



An open field

Constituency-level issues and national meta-narratives hold the key in U.P.

The Election Commission announced the Lok Sabha poll schedule on Sunday, and there is little doubt that the final outcome will be determined in great part by the vote in Uttar Pradesh. By including 11 candidates for U.P. in its first list last week, the Congress has reiterated its inclination to contest alone in the critical State in the absence of a deal with the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Though the Congress decision does not entirely shut the doors on a joint front of anti-BJP parties in U.P., the chances of such a formation are turning bleaker. There is no way of discerning the likely impact of a multi-cornered contest in the State, but in 2014 the scattering of the anti-BJP vote in the State helped Prime Minister Narendra Modi get 71 of the 80 seats, vital to gaining an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. An equally sweeping victory for the BJP in the 2017 Assembly election initially appeared to reinforce Mr. Modi's aura of invincibility, but this soon turned out to be the trigger for a series of developments that cumulatively pose a challenge to his bid for a second term at the Centre. Facing irrelevance, regional parties such as the SP, the BSP and the Rashtriya Lok Dal felt compelled to bury the hatchet and form a front against the Hindutva challenge. This reconfiguration appeared to make an emphatic turn in the State's politics, and the BJP lost all the three Lok Sabha by-elections that followed. It is in this landscape that the Congress is trying to resolve its indecisiveness about going it alone.

Yet, there is uncertainty at the granular level. Aspirants are being shunned by each party, resulting in a pool of disgruntled local actors now scurrying for shelter in other parties. The SP and the BSP will be contesting less than half their usual number of seats; the BJP is certain to replace a large number of its sitting MPs to reduce anti-incumbency at the constituency level. The Congress, though without an organisational base in the State, has the claim to be the national challenger to Mr. Modi. It might be tempted to rope in some of these dissidents from other parties, while remaining open to the possibility of an alliance. The shifting loyalties of individual leaders will have an impact on the caste coalitions that all parties factor into their calculations. An overarching social coalition of Dalits, backwards and Muslims in U.P. blocking the Hindutva advancement in 2019 is a possibility, but only one of several. Mr. Modi's strategy in the midst of this realignment of social groups in the State will be to pull his own campaign above local factors, and make it into a Hindu nationalist meta-narrative. The ongoing tensions with Pakistan and the debate on Ayodhya provide him with enough rhetorical tools. The terrain of U.P. has been fertile for this kind of politics too, a politics that makes nonsense of the accreditation of vote banks through seat adjustments.

Resolution, at last

Essar Steel case has clarified many aspects of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code process

The National Company Law Tribunal's approval of ArcelorMittal's bid for the insolvent Essar Steel Ltd. is significant for several reasons. First, the ₹42,000-crore bid will be the largest single recovery of debt under the fledgling Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) enacted in 2016. Assuming that the original resolution plan submitted to the NCLT stands, the secured lenders will manage to recover about 85% of their dues. The 15% haircut that they will suffer should be seen against the extraordinarily high amount of over ₹49,000 crore that is due from Essar Steel. Second, the case, which took 583 days to resolve, compared to the 270 days provided under the Code, has tested several aspects of the law and set important precedents for the future. Among the aspects that have been clarified during the long resolution process for Essar Steel are the eligibility of those who have defaulted in repaying their borrowings elsewhere to bid, the time-limits for bidding and the place of unsecured, operational creditors under the resolution mechanism. Finally, this was seen as a marquee case for the IBC, given the high profile of the company and its promoters, and the amount at stake. The battle royal between multinational players to acquire the insolvent company was proof, if any were needed, of the quality and importance of the underlying asset. In the event, the successful culmination of the Essar Steel case will be a big leg-up for the insolvency resolution process that is less than three years old.

To be sure, though the NCLT has given the go-ahead, the last word on the subject may not have been heard as the existing promoters could go in appeal against the verdict. The Code provides for an appeal to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal and then to the Supreme Court, and it is unlikely that the promoters, who bid a much higher ₹54,389 crore, will let go without a fight. The banks, though, will be hoping that the process ends in the next couple of weeks as they would want to account for the receipts from the resolution process within this financial year. After all, only four cases (excluding Essar Steel) out of the initial list of 12 big defaulters referred by the Reserve Bank of India for resolution back in June 2017 have been successfully resolved till now. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India data also point to a pile-up of cases in the various benches of the NCLT. As many as 275 companies, representing 30% of the total of 898 undergoing resolution, have exceeded the 270-day limit set for resolution under the Code. This can be partly explained by the attempt of promoters to tie down the process through appeals at every stage, but the fact is that there is a need for more benches of the NCLT to clear the pile-up. The government would do well to look into this issue.

