



Before eviction

States must quickly determine if procedural lapses deprived forest-dwellers of their rights

The Supreme Court's order to evict, over the next five months, occupants of forest lands who failed to make a successful claim for tenure under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, has once again highlighted the dilemma of reconciling inalienable tribal rights with biodiversity conservation. When the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act was passed, it was with the wholly welfarist goal of making these communities partners in conservation. They would be stewards of forests that have shrunk and become fragmented over the decades. It was another landmark, therefore, when the Forest Rights Act protected possession and conferred heritability of land to over 23 lakh out of 44 lakh claimants who are either specified Scheduled Tribes, or people who have lived in forests traditionally, relying on forest produce for at least 75 years prior to the cut-off year of 2005. But over 20 lakh other applicants who could not establish their claim through gram sabhas and appellate authorities have now been ordered to be evicted by July 12. The 17 State governments which have been asked to carry out the evictions must respond by quickly determining whether there were procedural lapses that deprived applicants of due process, notably in making appeals. This process may take time, more so in an election year, and the sheer scale of action required would necessitate an extension of the eviction date.

In the ideal scheme, as the Forest Rights Act envisages, forested areas and their biodiversity will be protected by communities, with individuals taking forest produce only for sustenance and livelihood. Such an approach is at odds with the colonial paradigm of forests being treated as a resource run by an opaque bureaucracy that replaced precious old-growth trees with monocultures such as teak. Today, forests have shrunk to about 5% of the land in terms of protected areas, while human pressures are growing: landscapes are alienated for resource exploitation, road and dam building, and a lot of wildlife is lost to poaching. Man-animal conflict is growing. Claims for tenure under the Forest Rights Act must therefore satisfy the primary test of whether they are legally unimpeachable, and even if they are, whether they would impose additional pressures on forests and wildlife. The answer in many areas may lie in resettlement. In some well-documented cases, such as in the Western Ghats, alternative land and cash compensation convinced tribals to move out of core areas. One example is that of the Nagarahole National Park, where the outcome has been good for both people and wildlife, as evidenced by the recovery of tiger density over three decades. State governments need to pursue such programmes in a humane and vigorous fashion. They must also come forward to declare critical wildlife habitats under the Act. This will aid in formulating resettlement schemes for tribal residents.

Pre-poll gambit

Reduction in rates brings cheer to real estate sector, but unsettles the GST regime

On Sunday, the Goods and Services Tax Council recommended a dramatic reduction in the headline indirect tax rates payable on under-construction properties. The GST rate payable on affordable homes, with effect from April 2019, will come down from 8% to 1%, and all other residential properties outside the affordable segment will attract 5% GST instead of the 12% levied at present. The new rate on affordable homes, defined as units that cost less than ₹45 lakh and have a carpet area of 60 square metres in metro cities and 90 square metres in non-metros, is far lower than the 3% rate mooted by a ministerial panel. The Council needs to meet again in March to clear the transition rules for the proposed rate cuts, and the conditions to be stipulated for housing projects to be eligible for the new rates. Days ahead of the expected announcement of the Lok Sabha poll dates by the Election Commission, the government is clearly keen on reaching out to different sections of voters. It has argued that the move will help meet the aspirations of millions of homebuyers, and revive the fortunes of real estate developers. Among the country's largest employers in recent years, the realty sector has been marred by the debt overdose that has plagued much of corporate India; this has been compounded by high unsold inventory that hit cash flows. Properties that were already complete at the time of the GST's adoption were spared the tax. But the introduction of 12% and 8% GST for under-construction premier housing units and affordable homes, respectively, had come as a dampener for fresh bookings.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley reckons that revenues will not be hit by the rate cut. The implicit assumption is that higher sales volumes will compensate the exchequer. Experts expect a 4-5% reduction in home prices, but the decision to deny input tax credits to builders could bring a twist in the tale. Developers may be forced to raise base prices as critical inputs, particularly cement (taxed at 28%), entail high levies that can no longer be offset. Buyers may still prefer to opt for unsold completed properties that don't attract GST, instead of incomplete projects. Compliance as well as material costs could go up too, as the Council is likely to mandate that around 80% of a project's inputs must come from formal sector vendors in the GST net. It is difficult to determine to what extent a proposed tax exemption on development rights will offset these costs for developers. Whatever the outcome of this pre-election ploy, the frequent structural tinkering ahead of electoral battles has emerged as the biggest challenge to the stabilisation of India's fledgling GST regime.

