



Time for caution

As the world looks to end the era of easy money, India must be prepared

India's external balance sheet may have improved significantly since the infamous taper tantrum of 2013, but there are now signs that warrant more caution from policymakers. Last week, the current account deficit (CAD) widened to a four-year high of \$14.3 billion in the first quarter of the current financial year, standing at 2.4% of gross domestic product, compared to 0.1% last year. The widening CAD was driven by a greater increase in merchandise imports than exports. A strong capital account surplus, however, has helped the country pay for its import bills without much trouble. Foreign investors starved of yield have been stepping up their investments in India, which remains one of the few places offering higher yields. Compared to last year, net FDI almost doubled to \$7.2 billion in the first quarter, while net portfolio investment jumped about six times to \$12.5 billion. The strong inflow of foreign capital has also led to a significant increase in foreign reserve holdings, thanks to the Reserve Bank of India which has been busy buying dollars to weaken the rupee. Forex reserves were at an all-time high of \$400.7 billion for the week ending September 8, while the rupee has appreciated by over 6% against the dollar this year. Low global oil prices over the last two years have also helped contain a good portion of its import bills.

All this might change with the impending tightening of monetary policy by the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks. After all, emerging Asian markets have been the biggest beneficiaries of loose monetary policy in the West, so any change in stance would most definitely affect them. Indian companies, for instance, have aggressively tapped into the market for rupee-denominated foreign debt, which can work against them if the flow of foreign capital turns volatile. The RBI has been regulating the amount and quality of such borrowings, so it may seem like things are under control for now. Further, India's total external debt declined by 2.7% during the financial year 2016-17, standing at \$471.9 billion, driven by a fall in external commercial borrowings and deposits by non-resident Indians. The World Bank, in fact, has said that India's external dynamics remain very favourable given the size of its economy and foreign reserve holdings. But a prolonged period of unfavourable trade balance when combined with volatile international capital flows can lead to un-savoury macroeconomic situations. According to a report by India Ratings & Research earlier this year, a 10% depreciation of the rupee combined with a 50 basis point interest rate hike can severely affect most Indian borrowers. It added that as much as 65% of foreign debt exposure of Indian companies may be unhedged. As the world looks to withdraw from an era of historically low interest rates, it would be wise for India's policymakers to be ready with an emergency plan to tackle a period of significant volatility.

Confrontational path

Bangladesh's legislature draws the battle lines against the judiciary

Bangladesh's Parliament raised the stakes in a stand-off against the judiciary last week by passing a unanimous resolution to take "proper legal steps" over a Supreme Court verdict nullifying the Constitution's 16th amendment. The amendment, passed in 2014, had empowered Parliament to remove judges of the Supreme Court found incompetent or guilty of misconduct, based on a two-thirds majority. This amendment had in a way restored the power of Parliament to impeach judges and was in line with the original Constitution of 1972. The Supreme Court had in July this year scrapped the amendment, suggesting that it was antithetical to the independence of the judiciary and restored the Supreme Judicial Council, headed by the Chief Justice, with powers to remove errant judges. The Parliament, dominated by the Awami League, not only resolved to reverse the Supreme Court's decision, but also found fault with Chief Justice S.K. Sinha's comments in this regard. He had said that the Constitution was a product of the collective will of the people and not just one individual, which was interpreted as an affront to "Bangabandhu", Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by the ruling Awami League. The largest party in opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, is not represented in Parliament as it had boycotted the elections held in 2014. The BNP had welcomed the Supreme Court decision but its position seemed to be guided more by Schadenfreude and less by a clear-cut position on the judiciary's independence.

It is difficult for the polarised polity in Bangladesh to debate any issue without political overtones, let alone one that pertains to separation of powers between the judiciary and legislature. The Supreme Court's contention is that Bangladesh's political system is unlike the parliamentary systems in the United Kingdom and India, for example, where legislators are empowered to impeach judges. Bangladeshi MPs do not have the freedom to vote on conscience on issues including impeachment, bound as they are by Article 70 that prevents legislators from voting against their party's decision on any matter. This prevents a dispassionate deliberation over any prospective impeachment, giving political parties, and those in the executive undue influence over appointments in the judiciary. Instead of taking a course of confrontation against the judiciary, Bangladesh's parliamentarians and its attorney general would be better off proceeding with a review petition to the Supreme Court and presenting their position dispassionately. The Supreme Judicial Council might have had a legacy connecting it to the country's authoritarian past, but the arguments of the Supreme Court that it is seeking to protect judicial independence from the executive in light of other laws that bind legislative work in Bangladesh need to be contested by the government point by point – not by a mere resolution.