Bringing politics back in

It must not be evicted from the public sphere on issues of national security



HAPPYMON JACOB

In the wake of the Pulwama terror attack last month, politicians and opinion makers made impassioned pleas that 'terror attacks should not be politicised'. There was also a strong popular sentiment for disassociating politics with what happened post-Pulwama. Unsurprisingly, the demand for dialling down politics was proportional to the demands for increased militarisation. The trust in politicians was replaced with an abiding belief that the men in uniform would save the day for India. When questions were raised about the basis of the Bharatiya Janata Party's statement that over 250 terrorists were killed in the attack on Balakot — an increasingly suspect claim — it was argued that such questioning would weaken the morale of the armed forces and help the Pakistani narrative. For a proudly and deeply democratic country such as India, this scorn for politics is both perplexing and worrying.

Politicising terrorism?

The calls for refraining from politicising acts of terror also apply to most matters of national security. The strong belief, often convincingly articulated by leading thought leaders, that national security must be divorced from politics is so entrenched in popular narratives that any attempt at discussing national security through the lens of politics is immediately discredited: "How can someone politicise something as important as national security?"

What is puzzling about such assertions is that most serious analysts and thoughtful politicians in-

tuitively recognise that, at the end of the day, political solutions are the best answer to conflicts. And yet de-politicisation comes handy for the government since "do not politicise" also means "do not ask difficult questions", a convenient way out of a tricky situation. For the general public, this results in weariness over how the political class has managed national security problems. In that sense, then, the aversion towards politics, especially in times of crisis, is essentially a function of the failure of the way in which politics and political debates are practised, not a negation of politics per se. The solution is to offer better political reasoning, and not replace political formulations with military ones, which is often seen as the easy way out.

Popular narratives about solutions to our contemporary security problems demand the adoption of militaristic or securitised solutions as if the military has some superior capability for conflict resolution that politics doesn't. The problem with privileging military solutions over political ones while dealing with conflict resolution is that the former use a specific set of tools, discourses and methods to resolve conflicts unlike the toolkit politics uses for conflict resolution. Consider an example. Post-Pulwama, the Government of India began a security crackdown in the Kashmir Valley and airlifted around 100 companies of paramilitary forces to enforce it, a typical and time-tested military solution to the unrest in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. A political solution would have been what the then United Progressive Alliance government adopted to deal with the widespread anger in the Valley in late 2010, wherein it sent a team of interlocutors to talk to the protesting Kashmiris. The interlocutors were able to bring about a sense of normalcy almost immediately, whereas the influx of more armed



men into the Valley is unlikely to achieve that.

Militarised methods and narratives also lead to de-politicisation, or the dismissal of normal politics from the public sphere, ushering in what could be called 'temporary emergencies'. Here's an example. In the immediate aftermath of the Pulwama attack, a leading Indian actress tweeted: "Anyone who lectures about non-violence and peace at this time should be painted black, put on a donkey and slapped by everyone on the streets." Put differently, she advocated that the practice of normal politics (criticism of the establishment lies at the heart of normal politics) be suspended and be replaced by a depoliticised and securitised discourse. And that those who violate such 'emergency' should be punished. When such short spells of emergency are normalised, it opens the door for more permanent securitised spaces and narratives. Kashmir, more or less reeling under spells of temporary emergencies for close to three decades now, is a perfect example.

Privileging militarisation over politicisation for conflict resolution is indeed unwise and counterproductive, an insight enshrined in the Clausewitzian dictum that war is the "continuation of politics by other means". When divorced from their underlying political intent, militarised approaches can lead to mindless violence — something democratic societies should unconditionally resist. Military means to deal with conflicts do have their limited utility, but

they must be politically guided.

'Freedom to the military'
Another reflection of depoliticising security matters is the tendency to argue that the armed forces should be given complete autonomy to deal with security problems. In the immediate aftermath of Pulwama, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for instance, declared that the "armed forces have been given complete freedom to take action", a statement that was well received by the general public. However, giving complete freedom to the military is replete with several complications, not the least of which is the indirect acknowledgment that the political class has failed to resolve the problem. For one, telling the armed forces that they are free to deal with the problem as they wish is a dangerous abdication of political responsibility which was entrusted to them through a democratic process.

