about her death, and the narratives surrounding her marriage persist. There can be no better evidence of that than the books that continue to be published on some aspect or the other of Diana's life and death. They most predictably begin in a manner that American journalist Christopher Anderson does in his recent book, *The Day Diana Died*: "Where were you when Diana died?"

This summer has seen at least six new biographies hitting bookstores, including her bodyguard Ken Wharfe's *Guarding Diana: Protecting the Princess Around the World*. Her private secretary P.D. Jephson, who published *Shadows of a Princess: Diana, Princess of Wales*

1987-1996, has been accused of 'betrayal' by the royal family. But his book just added to a long list of books that have been written by those who were close to Diana because of their work, including the bodyguard who survived the car crash that killed the Princess of Wales and Dodi al-Fayed in Paris, Trevor Rees-Jones, who recounted the last days in *The Bodyguard's Story: Diana, the Crash and the Sole Survivor*. Another Kensington Palace staffer who was accused of betrayal was butler Paul Burrell, who published *In the Royal Manner* in 1999, *A Royal Duty* in 2003, and *The Way We Were* in 2006.

However, regardless of the sense that those who were in Diana's proximity were most guilty of exposing her life, it is the book that Diana herself created, through interviews, and answers conveyed by tape to journalist Andrew Morton, that remains the most revealing, intimate, and

read account of her royal life. *Diana: Her True Story* first hit the stands in 1993 and shattered the notion that the royal marriage that had captured the world just a decade before could be restored. It was followed by another book that removed all doubt that Diana lived in a "crowded marriage": Jonathan Dimbleby's biography, *Prince of Wales*. Both books are seeing a new lease of life this year, as are biographies of Camilla Parker Bowles, including the superb, yet over-sympathetic, *The Duchess: The Untold Story* by Penny Junor and *Queen Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall* by Arthur Miller.

Clearly, even today, despite the fact that Diana would have been a grandmother twice over, and the newest generation of royals is every bit as glamorous as she was, it is evident that it is the past that still draws the most interest in the lives of the British royalty today.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 4, 1967

Kashmiri Pandits call off agitation

The 22-day-old agitation of Kashmiri Pandits, which claimed three lives and injuries to several hundred, was suspended today [September 3] following an intervention by the Union Home Minister, Mr. Y.B. Chavan. Under an agreement reached between the Hindu Action Committee which led the agitation and the authorities after 24 hours of intensive negotiations, it was agreed to set up a committee soon to look into the complaints and grievances of the Pandit community. The Government has also agreed to release all the persons arrested and detained in competition with the agitation. In regard to the Pandits' demand for a judicial inquiry into the alleged excesses committed by the police in detailing with the agitation, it was left to the Union Home Minister to choose the manner and method in which these allegations were properly examined.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 4, 1917

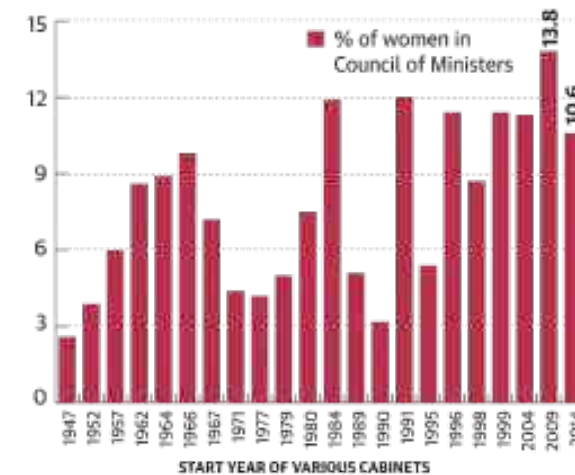
Raja of Mahamadabad's view.

The Hon'ble Raja of Mahamadabad who is now at Simla interviewed by a press correspondent on the present political situation in India said: We thank the Prime Minister for appointing Mr. Montagu as Secretary of State for India. We know that he is a friend of the people of India and he knows India from the inside. We welcome his pronouncement in the House of Commons as this is the first time in the history of British India that it has been definitely laid down that the British policy is to raise India to the status of a self-governing partner of the Empire at an earlier date. I appreciate fully the importance of Mr. Montagu's decision to come to India and examine Indian problems on the spot.

DATA POINT

Yes, Ms Minister

Female representation in the Union Council of Ministers has steadily increased over the years in various governments. The representation in the present regime (10.6%) is below the all-time high of 13.8% in the UPA's second tenure



SOURCE: TRIVEDI CENTRE FOR POLITICAL DATA, ASHOKA UNIVERSITY