Reading the tea leaves

The emerging India-Japan alignment sets the stage for the reordering of the Asian strategic landscape



RAKESH SOOD

In history, defining moments like 9/11 that can be identified as markers of change are rare. More often, there are trend lines of slow-moving geopolitical changes which come together at a particular moment in time resulting in an inflexion point. Reading the tea leaves indicates that 2017 may well be the year which marked the re-ordering of the Asian strategic landscape.

Two trend lines

The two slow moving trend lines clearly discernible since the Cold War ended a quarter century ago are the shift of the geopolitical centre of gravity from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific region and the rise of China. The U.S. 're-balancing' announced in 2011 was a belated recognition of these changes, driven home by the impact of the 2008 financial crisis. Most of the rivalries are being played out in the crowded geopolitical space of the Indo-Pacific, and Asian economies now account for more than half of global GDP and becoming larger in coming years.

China's rise is reflected in a more assertive China. According to President Xi Jinping's 'two guides' policy announced in February, China should guide 'the shaping of the new world order' and safeguarding 'international security'. Much has changed during the last quarter century when Deng Xiaoping advised China 'to observe calmly, secure its position, hide its capability, bide its time and not claim leadership'.

Today's China is not just willing but eager to assume leadership and expects other countries to yield space. China has suggested 'a new type of great power relations' to the U.S. Its assertiveness in the East China Sea with Japan and in the South China Sea with its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbours sends a signal that while multipolarity may be desirable in a global order, in Asia,



China is the predominant power and must be treated as such.

Even though China has been a beneficiary of the U.S.-led global order, it is impatient that it does not enjoy a position that it feels it deserves, especially in the Bretton Woods institutions. During the last five years, it has set about creating a new set of institutions (the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank) and launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to create a new trading infrastructure that reflects China's centrality as the largest trading nation.

The BRI is also complemented by a growing Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Beginning in 2009, the PLA Navy started rotating three ship task forces through the Indian Ocean as part of the anti-piracy task force off the Somalia coast. Visits by nuclear attack submarines to littoral ports began to take place. In addition to Gwadar, China is now converting the supply facility at Djibouti into a full-fledged military base.

Accelerating the trends

Recent developments have accelerated these geopolitical trends. The first was the outcome of the U.S. elections last year. By invoking 'America first' repeatedly, President Donald Trump has made it clear that the U.S. considers the burden of leading the global order too onerous. American allies, particularly in the Asia-Pacific, are nervous about Mr. Trump's harangues that they are enjoying the

benefits of the U.S. security umbrella on the cheap.

Recent nuclear and long-range missile tests by North Korea have added to South Korean and Japanese anxieties. Japan has been particularly rattled by the two missiles fired across Hokkaido. Given the U.S. push for more sanctions that depend on China for implementation, most Japanese reluctantly admit that North Korea's nuclear and missile capability is unlikely to be dismantled any time soon.

Another significant development was the Doklam stand-off between India and China that lasted from June to August. The Chinese playbook followed the established pattern – creating a physical presence followed by sharpened rhetoric, together becoming an exercise in coercive diplomacy. This worked in pushing the nine-dash line in the South China Sea with the Philippines and Vietnam even as China built additional facilities on reclaimed land in the area. India, however, chose to block China and a few hundred soldiers on the plateau maintained their hostile postures even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi attended the G-20 summit in July amidst heightened rhetoric recalling the 1962 war.

Differences with China did not begin with Doklam. It was preceded by the stapled visa issue for Indians belonging to Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, growing incidents of incursions along the disputed boundary, blocking of India's bid to join the

Nuclear Suppliers Group last year, ensuring that no language relating to Pakistan-based terrorist groups found mention in the BRICS summit in Goa and preventing the inclusion of Masood Azhar from being designated as a terrorist by the UN Security Council by exercising a veto.

Since 1988, India has followed a consistent China policy based on putting aside the boundary dispute and developing other aspects of the relationship in the expectation that this would create mutual trust and enable a boundary settlement. However, the gap between India and China has grown, both in economic and military terms, and with it has emerged a more assertive China. The shared vision of an Asian century with a rising India and rising China is long past. Mr. Modi's personal diplomacy with Mr. Xi has had little influence on changing Chinese attitudes or behaviour. After Doklam, there is finally a consensus that the old China policy does not serve our national interests and a review is long overdue.

A new strategic landscape

It is against this backdrop that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India took place last week. The contours of a new relationship were defined during Mr. Abe's earlier tenure, in 2006-07, when annual summits were introduced, the relationship became a 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership', Japan was invited to join in the Malabar naval exercises and a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation was concluded. Since then, significant content has been added.