Second, 'giving complete freedom to the military' is an open invitation to use military solutions to deal with what are essentially political problems. Third, and even more important, 'complete freedom' lies in the face of political control that should be the hallmark of a mature democracy. It is one thing for the general public to nurture romantic notions about military solutions, but it is dangerous for the political class to actually enshrine that in policy guidance. Popular fetishes about military force are the stuff for feel-good fiction, not policy making.

One direct implication of depoliticised conflict resolution is that it typically leads to more violence. Surprisingly, however, more violence doesn't normally lead to an introspection about the utility of militaristic tools of conflict resolution — on the contrary, it further strengthens the belief in its uses. When men in uniform die, their loss becomes a rallying cry for more violence which then

leads to even more casualties — the cycle goes on until political solutions are brought in. Take any militarised conflict, and you will see this point. The fact is that every death due to violence must be avoidable, and that can only happen if statesmen and women are willing to climb down from the cycle of violence. But for that to happen, there must be a decidedly political approach to conflict resolution.

Root cause theories

There is also an entrenched popular aversion to using 'root cause theories' to explain conflicts around us. Not only are those attempting to explain conflicts by examining its root causes routinely shunned by impatient commentators, they are routinely viewed as apologists of non-state violence. While this antipathy towards root cause theorists is a function of depoliticised conflict narratives, it leads to further depoliticisation of conflicts. Depoliticised narratives aim to treat the symptoms, ignoring what gives rise to those symptoms — the latter is difficult, requires introspection and mending ways, while the former expects that military force can be used to end violence or resolve the problem at hand. Militarily framed responses to conflicts also deny justice since they can only be used to reinstate the state's 'monopoly over power', not to provide justice to the aggrieved parties in a conflict.

Let's not forget that conflicts are a function of differing political values and expectations, and the only way sustainable conflict resolution can be achieved is by bringing politics back to negotiate those differences.

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The flawed unit of academic quotas

Much more needs to be done to improve faculty diversity on university campuses



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

In the history of reservations in India, Parliament has sometimes had to resort to even constitutional amendments to overturn some court rulings that have the effect of protecting the interests of 'general candidates'. The 77th constitutional amendment of 1995, which was recently extended to Kashmir, restored reservation in promotions as a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court in *Indra Sawhney* (1992) while upholding Other Backward Classes reservation based on Mandal Commission recommendations had prohibited Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) reservation in promotions.

Ordinance and after

The 81st constitutional amendment was made to overturn the Supreme Court's decision against the 'carrying forward' rule, which permitted the filling of unfilled reserved seats in subsequent years. Similarly, the 85th constitutional amendment was passed in 2001 to restore consequential seniority to promotee SC/ST employees as a 'catch-up' rule introduced by the court in *Ajit Singh* (1999) was causing hardship to SC/ST employees.

Last week, the Narendra Modi government promulgated an ordinance to undo the Allahabad High Court's judgment in *Vivekanand Tiwari* (2017) which had relied on a number of other High Courts and a few apex court judgments such as *Suresh Chandra Verma* (1990), *Dina Nath Shukla* (1997) and *K. Govindappa* (2009) that had made 'department' rather than 'university' as the unit of reservation in universities.

In *Vivekanand Tiwari*, an advertisement of the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) for teaching positions was challenged. The BHU, like other Central universities, was following the University Grants Commission policy of treating 'university' as the unit for the purposes of reservation. Due to judicial discipline, Justice Vikram Nath, who authored the judgment, did not have much of choice. But then Justice Nath himself did not seem to be a votary of reservations. In the beginning, he has said, "It is not a mandate but liberty given to the state. It is an enabling provision." Thus, according to him, the government may not provide for reservation.

The importance of 'shall'

Technically speaking, he is right. But then we cannot ignore that Article 335 categorically says that "claims" of SC/STs to posts in Centre and the States 'shall' be taken into consideration. As opposed to 'may' or 'will', the use of the word 'shall', in law, means



mandatory. While the judgment ended at page 29, Justice Nath devoted several additional pages to make out a case for the re-examination of the reservation policy by the government though there were no pleadings on this issue. He asked it to examine whether reservation at all is needed in university teaching posts.