Coalition of the concerned

Multi-pronged diplomacy is vital to compel Pakistan to end its support for terrorist groups



SUHASINI HAIDAR

In the wake of the Pulwama attack on February 14, the government has iterated once again its plan for the "diplomatic isolation" of Pakistan. The idea, which was first articulated after the 2016 Uri attacks, is a non-starter, as was underlined by the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman to both countries earlier this month, just a few days after Pulwama. In Pakistan, the Prince called himself "Pakistan's Ambassador" in his country, and issued a joint statement praising Pakistan for its fight against terrorism. Clearly, a more considered diplomatic strategy, less full of rhetoric, must be chalked out by the government in response to cross-border terrorism.

Beyond isolation

To begin with, the government would do better to repackage its idea of "isolating Pakistan" into one of building a more inclusive 'coalition against terrorism emanating from Pakistan'. In the past couple of weeks alone, Iran and Afghanistan have faced terror attacks on their security forces along the border with Pakistan – and several other countries, which have also faced such attacks or see the presence of Pakistan-based groups on their soil, would be willing to join ranks on this. The truth is, in today's interconnected world, it is vainglorious to expect countries to join a unilateral plan for isolation.

Despite the U.S.'s considerable might, it has been unable to get most countries, including India, to sever ties with Iran and North Korea, for example. The impact of



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

such a campaign is also doubtful: after years of trying to isolate North Korea, the U.S. is pursuing talks with its leader. While isolation might work as a campaign slogan for domestic audiences, it is quickly rebuffed each time a country engages with the nation one is trying to isolate. An inclusive coalition is more likely to move nations at the global stage as well. The success of the efforts led by the U.S. and other countries to 'grey list' Pakistan at the Financial Action Task Force or of French efforts for a United Nations Security Council statement on Pulwama points to that.

Second, India must focus on the case against Masood Azhar, which pre-dates the case against 26/II mastermind Hafiz Saeed. In a first, the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) claimed responsibility for the Pulwama attack in a suicide bomber video that has not thus far been disputed by its leader Masood Azhar. Azhar has been on the U.S.'s radar since 1992, when he was a leader of the banned terror group Harkat ul-Ansar, and worked with jihadi groups in Sudan and Bangladesh. His release after years in Indian prisons in exchange for hostages on board the IC-814 flight should on its own merit his banning and prosecution – not just in Pakistan, but in all the countries whose nationals were on board

that Indian Airlines flight, as well as the stops that flight made: in Nepal, the United Arab Emirates and Afghanistan.

Third, India must prepare for a pushback from Pakistan, most likely in terms of internationalising the Kashmir issue, and linking it to progress in Afghanistan. This is what Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan, Zahid Nasrullah, did when he said that any attack by India would "impact the momentum" of the peace talks in Afghanistan. His words were heard beyond Kabul, in Washington and Moscow. On February 18, members of the Taliban negotiating team were due to meet U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Islamabad. The talks were called off after Afghanistan objected to the Taliban team's travel to Pakistan, and rescheduled for February 25 in Doha. It remains to be seen how much countries trying to negotiate with the Taliban will need Pakistan's leverage to make progress on those talks. U.S. President Donald Trump sees them as the precursor for plans to pull out most troops in combat in Afghanistan before his re-election bid for 2020.

The American angle

Next, the government must prioritise action over words, when it comes to moves against Pakistan's sponsorship and hosting of the

JeM. The measures taken thus far – cancelling Most Favoured Nation status, maximising use of Indus waters, denying visas to Pakistani sports persons, etc. – have little real impact on Pakistan and certainly none on the military establishment. Instead of priding itself on extracting statements of condemnation from various governments in the world, it is better for New Delhi to use India's considerable diplomatic leverage to ensure action that would shut down the JeM and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) permanently and bring their leaders to justice. In this regard, mere statements and bans have not worked for more than two decades, and the government must consider other options, especially with the countries that carry the most leverage and access in Pakistan: China, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

It is puzzling that the U.S. has been able to carry out drone strikes on a whole host of terror group leaders on Pakistan's western front, but never once targeted camps and infrastructure belonging to the JeM and the LeT, despite their well-established links to al-Qaeda. India must also press the U.S. to place travel sanctions on specific entities in the Pakistani military establishment unless visible action is taken against the JeM, whose leaders hold public rallies and issue videos threatening India.

Contrary to popular perception, the Trump administration's moves to cancel funds to Pakistan last year is not the toughest action the U.S. has contemplated: in May 1992, then U.S. President George H.W. Bush had directed his Secretary of State James Baker to send a stern letter to then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif threatening to designate Pakistan as a "State sponsor of Terror" for its support to Kashmiri and Sikh militant groups.