A singular achievement was the conclusion of the agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy last year. Under negotiation for five years, this was a sensitive issue for Japan given the widespread anti-nuclear sentiment (though Japan enjoys the U.S. nuclear umbrella) and (misplaced) faith in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; it would not have gone through but for Mr. Abe's personal commitment.

To deepen strategic understanding, the two sides initiated a 2+2 Dialogue involving the Foreign and Defence Ministries in 2010. A

memorandum on enhancing defence and technology/security cooperation was signed and talks on acquiring the amphibious maritime surveillance ShinMaywa US-2i began in 2013. Trilateral dialogue involving both the U.S. and Japan and covering strategic issues was elevated to ministerial level in 2014. Japanese participation in the Malabar exercises, suspended because of Chinese protests, was restored in 2015. Once the agreement for the 12 US-2i aircraft is concluded with a follow-up acquisition as part of Make in India, the strategic relationship will begin to acquire critical mass.

However the strategic partnership needs stronger economic ties. Today, India-Japan trade languishes at around \$15 billion, a quarter of trade with China while Japan-China trade is around \$300 billion. Therefore, the primary focus during the recent visit has been on economic aspects. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed rail corridor is more than symbolism, in demonstrating that high-cost Japanese technology is viable in developing countries and that India has the absorption capacity to master it. Completing it in five years is a management challenge but the bigger challenge will be to transfer the know-how of best practices to other sectors of the economy.

Another major initiative is the recently launched Asia-Africa Growth Corridor to build connectivity for which Japan has committed \$30 billion and India \$10 billion. This adds a critical dimension to the 'global partnership' between the two countries. However, to make this productive, India needs to change its style of implementing projects abroad, most of which have been plagued by cost and time over-runs.

Ensuring effective implementation and setting up mechanisms for delivery will align Mr. Modi's Act East policy with Mr. Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. This alignment sets the stage for the re-ordering of the Asian strategic landscape.

Rakesh Sood is a former diplomat and currently Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation. E-mail: rakeshsood2001@yahoo.com

Irrationalism in city planning

It is better to go back to the drawing board in designing Amaravati

TARA MURALI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has reportedly sought further improvements to the design by the international architectural firm Foster + Partners for the Amaravati start-up area. It is further reported that he has suggested certain changes and favoured the direct interaction of the architects with film director S.S. Rajamouli to seek his inputs to give finishing touches to the plans.

No explanation is to be found of the suggested "certain changes" or "finishing touches".

There are two issues in the Amaravati city project – one of professional integrity and the other of public interest. Both are important, and the reason that they are interlinked in this article is that the lack of the former has made possible irresponsible and improper administrative action of major public expense and serious consequence.

Many changes

To summarise the murky happenings of the Amaravati city project: In March 2016, Maki and Associ-

ates were declared as winners of an invited competition for the Amaravati capital complex. The competition was adjudged by a jury of professionals but the jury's report on shortcomings or strengths of the winning design has not been made public.

When the design itself was made public, it was harshly criticised on several counts – that it was similar to the public buildings at Chandigarh; it was too futuristic; it did not display any Indian characteristics, etc. Maki and Associates claim they had made extensive design changes to meet the new demands, but in spite of that, the government decided to reopen the competition and remove the firm from the project. Complaining to the Council of Architecture (CoA) in December 2016, the principal architect of the firm, Fumihiko Maki, a Pritzker Architecture Prize winner, questioned the motivations of the Andhra Pradesh government committee, alleging unfair practice, a lack of transparency and his firm's 'fraudulent' removal from the project.

Whether the CoA has recognised and taken any action on Mr.



Maki's complaint is not known.

The 'Baahubali' factor

In December, the State appointed the U.K.-based Foster + Partners along with Hafeez Contractor as the new architects for the project. At the same time, it announced that the project would be assisted by three film and art directors of Indian cinema. The reason was that the three had done extensive research on history, architecture,

and culture for their films and their inputs were likely to be of enormous value in giving a native touch to the design. There were indications that the powers that be wanted Amaravati to be modelled on the lines of the fantasy city portrayed in the film *Baahubali*.

The city of the film is neither contemporary nor ahead of its time. It has been set in an ancient kingdom, the form of which is, at best, drawn from mythological stories and depicted in children's comic books. There is no authentic representation of such cities to use as a reference.

Amaravati itself had earlier been criticised as an 'ultra-mega-world-class-city' that was being rushed through by destroying thousands of acres of prime farm and forest land. Proper environmental impact assessment had not been done, and the Prime Minister was criticised for participating in the foundation stone-laying event.