Our courts have used the differences between 'cadre', 'service' and 'post' to arrive at the conclusion that 'department' should be unit of reservation. So though lecturers, readers and professors in a university have the same scale and allowances in their respective cadres, they cannot be clubbed together. Since there is no scope for interchangeability of posts in different disciplines, each single post in a particular discipline is to be counted as a separate post. On the face of it this seems to be perfectly logical. But the reality of the working of our universities is different. Every university spends lot of time in deciding reservation and tries to balance the competitive interests and needs of various departments.

Even with the 'university' as the unit, in over 40 Central universities we have huge under-representation of SCs and STs especially at the level of professor and associate professor. If 'department' was allowed to be taken as a unit, these numbers would have been far less.

In its review petition, the government did share with the Supreme Court the BHU's example of the adverse effect of using 'department' as the unit. For example, there were 1,930 faculty posts on May 12, 2017. If the BHU were to implement reservation based on using 'university' as the unit of reservation, 289 posts would have had to be reserved for SCs, 143 for STs and 310 for OBCs. Under the new formula of using 'department' as the unit, the number of reserved positions would go down to 119 for SCs, 29 for STs and 220 for OBCs.

Beginning of an end

Implementation of the department-wise reservation policy would have had a disastrous effect on other universities as well.

A study of 20 Central universities by the Central government has shown that reserved posts will come down from 2,662 to 1,241 in a year. The number of posts of professor would have reduced from 134 to just 4 for SCs; from 59 to zero for STs, and from 11 to zero for OBCs. But number of unreserved or general posts would have drastically increased, from 732 to 932. At the level of associate professor, for

SCs it will have reduced from 264 to 48, for STs from 131 to 6, and for OBCs from 29 to 14. But here again the number of general posts would have increased from 732 to 932. In the case of assistant professor, the number of reserved posts would have reduced from 650 to 275 in STs, from 323 to 72 for SCs, and from 1,167 to 876 for OBCs. But the number of unreserved or general posts would have gone up from 2,316 to 3,233. Thus department-wise reservation was a sophisticated beginning of an end of reservation. If SC/ST candidates do not become professors, they cannot become vice-chancellors as only a professor with 10-year experience is eligible for this. In 2018, out of some 496 vice-chancellors of Central and State universities, there were just six SC, six ST and 48 OBC vice-chancellors.

The government deserves appreciation for the ordinance, though brought in belatedly on the eve of the elections to garner Dalit votes. But we need to do more to improve diversity on our campuses with more SCs, STs, OBCs, Muslims, persons with disabilities and sexual minorities being recruited as faculty as our campuses do not reflect social diversity despite the university being a unit for reservation. Let the score on the diversity index be a major criterion in giving grants to universities.

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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 general election

Now that the schedule for the mammoth general election has been announced, the Election Commission should further specify regulations, like the use of social media, that must be implemented before the election. The challenge is to tackle the menace of fake news on social media. Further, the Election Commission should also look into implementing a strategy to ensure the continuation of people-centric projects, if any, during the model code of conduct.

VARUN S.D.,
BANGALURU

■ The election date for Tamil Nadu is April 18, Maundy Thursday. It is a holy day for

Christians and falls right in the middle of the Holy Week just before Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Not long ago, there was a move to observe Christmas as Good Governance Day. I do hope the present election date is just a coincidence.

SANJAY PINTO,
Chennai

Nirav extradition

The national media, in one voice, excitedly reports that "Nirav Modi, wanted by the Indian authorities in connection with the ₹13,578 crore Punjab National Bank fraud case, is in London, living in a luxury apartment complex by Oxford Street". As expected, the Congress and the BJP have latched on to the subject as a weapon in their election campaign with

the predictable face-off. Nirav Modi could not have done what he did without the active connivance of top officials. Believe me, he will be forgotten after the general election.

C.V. VENUGOPALAN,
Palakkad

Ayodhya mediation

The Supreme Court's attempt at mediation in the Ayodhya dispute provides a ray of hope. Some thought appears to have gone into forming this committee. Morever, the choice of eminent mediators gives hope for a more unbiased decision. However, the non-participation of expert women in this settlement committee is a bit upsetting.