A similar line of talks must be

pursued by New Delhi with Riyadh – which once was a donor to Pakistan's Islamist institutions, but now is wary of funding extremism – to withhold any funds that may trickle down to charitable wings run by the JeM and LeT. With China, it is surprising that the issue of a simple ban at the UN Security Council has not been made India's chief demand from Beijing. It is hoped that this will be rectified soon when the next proposal to ban Azhar is brought to the UNSC, and during Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's visit to China this week for the trilateral Russia-India-China meeting. More than the ban, however, India must ask China for action against any entities dealing with the JeM in Pakistan, given that China is the partner with the most influence in Pakistan today, and one with the most to lose from terror groups in Punjab operating along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Steady dialogue

Finally, India must look to its own actions on the diplomatic front with Pakistan. Calling off a formal dialogue process for more than a decade has clearly yielded no desired outcome. South Asia as a region, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process too have suffered the consequences of this disengagement, without yielding any desired outcomes. A measured, steady and non-political level of dialogue is a more effective way of impressing India's determination to root out terrorism than the present on-again, off-again policy. As the nation prepares for a possible military response to the Pulwama attack, it is important that New Delhi consider its diplomatic response carefully, particularly taking into account both the historical and regional context of its moves.

suhasini.h@thehindu.co.in

The correct prescription

Entry of e-pharmacies will bring down the price of medicine for Indian patients



PRASHANT REDDY T.

Amid a slew of conflicting judicial decisions from different High Courts, the legality of e-pharmacies continues to be questioned by various trade associations such as the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD). It represents 8.4 lakh pharmacists who run the brick and mortar pharmacies in neighbourhoods across India.

E-pharmacies, which operate through websites or smartphone apps on the Internet, offer medicines for sale at a discount of at least 20% when compared to traditional pharmacists, with the added convenience of home delivery of medicines to one's doorstep. For scheduled drugs, patients can submit photographs of prescriptions while placing orders. Despite operating in India for at least four years now, the legal status of these e-pharmacies is not clear because the government is yet to notify in-law draft rules that it published in 2018.

The fiercest opponents of e-pharmacies are trade associations

of existing pharmacists and chemists. They argue that their livelihoods are threatened by venture capital backed e-pharmacies and that jobs of thousands are on the line. Apart from these obvious arguments, these trade associations also spin imaginary tales of how e-pharmacies will open the door to drug abuse and also the sale of sub-standard or counterfeit drugs, thereby threatening public health. There is enough evidence on record to demonstrate how existing pharmacies contribute generously to drug abuse and sale of sub-standard medicine. There is no reason to suspect that e-pharmacies are going to worsen the situation in anyway.

A case of cartelisation

The more prudent way of looking at the entry of e-pharmacies is competition and the resultant effect it will have on lowering the price of medicine for Indian patients. Viewed from this perspective, there is virtually no doubt that e-pharmacies should be allowed to operate because the history of India's trade associations of pharmacists is one of rampant, unabashed cartelisation that has resulted in an artificial inflation of medicine prices.

In a fully functional, competitive market, pharmacists would compete with each other for busi-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

ness. This competition could happen in the form of discounts or improving operational efficiency. For example, if two retailers buy a medicine from a wholesaler at ₹50 and the maximum retail price of the drug is ₹75, they are free to sell it at ₹70 or ₹65 or even ₹51. The seller with the lower price gets more customers and can make more profits. However, if both sellers enter into an agreement with each other to sell the drug at ₹75 and they also clearly define the geographical area within which they are operating, they both make higher profits but at the cost of the patient who now has to pay higher prices.

This practice of two competitors colluding to fix the sale price and area of operation is called cartelisation, and is illegal under India's Competition Act. The premise of this law is that a free market is efficient only if all sellers are competing with each other to offer the lowest price to the customer.

Over the last decade, the Com-

petition Commission of India (CCI) has had to deal with several complaints alleging that trade associations of pharmacists are providing platforms for cartelisation where pharmacists are basically rigging the market. In simple terms, this means that pharmacists, who should otherwise be competing with each other to offer lower prices for their customers, prefer to enter into agreements with each other to fix the price at which they will sell medicines to patients. Once all parties are on the same page, there is no reason to compete with each other and reduce prices.

Another barrier

A second, more insidious strategy is the practice of requiring pharmaceutical companies to apply for a no-objection-certificate (NOC) from the regional trade association before they appoint new stockists in a region to sell a particular drug. This has the effect of artificially restricting competition in certain markets because more stockists mean more competition. By creating such artificial, extra-legal barriers to the free trade of medicines within India, these trade associations create huge distortions in the Indian market. It is suspected that these practices continue despite multiple restraining orders by the CCI.

In its recent policy note on "Making markets work for affordable healthcare", published in October 2018, the CCI noted, "One major factor that contributes to high drug prices in India is the unreasonably high trade margins." One of the culprits for this phenomenon identified by the CCI was "self-regulation by trade associations [which] also contributes towards high margins as these trade associations control the entire drug distribution system in a manner that mutes competition".