The State has consistently disregarded criticism of its fair approach regarding architectural design consultancy and also to the conditions imposed on architects that make a mockery of evaluating

city planning issues sensitively. As architect A. Srivathsan has written in *The Wire*, "What is of concern are the frequent and opaque changes, the lack of professionalism and accountability. The real danger in the Amaravati story is that a serious, positive planning process has been turned into a flight of whimsy and that public projects remain captive to state caprice."

It is hardly surprising that things have come to a head again. This unscientific and irrational approach to city planning and architecture displays the extent to which the malaise has spread. Public money is being wasted on political hubris and nonsensical notions of public architecture.

It is time that all right-thinking citizens, especially professionals, condemn this situation and demand a more rational, transparent, open and fair process in the design and construction. It is better to go back to the drawing board now than to suffer the impact of senseless design later.

Tara Murali is an architect

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.

Bridges with Tokyo

The animus between Japan and China is centuries old as opposed to our misgivings over China built over just 50 years. To that extent Japan has a far greater stake in relations with India. The pact on the bullet train is sizeable in value and Japan would only be too happy to fill up its manufacturing ledgers, thinned by over two decades of economic slack. The agreement could well have come through last year itself, but the timing seems to have been dictated by the Gujarat elections. Perhaps the Doklam stand-off had as much to contribute to this. The train project is but a prologue to greater India-Japan collaboration that would test our mettle to keep the political overtones with reference to China to the bare minimum and focus on bilateral economic ties.

R. NARAYANAN, Ghaziabad

The hero of 1965

In the passing of Marshal of the Indian Air Force Arjan Singh, India has lost an eminent war hero who played a determining role in the 1965 war. He was the embodiment of dedication, professionalism and commitment. His demise leaves a void that cannot be filled, for Arjan Singh was *sui generis*.

NIRANJAN SAHOO, Bhubaneswar

Justifying the hike

Union Tourism Minister Alphons Kannanthanam has stirred up a hornet's nest with his blunt assertion that vehicle owners are not so poor that they should be complaining about the increase in fuel prices. To be fair, his statement, notwithstanding its underlying political incorrectness and apparent insensitivity, is not entirely untrue.

However, the articulation of

policies and their justifications, especially in respect of those imposing a higher tax burden on the people, need to be carried out in a nuanced and sensitive manner. If taxes and levies can be arbitrarily hiked to exploit a captive market such as that for petroleum products, it not only makes the government guilty of monopolistic behaviour but also undercuts the principle of taxation with representation as the price revisions do not have Parliament's approval.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Sounding the bugle

Tamil Nadu is among the few States in the country where film actors never shy away from plunging into the world of politics in the hope of becoming Chief Minister of the State one day. However, the successes scripted by M.G.

Ramachandran, M. Karunanidhi and Jayalalitha cannot be fully attributed to their association with the tinsel world. Their allegiance to the Dravidian movement and its ideology, coupled with a direct connect with the masses at the grass-root level, played a pivotal role in their emergence as forces to reckon with. Now that actor Kamal Haasan has evinced greater interest in joining politics, one cannot say with certainty that people will back him and ensure his success in politics. His criticism of the ruling party may not have gone down well with the people as well. Unlike cinema, electoral politics is a different game altogether where muscle and money have to be taken into account ("I have arrived in politics", says Kamal", September 16).

M. JEYARAM, Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

The political confusion in Tamil Nadu seems to be spurring those watching from the sidelines to jump into the fray. Forming a new party is an option for Mr. Haasan, but there are bound to be many hurdles. He has a fan following which can be expected to work hard for him in an election. Though he is a fabulous actor, he will have to work on his image, especially among the educated middle class. The Congress has been surviving by joining hands with one Kazhagam or the other. As the old guard has rested its oars, this party offers him an opportunity to take control of it. He should therefore join the party and launch his bid from here.

S. RAJAGOPALAN, Chennai

Kamal Haasan has set the sails of his political boat and it is premature to guess how his vessel would weather

the uncharted territory. His declaration that his party would be funded by the poor sounds immature as that betrays his order of priorities. His celluloid roles seem to cast their spell on his political ambitions if his one-liners, quips, retorts and taunts to questions posed by the media are any indication. No doubt he needs to be given time and space to adjust himself to the demands of his new role, but new entrants should be smart enough to remember the wise counsel of the DMK's patriarch that all the cheers and applause one gets in a meeting may be deceptive as none can gauge how many hands that clap during a speech would actually vote for the party that the speaker campaigns for.