MEHAR SINGH,
New Delhi

Now, gamekeepers

The report, "Vidyal heralds a new dawn: poachers turn protectors in Vidyal" (March 4), took me down memory lane, having been involved in the reformation of poachers. As the then circle inspector of Gudalur, I lent support to the Kerala Forest Ranger, Raju Francis, in holding multiple parleys with poachers to surrender and accept their reformation programme. When we reached the goal and a "surrender ceremony" was organised in Thekkady, all went well till the point when the poachers refused to board the forest vehicle apprehending arrest in Kerala. It took me a while to convince them and vouch for their safe return. I even accompanied them to the

ceremony. There were some hiccups following recidivism noticed among a few members. But, overall, the scheme is worth emulation by all forest departments.

M.X.B. STANLEY,
Madurai

Having a 'Parley'

The introduction of a new segment, "Parley" (OpEd, March 8), is sure to help readers get a wider view of expert opinion on current

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The reference to *socialist* democratic SLFP should be corrected to read as *social* democratic SLFP in the report titled "An old party looking for a new lease of life" (Despatches, Magazine section, March 10, 2019).

It was not Hardik Patel: It was cricketer Hardik Pandya — along with his brother Krunal Pandya — who attended the wedding of Akash Ambani. The report, "Akash Ambani ties the knot with Shloka Mehta" (March 10, 2019), got the name wrong.

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From a party to a movement

To be politically viable, the Congress must align with social protests outside the fold of electoral calculations



AJAY GUDAVARTHY

The Congress faces an uphill task. After the terrorist attack in Pulwama, it is playing it safe as usual – it has no narrative and is simply buying time for the hysteria to fade out. The party looks confused as to whether it should build on the nationalist narrative that has gained traction or raise procedural issues about India's response that have little appeal on the ground. Why is the Congress hesitant to produce an alternative narrative? Why does it insist on being silent instead of coming up with an emphatic narrative that can counter the ultra-nationalist rhetoric of the Prime Minister?

The Congress's failures

To begin with, the Congress is worried about a Hindu consolidation against any possible critique that it might offer as an alternative narrative to the narrow ethnic nationalism of the Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh combine. This is a somewhat justified concern. For over half a century, the RSS has been doing work in the sociocultural domain that has set the terms of reference for others, while the Congress has done nothing in the cultural domain apart from building a rhetorical and half-hearted campaign for inclusive nationalism without mopping up social consent for it.

Further, the party itself aided and abetted the emerging Hindutva consensus, with former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi acting against the Shah Bano judgment and former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao paving the way for the controversy around the Babri Masjid. By introducing neoliberal reforms, the Congress dismantled the welfare state and the legitimacy of social democracy, while continuing with secularism as a social policy, which sections of the majority Hindu community began to perceive more and more as an appeasement to Muslims rather than as legitimate citizenship benefits.

Without a shared ethos on the ground, 'market fundamentalism'



"The Congress should become the vehicle for mainstreaming various small struggles for basic survival." A farmers' protest in Indore on March 9. • PTI

began to destroy the ideal of a harmonious social fabric of religious and caste groups. The Congress's 'politics of accommodation' took a beating when the Other Backward Classes first moved to regional parties and later to the BJP. In due course, the Congress became more and more dependent on Muslim and Dalit votes to win elections. In this scenario of induced dependence on the minority vote, the Congress began to look more tilted towards the Muslims without actually doing much for the community – it did not, for instance, enact effective policies to counter the effects of backwardness that was noted by the Sachar Committee report.

It is against this backdrop that the phenomenon of Narendra Modi emerged. Mr. Modi and the BJP began to actualise the RSS's vision of a Hindu Rashtra. Mr. Modi built his credibility both by highlighting the failures of the Congress as well as appropriating the liberal-progressive critique of those failures and packaging within that an aggressive majoritarian politics. The appeal of the Hindutva brand of politics is based on consolidating various micro-narratives

to form a metanarrative of 'othering' Muslims. While dynasty became a symbol of old patronage politics, Muslim appeasement began to symbolise the various kinds of exclusions and failures in ensuring inter-generational mobility for Hindu caste groups. Mr. Modi occupied this symbolic space. The credibility and trust he enjoys today is the articulation of the angst of an aspirational new generation, and the anger of traditional caste groups.