One of the solutions proposed by the CCI was encouraging more e-pharmacies. As stated by the CCI in its policy note, "Electronic trading of medicines via online platforms, with appropriate regulatory safeguards, can bring in transparency and spur price competition among platforms and among retailers, as has been witnessed in other product segments."

Where the state has failed, it is possible that venture capitalist backed e-pharmacists will succeed in bringing back competition to the retail drug markets in India. There is no reason for India to continue indulging trade associations that have no taste for competition or fair business practices.

Prashant Reddy T. is a Senior Resident Fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

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.

After Pulwama

Being a former government interlocutor for Jammu and Kashmir, one expected the writer to acknowledge the complexity of the problem (Editorial page, "After Pulwama, a sorry response", February 25). There was an eagerness to sing paeans to the erstwhile UPA government's responses.

Nowhere in the article could one find any suggestion or solution to end Pakistan's treacherous and cowardly policy: of locking its regular army in barracks and training and dispatching terrorists to bleed India. Will mollicoddling the separatists make Pakistan shut down its terror camps? The comment about the lack of a Kashmir policy is astonishing because there is no Kashmir policy without

a Pakistan policy. It is impossible to have any policy towards a nation which is a de facto militaristic theocracy masquerading as a modern democracy and which operates in the shadow of international conventions.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

Managing the waste

The reality about sanitation is a lot more different than what is on record. The mega Swachh Bharat Mission appears to have lost its purpose and it may not be an exaggeration to say that it has been reduced to an exercise of building toilets. The major issues such as whether they are being used or whether these toilets are indeed connected to a proper sewerage system need to be the focus (Editorial page,

"De-odourising sewage", February 25).

DEEPIKA TRIPATHI,
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Every citizen is entitled to potable water, but with the population explosion and water management programmes far from satisfactory, the problem of sewage management has been compounded. The other major cause of water pollution is the unchecked discharge of industrial effluents into water bodies, which can be seen across India. The government and other stakeholders should exercise care. Finally, when one talks about sanitation, cosmetic and superficial measures such as "photo ops" of celebrities cleaning roads do not help the main cause.

DEEPAK SINGHAL,
Noida

The common process of recirculating treated sludge into the rivers does not seem to be coherent. Inoperable sewage treatment plants should be replaced with futuristic systems which can provide potable water after treating the sludge and subsequent osmosis. These plants can also provide electricity and excellent manure. The hallmarks of any smart city should be a good drainage system, an idea championed in the Indus Valley Civilisation.

JACOB J. PUTHENVEETIL,
Chennai

Migrant focus

A paradigm shift in the attitude towards migrant labourers in Kerala, to make them live a life of dignity, is no more an optional policy. In a State where there are shifts in the work force ratio, a growing population of the

elderly and a yet-to-wane attraction among the young for seek overseas employment, the role that migrant labourers play in ensuring Kerala's progressive march cannot be over-emphasised. While the LDF government seems alive to this, cosmetic steps need to be augmented with proactive measures (OpEd page, "Old challenges in building a new Kerala", February 25).

AYASSERI RAVEENDRANATH,
Aranmula, Kerala

A Sunday refresh

The new format of the 'Magazine' is interesting. I have come across the magazines of other newspapers but 'The Hindu' is different. The handy format will ensure a week of good reading material.

HIMANSHU SRIVASTAV,
Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh

As some of the letters show ('Letters to the Editor', February 25), the new format of the 'Magazine' has been well received.

How about shifting the 'Open Page' to the tabloid? Most of us would like to read its interesting stories/anecdotes at leisure during the week. Most often, the main paper loses its importance by evening.

J.S. ACHARYA,
Hyderabad

The makeover has resulted in a product that is rich in content. Perhaps the Literary Review can have poems and short stories, which will also allow creative writers to have a space of their own in the magazine. There should be a forum for readers' opinions.

B. PRABHA,
Varkala, Kerala

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

The case of Shamima Begum

If the U.K. goes with the exclusionary instinct of an angry public, it will be dangerous for democracy



VIDYA RAM

In February 2015, three British schoolgirls from East London, aged between 15 and 16, took a flight to Istanbul and then Syria. They had told their parents they were going out for a day, but they didn't return. While their worried families went to Turkey in March to find out what happened to them, the disappearance of the girls sparked a national conversation on how young men and women in the U.K. were leaving for Syria and Iraq, often unbeknown to their families, to join the ranks of the Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist groups.