SIVAMANI VASUDEVAN, Chennai

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

Periyar's tryst with socialism

On his birth anniversary and the centenary of the Russian revolution, an intriguing 'what if'



A.R. VENKATACHALAPATHY

On December 13, 1931, Periyar set sail on the French ship, *Amboise*, from Madras on a voyage that would take him to the Soviet Union and other countries in Europe. As the Criminal Investigation Department observed, "Their visit to Russia was not bona fide, and the lieutenants of [Periyar] have been asked to keep this fact as secret as possible."

What is referred to in Periyar's biographies as the European tour took him to the Soviet Union via Sri Lanka, the Suez, Cairo, Athens, and Constantinople. Later, he journeyed through Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, and Sri Lanka.

Periyar maintained a tour diary, parts of which were reproduced in his own lifetime. Many photographs too have survived. In 1997, V. Anaimuthu, editor of Periyar's collected writings, partially unearthed Periyar's diary. Though incomplete, this is the single-most important source of the tour.

The Soviet tour

Heralding his Soviet tour, Periyar published a part translation, in Tamil, of *The Communist Manifesto*. His co-translator, S. Ramanathan, and his young relative, Ramu, accompanied him on this tour.

In Athens they had to wait for two weeks for Soviet permission. It is not clear how contacts were established with the Soviets, but the pass eventually arrived on February 2, 1932. They boarded the *S.S. Tchitcherine*, and after a seascrossing of the Black Sea, arrived at Odessa. They took a train at Kiev and reached Moscow on February 14.

Periyar promptly reported to the VOKS, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. No record of what transpired in the first two months of the tour has survived, and we are able to piece together their programme only from fragmentary information.

Soon after his arrival, Periyar made the mandatory visit to the Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square. He visited the Baku oilfields in Azerbaijan, Sukhumi in Abkhazia, and Tbilisi in Georgia. Apart from Leningrad, Periyar also visited Dneprostroi and Zaporizhia – the hy-



Periyar during his trip to Europe and the Soviet Union. •VIDUTHALAI

droelectric stations that were symbols of Soviet power.

From April 19, when he returned to Moscow, we have Periyar's day-to-day record of his subsequent 30 days in the Soviet Union. Here he was hosted by what Periyar refers to as the atheist society, the League of the Militant Godless. Some literature was shared between Periyar and the League, including a letter from the German International Freethinkers' Association and a bulletin of the Association.

Periyar and his associates received excellent treatment wherever they went, which they contrasted with the privations of the Great Depression in other parts of the Western world. One of the detailed descriptions that Periyar provides of Soviet administration is that of the Moskva Sarkozy Sakiz District People's Court.

He also visited the Lefortovo prison, the notorious Soviet prison associated with the KGB and the Stalinist purges. Periyar went to the AMO (Avtomobilnoe Moskovskoe Obshchestvo, or Moscow Automotive Enterprise). The kitchen and the massive dining area at the AMO factory impressed him. He was also taken to the Profintern (Red International of Labour Unions) office. This was probably more serious business, as the passage of worker radicals to Moscow was discussed.

It was a coincidence that Periyar was in Moscow on May Day, and he was witness to the joyous celebrations. Dioramas depicting various scenes such as those of the haves and have-nots, which reminded Periyar of the Mariamman temple festivals, were being paraded. Army units marched past the Lenin Mausoleum

where Stalin, Mikhail Kalinin, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky and other important leaders stood, waving to the crowds. The Turkish Prime Minister, Ismet Inonu, was a state guest on the occasion. Some days later, a welcome reception for all foreign delegates who had come for May Day was organised by the Society of Old Bolsheviks at the Great Kremlin Palace, and Periyar too was invited.

Émigrés of various hues were present in Moscow at that time and Periyar met some of them, including Abani Mukherji, a founding member of the Communist Party of India.

By the end of April 1932, for reasons not entirely clear, there was discussion about concluding the trip. This is not surprising, as there is confusing information on what Periyar and his two associates were doing or attempting to do in Moscow. Even though Periyar was in touch with Communist Party of the Soviet Union officials, the logistics of the tour were being managed by the League of the Militant Godless.

By May 14, Periyar's departure for Berlin was confirmed. After some delay, the papers finally arrived on May 17, and Periyar departed from Moscow immediately.

Reactions on the red spectre

What was the import of Periyar's Soviet tour, and what impact did it have on his political career?