Mr. Modi became the TINA (there is no alternative) factor of Indian politics. In spite of failure on the economic front, people are still not prepared to question his intention of *Saaf Niyat, Sahi Vikas* (clean intent, right development). The electorate today has nagging doubts about his competence, but not about his will and intention to do well. Mr. Modi's campaign for the Lok Sabha election is based on this reality on the ground. It affords him a space to contradict himself in his campaign speeches. Ministers and BJP leaders can afford to make claims of what transpired during the air strikes as well as make tall promises because

the electorate continues to trust Mr. Modi and considers him to be beyond doubt and above critical interrogation. And that trust emerges from the Congress party's chequered history. Mr. Modi's campaign style and rhetoric reflect this deep trust that people have invested in him. There may be contradictions in his speeches, but people continue to justify all of this in the name of nation and religion.

What the Congress can do

In this situation, what can the Congress do? It needs to change the terms of reference and the lens through which the electorate today is evaluating things. This is a difficult task but not an impossible one. For this, the Congress needs to go back to being a movement. It needs to closely align with various social protests outside the fold of electoral calculations. It should become the vehicle for mainstreaming various small struggles for basic survival, including the struggles of *safai karamcharis*, Dalits, Adivasis, those displaced by development projects, internal migrants, students, and others. These are unheard voices on the fringes of society, and the Congress should try to make them heard.

Without such deep change in the DNA of the Congress, it will be difficult for the party to be a viable political or electoral alternative. Social consensus has shifted to the right, across castes and classes in India. The RSS has made this possible in a diverse society such as India through its rugged survival in the margins for almost a century. What we are witnessing today are the fruits of that labour. It is through such sustained work that it has captured the public imagination. It has gained the capacity to now set the agenda for popular politics. It has learnt to co-opt all that is hegemonic in the public sphere to package its own exclusivist and authoritarian brand of politics. The Congress needs to get a handle on these micro-aspects to set a more inclusive agenda the way it did during the anti-colonial movement. Its own future depends on whether or not it is able to make this transition in the days to come.

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FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Sources are sacrosanct

The idea of common good binds the source and the reporter



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

What can one make of the contradictory claims by the Attorney General of India? On March 6, he told the Supreme Court that "secret" documents published by *The Hindu* on the purchase of 36 Rafale jets were "stolen" from the Ministry of Defence, probably by former employees. On March 8, he informed the news agency PTI that what he meant in his submission before the Supreme Court was that the petitioners in the application had used "photocopies of the original" papers, deemed secret by the government. While the senior-most legal officer of the country was busy deciding whether the documents were stolen or photocopied, people on social media were attacking journalists for frequently citing unnamed sources in their reports.

Ethical framework

It is important for citizens to understand the legal and ethical framework that guides the relationship between a source and a journalist. The European Court of Human Rights, in *Goodwin v. the United Kingdom*, ruled: "Protection of journalistic sources is one of the basic conditions for press freedom... Without such protection, sources may be deterred from assisting the press in informing the public on matters of public interest. As a result the vital public-watchdog role of the press may be undermined, and the ability of the press to provide accurate and reliable information be adversely affected... An order of source disclosure... cannot be compatible with Article 10 of the Convention unless it is justified by an overriding requirement in the public interest."

Norman Pearlstine's *Off the Record* is a fine book that examines the complex relationship between sources and journalists. Journalists take care not to confuse a whistleblower with a source. There are many unreasonable demands before investigative journalists. A sharp observation by James Risen, senior national security correspondent at *The Intercept* and director of First Look Media's press freedom defence fund, explains the challenges in front of a reporter: "We're

being forced to act like spies, having to learn trade craft and encryption and all the new ways to protect sources. But we are not an intelligence agency. We're not really spies. So, there's going to be a time when you might make a mistake or do something that might not perfectly protect a source. This is really hard work. It's really dangerous for everybody."

I had explored one element of this relationship in an earlier column, "The relationship between journalists and their sources" (September 29, 2014). There are many interlocking factors that not only define the symbiotic relationship and but also spell out the obligations of journalists to their sources. My colleagues at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford have spelled out the ground rules in "The Perugia Principles for Journalists Working with Whistleblowers in the Digital Age".