Giving evidence to a parliamentary committee shortly after the girls disappeared, the then Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Mark Rowley, spelt out what appeared to be Britain's approach: "If you have been innocently duped, you travelled to a war zone and you regretted it and you have come back, there is nothing criminal or terrorist in that. Clearly, if you have taken part in terrorism... then we are going to do everything we can to make sure you face the consequence of that through the criminal justice process." Britain has been contending with the issue of returnees for some time now. The government believes that of the 900 individuals who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join forces such as the IS, 40% have returned to the U.K., 20% have died, and 40% remain in the region.

Four years after the disappearance of the girls, *The Times* discovered one of them, Shamima Begum, in a Syrian refugee camp of 39,000 people. Heavily pregnant at 19 after having lost two children, Begum told the newspaper she had no regrets. She insisted that she was not the "silently" schoolgirl who ran away, but was still frightened. "Now all I want to do is come home to Britain," she said.

The question of citizenship

The story created an uproar in Britain; tabloids raged at her "unrepentant" attitude. The government swiftly ratcheted up its response. While



"The fact that Shamima Begum admitted to having no regrets leaving the U.K. is not surprising given that she lives in a refugee camp that is home to many Islamic State sympathisers." A picture of Begum. ■ REUTERS

the Security Minister initially insisted that no British lives would be put at risk to "go looking for terrorists or former terrorists in a failed state," it soon emerged that the authorities were determined to withdraw Begum's British citizenship. Under the British Nationality Act of 1981, the Secretary of State has the power to deprive a person of citizenship on the grounds that it is "conducive to the public good" and that the person would not be rendered stateless. The government believes that Begum either currently holds Bangladeshi citizenship or is eligible to apply for one. Begum and the Bangladesh government deny that she holds dual citizenship, and Bangladesh has even firmly said that there is "no question of her being allowed to enter into Bangladesh." This suggests that Home Secretary Sajid Javid's decision to strip Begum of her citizenship would render her stateless. Her family is considering legal options to challenge this decision. While deploring her conduct and comments to the media, her sister wrote in a letter to Mr. Javid that it is not possible for the family to abandon her either.

The issue has deeply divided Britain. On the one hand, the right-wing has sought to use the controversy to add to the narrative that it has often resorted to: of a supposedly magnanimous, set upon Britain, apt to be exploited by rogue individuals such as an impudent "jihadi bride". To this effect, many have attacked Begum's comments that revealed her

shock at the Home Office's decision. "Thank god, Sajid Javid grasped Shamima Begum is the one person uniting Britain - against her," declared a columnist in *The Telegraph*, accusing some of attempting to turn her in to the nation's "sweetheart". This is ludicrous, as everyone who opposes the Home Office's decision unanimously agrees that she must come back to face the judicial consequences, whatever they be.

Migration to Britain

To many others, this has highlighted the dangerous trajectory of British politics, where citizenship and the concept of belonging are under threat, and at the mercy of a capricious political system. Britain's attitude to migrants has already been under great scrutiny over its treatment of the Windrush generation (Commonwealth citizens who were invited to Britain between 1948 and 1971 to help rebuild the country after World War II, and were wrongly treated as illegal immigrants and some even deported). The Begum controversy highlights how only those with foreign roots are at the risk of losing citizenship. A white Brit without foreign ancestry would have no recourse to other countries and would therefore not be stripped of her citizenship. This makes the situation particularly discriminatory.

It raises other ethical questions. One Conservative MP asked in Parliament: "In removing British citizenship, the Home Secretary is essential-

ly saying, 'She's somebody else's problem', but... 'Which other country is supposed to look after her on our behalf? Can you imagine the fury here if we took a French or Italian citizen who joined Islamic State?'" Others wonder about leaving a young woman, who could potentially do harm or radicalise others, in Syria, a country without resources and vulnerable to terrorist activity.

Through all this Mr. Javid has insisted that his decision is all about "keeping the country safe". He has also questioned the ability of Britain's judicial system to hold Begum to account given that where she and others like her are in a "very lawless and dangerous place, so it is not always possible... to gather evidence of... activities that could be used to try to have a successful prosecution." However, many in the law enforcement agencies disagree with this perspective. The head of Mi6, Alex Younger, told *The Times* that while those who returned did pose risks, they had the right to come back. Others have pointed to the mechanisms that exist for returnees, such as through the use of temporary exclusion orders that place conditions on their return and enable them to be monitored at home. Still others have noted that depriving Begum of her citizenship could send out the dangerous signal that Britain is playing into the hands of terrorist recruiters, who are eager to make minority communities in the U.K. feel isolated. However, it's easy to see why Mr. Javid, widely seen as having prime ministerial ambitions, may disregard such considerations: A recent *Sky News* poll suggested that 76% of the public are in favour of Begum not being allowed to return.