The short statement that Periyar released immediately on return was ominous. It exhorted members of his self-respect movement to desist from using traditional honorifics such as *Maha-ganam*, *Sri*, *Thiru*, and *Thirumathi*, as prefixes and urged them instead to employ 'Thozhar', or 'Com-

rade'. It is a custom in Tamil Nadu to ask older and venerated people to name children. Such was his fascination for the Soviet Union that Periyar named the daughter of a leading Dravidian intellectual 'Russia' and another child 'Moscow'.

According to a secret police report, Periyar "lost no time in starting the spread of Communist doctrine". Within three months of his return he had addressed over 40 public meetings where he "expressed unbound admiration of the Russian regime" and stated "his intention to end the present administration and establish a Socialist form of government."

Considering that the government was paranoid about the red spectre, reaction was swift. Police action was taken against him and his family. Periyar was soon forced to take a call on the party's programme and its immediate future. In March 1935, in a public statement, he declared that he was withdrawing his socialist programme in the larger interest of his self-respect movement.

Periyar remained impressed by the achievements of the Soviet Union all through his life. The complete control of society and economy by the state made a deep impact on him. "It is a new world," he observed. "Such a transformation has never ever taken place in any country." He believed that only a Soviet-style state could rid India of its poverty. But Periyar either did not follow what happened in the Soviet Union subsequently or did not care for the reality of lived Soviet socialism. He preferred to believe in an idealised version of a socialist society, for he did not comment about the Moscow show trials, the Stalinist purges, etc. His engagement with socialism, intense during 1932-35, never really surfaced in the next 40 years of an eventful political life. The socialist fringe of his movement left him and joined the still, and forever, nascent Communist Party.

However, Periyar made frequent comments about his Soviet tour and favourable statements about the Soviet Union all through his life, while remaining critical of the Indian communist party on the grounds that it was a Brahminical party. How modern Tamil Nadu would have shaped if the brief alliance between Periyar's movement and socialism had continued remains a most interesting 'what if' question.

A.R. Venkatachalapathy is a historian of the Dravidian movement

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Ethics at source matter

There is a distinction between being a defender of journalistic truth and a confidence trickster



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

I did not imagine that my last column, "An impunity that can be countered" (Sept. 11), could be provocative. The intention was to provide a tool to deal with sources who habitually mislead reporters, and to protect journalistic credibility from the onslaught of multiple stories emanating from the corridors of power. I did not realise that a column needed caveats to mean what it intended to mean.

A section of readers, reporters, and journalism students wanted to know whether I have changed my opinion about the importance of attribution and the rules of granting anonymity in the present political climate. In my journalism classes, I often draw attention to the searing opening lines from Janet Malcolm's *The Journalist and the Murderer*: "Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse." The questions posed by the students were sharp and honest: how do we deal with a multiplatform media reality where no one likes to miss a story? In an opaque structure, where access has become a favour provided by those in power, what options are left for reporters to do their job ethically and in a competent manner?

When to grant anonymity

The bedrock of journalism is its role to bear witness: talking to a political source to understand Cabinet changes that are planned – why someone is preferred and another is rejected – is an important way of knowing one's own government and the functioning of political parties. But that does not change my opinion that granting anonymity is a journalistic privilege that should be invoked sparingly and only in special unavoidable circumstances to fulfil a public interest role. Why should a statement like "rewarding performance" be published without attribution? I agree with David, a reader, who invoked the idea of caveat emptor, and shifted the responsibility to the journalist. It is important for reporters to make it clear to sources who demand anonymity that they must explain their rationale. Reporters should realise that by granting anonymity to a source, they are denying the objective space for readers to

make their own informed choices – it is journalists who are deciding on behalf of readers that the information they have secured is valid, relevant, and authentic.

My premise on the use of anonymous sources is rooted in the code of the public broadcaster, NPR, which calls for a joint decision in using this device. It says: "This is not a solo decision – the editors and producers of these stories must be satisfied that the source is credible and reliable, and that there is a substantial journalistic justification for using the source's information without attribution. This requires both deciding whether it is editorially justified to let the person speak anonymously, and being satisfied that this person is who the piece says he is and is in a position to know about what he's revealing." Many media scholars and editors have been stressing for years the qualitative difference between a single 'off the record' quote and 'unattributable background briefing' which usually involves a lengthy



and considered statement by a source to a trusted journalist. The former is an opinion, while the latter is an explanation of the context in which decisions are being made.

The best distinctions about different types of relationships between a reporter and a source are in Norman Pearlstine's book, *Off the Record*: "Editors have an obligation to know the identity of unnamed sources used in a story, so that editors and reporters can jointly assess the appropriateness of using them... That source must understand this rule." The important question is, are reporters following this cardinal principle?