Publishing the truth

All major investigative stories draw their strength not only from the relentless work of reporters but also from conscientious sources who first alert reporters about the wrongdoing. Daniel Ellsberg's crucial role in releasing the Pentagon Papers is as important as the work of the reporters of *The New York Times* in exposing the U.S. military's role in Vietnam. From internationally known investigations like the Watergate stories, Snowden

files, the thalidomide victims' reports, and the Panama Papers to our own investigations in the Bofors and Rafale cases, brave sources have risked everything to enable reporters to publish the truth.

The first principle in investigative journalism is to protect your sources and defend anonymity when it is requested. James Risen was nearly arrested by the U.S. administration because he refused to identify the source of information contained in his 2006 book, *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*, about a bungled covert CIA operation involving Iran. The relationship between a source, who is willing to risk his or her career, reputation and future for the sake of truth, and a reporter cannot be reduced to a transactional equation. The relationship is built on trust and involves mutual respect. The idea of common good binds the source and the reporter. Hence, their relationship is sacrosanct.

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SINGLE FILE

Losing the information war

The Indian government no longer has viable channels to put across its point of view to the Western media

K.P. NAYAR



India is used to a negative international media. After the 1998 nuclear tests, the American media echoed the lines of Jesse Helms, then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that "the Indian government has not shot itself in the foot.

Most likely it has shot itself in the head." As events unfolded, its dire predictions turned out to be completely inaccurate.

The difference between then and now, when the global media has cast doubts about India's "non-military and preemptive" response to the Pulwama terrorist attack, is that the Indian version of events is hardly getting a credible hearing. This is because the Indian government no longer has viable channels to put across its point of view to the Western media. By acts of commission and omission, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), which should be in the driving seat for such publicity, has, over the last few years, discontinued a practice that might have persuasively argued the Indian position.

For some time now, foreign correspondents based in India have not been attending briefings by MEA spokespersons. They may have concluded that their time might be better spent on other stories as they tend to cover the entire subcontinent and have enough on their plate.

This was not the case earlier. For many decades, following the daily briefing by the MEA spokesperson, Indian and foreign correspondents would gather at 4.30 p.m. for background banter over tea and samosas. It gave an opportunity for the spokesperson, who was sometimes joined by heads of MEA's territorial divisions, to informally put across what he or she could not say on record about India's stake in diplomatic juggling. Inevitably, some of this would be published in reports.

That did not happen with events post-Pulwama. The daily briefing by the MEA spokesperson seems to have faded in importance. Towards the end of Manmohan Singh's tenure as Prime Minister, the daily briefing was scrapped in favour of weekly briefings. That worked as long as the spokesperson was accessible to foreign correspondents in New Delhi 24x7 or on call. That is no longer the case. In the new millennium, changes were made to the MEA's outreach using new technology, modelled on the U.S. State Department, making it easier to find information.

Such useful content is no longer available on the MEA's information outlets. The brief for spin doctors of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomacy has been to convince the domestic audience that India is a great power. Earlier, the brief was to convince the world that India is an emerging giant in global affairs. With this change in priorities, the government is unable to disseminate information that could have produced a more sympathetic global media on the current play in India-Pakistan relations.

The writer has been a foreign correspondent for nearly three decades



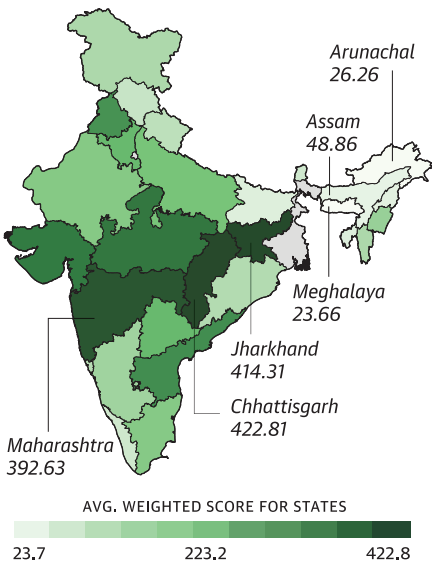
DATA POINT

Grading cleanliness

Urban Local Bodies in Chhattisgarh are the cleanest among all States, according to the Swachh Survekshan 2019 report. Due to poor citizen feedback, some ULBs did not manage a better overall score despite good scores on other parameters. By Varun B. Krishnan