What Begum did during her time with the 'Caliphate' and the extent to which she continues to sympathise with the IS is not known. The fact that she admitted to having no regrets is hardly a surprise given that she remains in a refugee camp that is home to many IS sympathisers. But if the starting point is to just go with the punitive instinct of an angry public and deprive a young woman, who was potentially brainwashed as a minor, of her fundamental rights, it is a dangerous time for democracy, due process and the rule of law.

vidya.ram@thehindu.co.in

Re-imagining Delhi

The governance structure is in need of a drastic remake



RAGHU DAYAL

Notwithstanding the importance of the rural sector, it is the cities and towns, where citizens' daily travails in terms of *pani, bijli, sadak*, housing, schooling, healthcare and sanitation play out, that extensively impact the public's perception of a government's performance. While the annual inundation of cities, daily loss of lives on roads, and frequent infernos highlight dysfunctional civic and municipal governance, the failure to create zones, which results in thickets of illegal buildings and structures, as revealed in the 'sealing' overdrive in Delhi, shows how the rot runs deep.

Urban problems are not urban in isolation; they are national problems. Cities are in need of duly empowered municipalities and institutional systems and processes for closely coordinated and accountable agencies that can deliver in areas such as sanitation, health, education, mobility and housing.

Too many cooks

With a plethora of elected and other agencies, the governance structure for Delhi is in need of a drastic remake. In addition to 272 councillors in three municipalities, 70 MLAs, and seven MPs, there is the New Delhi Municipal Council for the cloistered Lutyens' zone, and the Cantonment Board, not to talk of the Union government controlling land and policing. Too many intervening institutions, often with overlapping jurisdictions and sometimes contradictory goals, make for suboptimal outcomes.

The mega-scale migration is Delhi's special challenge. Migration has steadily risen over the decades. With people pouring into the city and cars on to roads, the outlook for the environment looks grim. Delhi generates over 5,000 tonnes of refuse every day. In a way, Delhi is hailed as the country's pampered child. Its annual per capita income of ₹3.29 lakh (2017-18), which is almost thrice the national average. According to the 2011 Census, of a total of 3.34 million households in Delhi, 3.31 million had electricity, 2.62 million had safe drinking water, and 2.99 million had toilet facilities. Even so, the city has more than 200,000 homeless people and almost half of its population is in slums and unauthorised colonies.

High wages with little accountability for actual service delivery make public sector agencies an obvious target for patronage hiring. It also results in massive over-staffing. We need privatisation of civic delivery services like cleaning of roads and drains.

Use of technology

Conservancy services deserve a senior-level exclusive administration. Waste management demands professionalism and technology. The use of biotechnology should help in the treatment and disposal of waste; information technology in city planning and service delivery options; energy saving and cleaner technologies in urban transport; and high-tech, low-cost materials in building and housing. Technology can be used to implement user-based charges for access to roads, electricity and water. Economies of scale can be achieved by sharing service areas such as billing and tariff collections, cable laying and maintenance.

China envisions three big urban clusters - along the Pearl River, the Yangtze River, and the Beijing-Tianjin corridor - each with 50 million people or more. The National Capital Region, aiming to relieve pressure on Delhi, needs to be similarly treated as a Common Economic Zone, with a rationalised inter-State tax structure, uniform financial/banking services, telecom facilities and power supply, an integrated education and health policy, rail and road transport network, water supply and drainage system.

It is not a case of a lack of funds, but of governance and delivery. In most cities, municipalities are viewed as dens of corruption and inaction. Inspectors do not inspect, they only extort. A structured, mandatory inspection system is necessary for effective delivery. Councillors and commissioners don't regularly move around their wards; they remain inaccessible to people.

Owing to its great importance for national reconstruction and countrywide impact, especially for India's large cities - Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru - the real catalyst for reimagining the NCR needs to be the Union government. A compact, less diffused and pruned structure will hopefully usher in a promising paradigm of urban management that is worthy of being replicated across the country. The primary need is for the delivery apparatus to be transformed. The city needs to first address its basic problems before it dreams of striding towards the goal of being really *swachh* and 'smart'.

The writer is former Managing Director, Container Corporation of India

SINGLE FILE

More mixed events, please

If the Hopman Cup gets the axe, it will be a loss for the sport

PREETHI RAMAMOORTHY



It was one of tennis' most striking images: Roger Federer and Serena Williams, arguably the greatest players of the sport, playing against each other for the first time. This moment was possible thanks to the Hopman Cup, a mixed team competition that has been held in Perth, Australia, for the past three decades. "Fed/Serena and Hopman Cup is dominating sports news today," *Sports Illustrated's* Jon Wertheim tweeted. "Even 14 time zones removed, there is more talk of this than college bowls. If I'm Tennis Australia, I'm thinking long and hard before I mess with this event."