If a reporter has followed all the guidelines that govern the processes of granting anonymity to a source, and then discovers a deliberate falsehood aimed at misleading the public, then to invoke the right to out the source becomes a valid defense. Otherwise the reporter will be seen as a confidence trickster.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

Dismantling hierarchy

Karunanidhi's role in addressing caste discrimination and implementing equality

TIRUCHI SIVA



An assessment of the historic Dravidian movement and its leadership, which was responsible for empowering victims of caste discrimination and putting into practice the ideal of equality, requires sensitivity and understanding. The article by Pulapre Balakrishnan titled "The federal manoeuvre" (published on September 16) does not take into account the depth and dimensions of the movement and the progressive world views of those who spearheaded it.

Kalaingar Karunanidhi's contributions in implementing this ideal, in the form of schemes and programmes of the government he headed, are very much in the public domain. Prof. Balakrishnan is so caught up with the filmy world that the illusory perception he develops actually blurs his vision to appreciate the real world of the Dravidian movement, and the tangible and substantive contributions that Kalaingar made in transforming the lives of poor and deprived people.

Kalaingar was an outstanding product of the movement, who took into account the interests of the people of Tamil Nadu. He nationalised buses as Transport Minister in 1967, and as Chief Minister in 1971. Among his remarkable accomplishments are the land reforms he initiated to benefit the landless poor. He was the chief architect of the Land Ceiling Act of 1972.

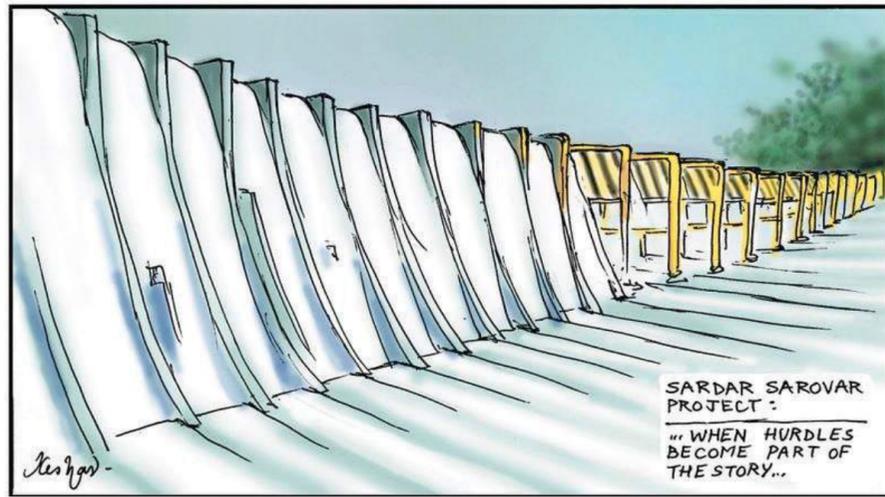
Social justice

He took measures that without any bloodshed ensured social justice and equal opportunity to millions who laboured under a hierarchical structure based on caste, priest craft, and superstition. As Chief Minister, he came up with an innovative scheme that gave priority in education and employment to the first graduate of each family. This benefited thousands and expanded their capabilities to lead a life of dignity. He directed women teachers to be recruited for primary schools across Tamil Nadu. For improving nutritional standards of children and mitigating hidden hunger, he introduced a scheme mandating the provision of five eggs a week to schoolchildren in their midday meals. He started the Women's Self-Help Group, economically empowering women. He ensured 30% reservation for women in all jobs, and ensured their inclusive representation in the administration of the State.

Dalits in three Panchayats – Pappapatti, Keeripatti and Natartamangalam – were being denied the right to file nominations for elections to those grass roots representative bodies. The situation was so bad for them that even after they were elected to head those Panchayats, they were coerced to resign from office. As Chief Minister, Kalaingar took all the measures to empower them to file nominations and enjoy legitimate power in the event of the elections to those representative bodies. Such a vision combined with positive action flowed from the legacy of the Dravidian movement, of which he was an integral part.

Today we all lament the commercialisation of education. It was Kalaingar who stood against MGR when the latter opened up the education sector to private players on the ground. He said it would make education costly and inaccessible to those who are socially, educationally and economically weak.

Tiruchi Siva is a DMK Rajya Sabha MP



CONCEPTUAL

Subsidiarity principle

POLITICAL ECONOMY

A principle in social thought which states that social problems need to be addressed by the smallest local institutions which can tackle them better than centralised political bodies. Ownership of any problem is believed to be greater at the local level, which in turn leads to better solutions. The subsidiarity principle is viewed as an argument for limited government, emphasising the power of voluntary institutions to tackle many social challenges better than a big government. The term has been attributed to French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville, who spoke of its significance in *Democracy in America*.