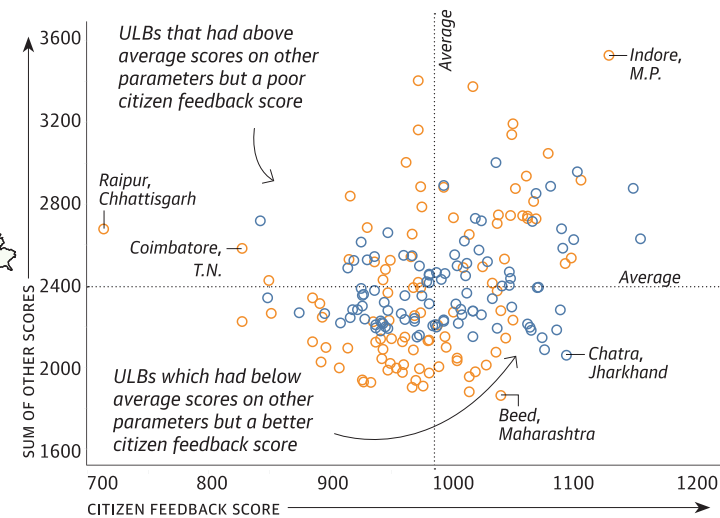
Scoring States

Close to 69% of the ULBs in Chhattisgarh were ranked among the top 500 (out of 4,237). Jharkhand and Maharashtra are the other two States in the top three. States which secured the three lowest scores were in the Northeast. West Bengal opted to not participate in the survey



People factor

Analysis of the top 200 ULBs shows that in some, citizen feedback was a crucial factor in improving or worsening the total score. ULBs marked in blue (o) have a population of less than one lakh people (rest have more than 1 lakh)



Weightage

The scores used to compare States on the map were adjusted for the differential rate of urbanisation. Also, instead of actual scores, relative ranking was used to normalise the analysis metric. On the other hand, the scatter diagram on the right has unweighted scores of the top 200 ULBs

The survey grades each Urban Local Body for a total of 5,000 marks. The scoring system has 4 components, each with 25% weightage

The four components: Service level progress (eg. solid waste management), direct observation, citizen feedback and certifications (eg. ODF certified)

Both the unweighted and weighted scores were released for analysis

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 11, 1969

Desai threatens to quit

Mr. Morarji Desai, Deputy Prime Minister, is reported to have told a meeting of the Executive of the Congress Parliamentary Party here [New Delhi] today [March 10] that if some of the party members were allowed to go on maligning him in public, he might have to think of retirement. Mr. Desai made this statement when there was a brief but heated discussion on some of the remarks made by Mr. Chandra Shekhar in the Rajya Sabha last week during the debate on Birla affairs. Although it was not part of the agenda for the meeting today [March 10], the matter was raised by Mrs. Tarakeshwari Sinha, who had earlier written to the leader of the party drawing attention to some party members singling out certain Ministers for attack while criticising the Government's policies, and urging the need for effective steps to enforce discipline.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 11, 1919.

Sir Rabindranath Tagore on National Education.

Sir Rabindranath Tagore delivered a masterly address on "National Education" last evening in the Gokhale Hall [in Madras on March 10] at 5:30 in a silvery tone which was distinctly heard by one and all of the large audience. The Hall and the galleries were filled to their utmost capacity. Ladies and gentlemen of all classes and creeds were present. The address was listened to with rapt attention. Admission was by tickets... Sir Rabindranath Tagore, in the course of his address, said that the question which he wished to discuss was what should be the ideal of education in India? Upon each race the duty was laid to keep alight its own lamp of the mind as representing its own thought in the illumination of the world. To break the lamp of any people was to deprive it of its rightful place in the world festival. He who had no light was unfortunate enough, but utterly miserable was the man who, having light, had afterwards been deprived of it or forgotten its existence.

CONCEPTUAL Twin studies

BIOLOGY

This refers to scientific studies conducted on identical twins who share the same set of genes. It is believed that twin studies can be an effective way to answer several questions related to human behaviour, including the influence of genes and environment on the behaviour of individual human beings. Behavioural scientists may employ twin studies to understand the behaviour of identical twins who share the same set of genes but were adopted by different families and thus grew up in significantly different environments. Such twin studies can help scientists to successfully isolate the influence that the environment has on the behaviour of individuals.

MORE ON THE WEB

Indian Premier League – winners and highest scorers

<http://bit.ly/IPLhighlights>