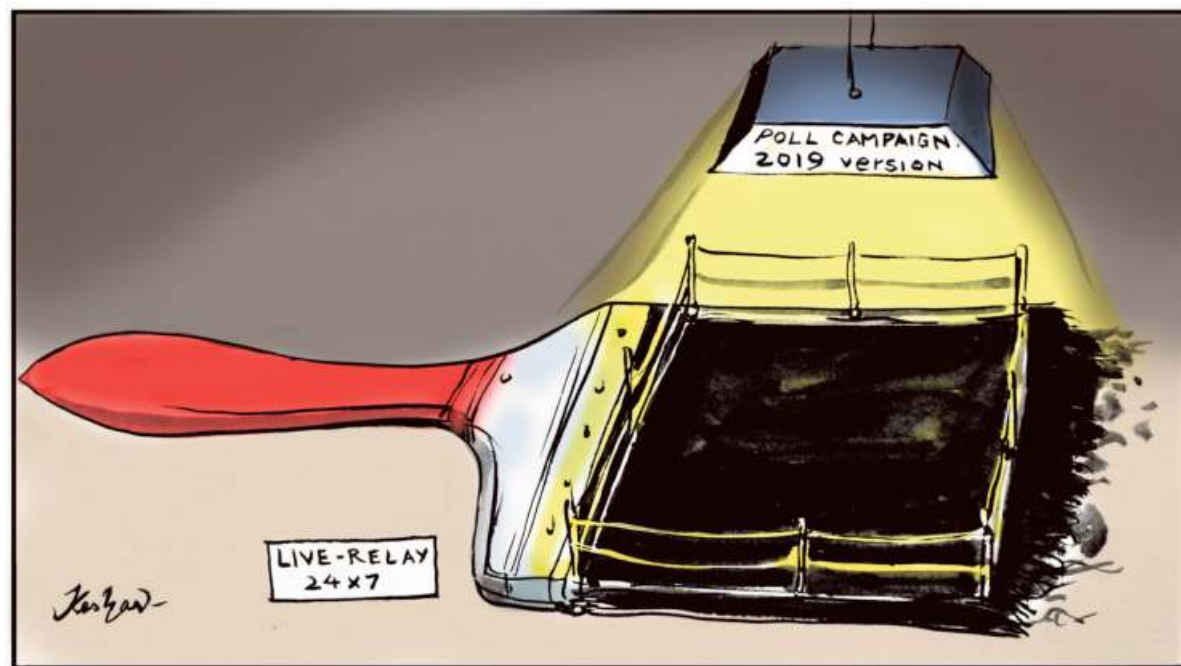
Despite making headlines worldwide, it is unlikely that the world will see a repeat of this. The future of the Hopman Cup is uncertain because the Association of Tennis Players (ATP) is planning to relaunch its World Team Cup, the ATP Cup, around the same time. This all-men's event will serve as another springboard before the Australian Open, carry a hefty \$15 million in prize money and, most importantly, contribute to player ranking points. On the other hand, despite its star performances, the Hopman Cup does not count towards rankings.

Of all major sports, tennis celebrates men and women competing as equals in the same major tournaments, for the same prize money, and in front of the same crowds. Apart from mixed doubles at the Grand Slams and the Olympics, the Hopman Cup is the only tournament where tennis fans can witness the best men and women players compete on the same court. It is one of those rare events that features mixed doubles as the main crowd draw. Some stellar examples from the past include Boris Becker and Steffi Graf, who played together in 1992, and Federer and Martina Hingis, who played together in 2001. This year, Federer and Belinda Bencic won. A record 1,10,364 people were in attendance and several days were sold out.

This is perhaps why it is surprising that the sport has decided to let it go, rather than embrace it as a huge selling point. It also points to what the sport thinks of mixed doubles. Even at Grand Slams, these matches are given little fanfare and often relegated to smaller courts. The prize for winning at Wimbledon is \$1.45 million compared to \$3 million for the singles winner.

But for fans of tennis, some of the most entertaining matches feature both men and women. They are a mixture of power and finesse, joy and unpredictability. Tennis is a gender-balanced sport. But in the last two years, three new all-men events have been introduced: the ATP Cup, the revamped Davis Cup and the Laver Cup. There is no reason why these tournaments cannot include a female or mixed doubles version. When you get your best men and women together, it is ultimately the sport that wins.

The writer writes on tennis for *The Hindu*



NOTEBOOK

When India-Pakistan animosity was pushed to the back burner

Not long ago, the two public service broadcasters promised to share treasures

ANURADHA RAMAN

Since the time of its inception in 1930, All India Radio (AIR) has broadcast interviews, public addresses, conversations, and music. Senior officials often speak about the invaluable treasures in AIR's archives and narrate the most fascinating stories. One that has stayed with me is about Saadat Hasan Manto. Manto apparently scribbled stories on paper napkins, which are in AIR's possession. I dream of seeing those paper napkins some day.