MORE ON THE WEB

When was the zero first used in India?

http://bit.ly/2f2QBZF

SHELF HELP

The many North Koreas

Most books speak of a repressive regime

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

The secretive land of North Korea has always been in the news for all the wrong reasons: human rights abuses, nuclear tests, public executions, and an authoritarian government, among others. Given how difficult it is to enter this little-known country, books on it too are few but varied. Some speak of a repressive state; some are first-hand accounts by travellers; some by North Koreans who have fled and found refuge in other countries, only to recount past horrors; and a few on how North Korea is a lot more than what we hear.

Guy Delisle's *Pyeongang: A Journey in North Korea* (2004) is a black-and-white graphic novel that focusses mostly on the landmarks in North Korea's capital. To capture the colourless world that he stayed in for two months, Delisle's sketches

are in pencil. He draws only what he is allowed to see, but the book captures in picture the story of a foreigner with little freedom to travel.

If Delisle's book is from a foreigner's eyes, journalist Blaine Harden's *Escape from Camp 14* (2012) is an insider's account of an authoritarian regime. This heart-rending, brutal account followed Harden's profile of Shin Dong-hyuk, the subject of the book, for *The Washington Post*. Shin, who is born in a North Korean labour camp, speaks of the torture he endures, the executions he is witness to, including of his mother and brother, and his final escape to the U.S. A book filled with ghastly details, *Escape* is as morbidly gripping as it is controversial.

A rare attempt to show North Korea empathetically, as any other country, was made by British diplomat John Everard in *Only Beautiful, Please: A British Diplomat in North Korea*

(2012). Everard speaks of a civilisation that has suffered under the greatest information blackout that began in the 20th century and that continues until today. He changes the names of those he interviews, but writes that North Korea deals with the usual urban and rural issues that many developing countries deal with, including the extreme cold in Pyongyang and changing government plans. Everard says he feared that he was moving around in a huge surveillance state, but found people often laughing away his fears. He speaks of things as mundane as restaurants that serve few but delicious dishes, to show how life is as normal as yours or mine.

Anjaly Thomas, in *There are no Gods in North Korea* (2016), writes a easy-to-read account of her journey through a controlling nation where restrictions galore are imposed on tourists.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 18, 1967

U.K. police snatch Russian scientist

Scotland Yard yesterday [September 17] snatched a young Russian physicist, Tkachenko, from a Moscow-bound plane after reports that he had been dragged into a Soviet Embassy car in a busy London street. The man's call for help resulted in a general police alert. Just as an Aeroflot jet was about to taxi away for take-off, police squad cars ringed it. Officers of Scotland Yard's special (political) branch and immigration officials rushed aboard. There was a tussle on the steps of the plane, with the captain of the airliner and the young Russian's wife trying to keep him aboard. The police won, and the man was taken into the airport building. Vladimir Tkachenko, aged about 25, had been working on low temperature physics at Birmingham University. He was a post-graduate exchange student and had been due to return to Moscow after about eight months in Britain.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 18, 1917

Snake farms in the United States

It may not be generally known that there are ranches in the great south-western part of the United States whose whole business in the fattening of rattlesnakes and other reptiles for market. The market for these creatures is an active one, including museum proprietors, circus men, sideshow-actors, zoological devotees, and also chemists who wish to study the various snake poisons. Probably the biggest of these ranches is the Armstrong ranch, near Brownsville, Texas, which consists of ten acres of land, surrounded by a high fence constructed in a manner to prevent the escape of any wriggling wanderer. This enclosure contains pens for different classes of reptiles, and each pen holds at least a thousand snakes. A fat rattler will bring more money than a lean one, for snakes are sold by the pound. Consequently the snake rancher's work is to make his charges comfortable and fatten them to the extent of his ability. Then, when the buyer comes along, the snake-poison is scientifically extracted from the boarders who are about to leave the farm, their poison being kept in bottles for chemists and physicians, and the rattlers go forth to their new homes as harmless as pet canaries.

DATA POINT

Stateless but counted

By the end of 2016, Myanmar had close to a million people, mostly the Rohingyas, who were officially termed "stateless" by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Myanmar and Ivory Coast together had half of the world's stateless people.

Country	Stateless people according to UNHCR	% of overall Stateless
Myanmar	9,25,939	28.6%
Ivory Coast	6,94,000	21.4%
Thailand	4,87,741	15%
Latvia	2,42,736	8%
Syria	1,60,000	5%

SOURCE: UNHCR, 2016