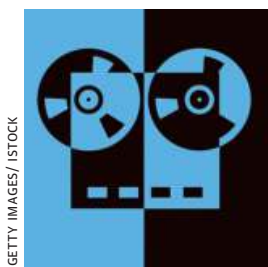
Almost every single artist has sung in AIR studios. I heard that veteran singer Gangubai Hangal was made to wait at the gates of AIR before being allowed to enter its studios for a recording. Much as I wish she had not been made to wait, I have also heard about how, much before television, when AIR ruled the roost, its studios played host with generosity. A newly inde-

pendent country wished to preserve its cultural diversity, and AIR was the patron saint for one and all.

Along with the archival material, which is accessible to journalists, came the problem of storing the spools of recordings in a temperature-controlled environment. Some rare recordings were erased to make way for new public speakers, and these made news.

But what I was looking for six years ago were the rare Muhammad Ali Jinnah tapes - two public speeches made on August 11 and 14, 1947. As with AIR recordings, there was a back story to Jinnah's original tapes on spools (the speeches are now available on YouTube). I was told that the original spool recordings were buried in the vaults of AIR. I was also aware that Pakistan wanted the original tapes of their Quaid-e-Azam's address.

The story goes that two



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

south Indian engineers (most of the engineering staff then were recruited from south India for their technical skills) were dispatched to Pakistan to record Jinnah's address as there were no recording facilities in Lahore and Peshawar then. Here is where things get a little muddled. Apparently, the engineers came back with the recordings, but the recordings got misplaced in the chaos that followed Partition. While Pakistan insisted that India had the tapes, India countered this saying that it didn't have the August 11 recording. This had Jinnah's speech about how all faiths

would enjoy equal treatment in the new country.

After I chased officials at AIR for eight long months, they made available the August 14 recording, which was later returned to Pakistan amidst much fanfare. A public-spirited individual had also filed a request under the Right to Information Act to make public the Jinnah recordings. What AIR also had was another recording of June 3, 1947, a brief talk by Jinnah in Delhi. This was not the 'multi-faith' address.

There was much bonhomie on display as India too made a request for some rare recordings of its filmmakers, Prithviraj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar, from Pakistan to be returned to its archives. On display was a common legacy where two public service broadcasters promised to share treasures from the past. And for a brief moment in time, animosity was pushed to the back burner.

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 26, 1969

Indus Valley inscriptions deciphered

A team of Finnish scientists yesterday [February 25] announced that they had succeeded in deciphering - by logic, intuition and computer - the language of India's ancient Indus Valley civilisation that vanished about 4,000 years ago and left a mysterious legacy of thousands of inscriptions on beautifully carved seals. The team, sponsored by the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies here [Copenhagen], said the breakthrough came only three weeks ago, and provided a key that threw open the doors to a new understanding of the Indus people. "Our key already gave the answer to the mystery of the origin of the Hindu caste system," said Dr. Asko Parpola one of the four Finnish researchers on the team. "It also approved for certain that the bearers of the Indus culture were Dravidians." The deciphered Indus inscriptions showed that the caste system existed long before the Aryans swarmed into India.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 26, 1919

A Daring Robbery.

A daring robbery is reported to have been committed [in Bangalore] at 2nd Q.V.O. Sappers and Miners. It is stated that at about seven o'clock in the evening a domestic servant, who subsequently turned out to be unemployed, appeared at the guard room with a chit asking for the family allotment cash box to be handed over to Captain Joyce. Believing the chit to be genuine the Havildar of the guard, with the permission of the officer of the day, gave the cash box to the servant. In company of a Sapper, it is stated that these men say that they went to the R.E. officers' mess where they say a European officer to whom they handed the cash box told the Sapper to return at 10 P.M. for the box, which he did. The man, it is said, alleges that when he went back the same officer said the cash box was locked up in a big safe and he was to come for it in the morning. In the morning, however, the cash box was found broken open and empty with the exception of two or three cheques, on Coles Road, about a furlong away.

CONCEPTUAL

Hysterical strength

BIOLOGY

This refers to the abnormal levels of strength exhibited by certain individuals during times of extreme stress. For instance, people have been reported as lifting heavy objects like cars and huge rocks when their lives were under imminent threat. Such superhuman strength is attributed to the production of a variety of hormones like cortisol and adrenaline by the human body when exposed to extreme stress, which in turn increases the overall energy level of an individual.

MORE ON THE WEB

Oscar fashion in Pictures: Tuxedo gowns, much pink, and jewel tones

<http://bit.ly/oscarsphoto>