



## Passing the buck

Political messaging and administrative alerts are key to stopping the string of lynchings

The Central government has finally moved to react to the lynchings reported from across the length and breadth of the country, but its line of action is bafflingly weak. Over the past couple of months, mobs have materialised to beat to kill people they suspect – almost always without basis – of plotting to kidnap children to harvest their organs. Warnings to beware of child kidnappers, sometimes with the rider that they are likely to hail from other parts of India, are mostly circulated on WhatsApp, the Facebook-owned encrypted messaging platform. Since a cluster of such killings in Tamil Nadu in May, deaths have been reported from States as far apart as Assam, Karnataka and Maharashtra. In one recent attack, five people were clobbered to death in Maharashtra's Dhule district on child-lifting rumours; the mob numbering hundreds overpowered the few policemen present. And ironically, among three people lynched in Tripura on a single day, June 28, was a man hired by the State government to spread awareness against precisely such rumours.

Now, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has told WhatsApp to take "remedial measures... to prevent proliferation of these fake and at times motivated/sensational messages". WhatsApp is the communication platform of choice in the age of cheap smartphones. One of the USPs of the platform is that the messages are encrypted in a manner that makes it impossible for them to be read. Given this, it is not clear how such a platform can take measures to limit the spread of motivated or sensational messages. Also, whether such checks would amount to legitimising surveillance and a loss of privacy – a rare commodity in this digital age. Even if it can do so without compromising privacy, the problem is not the medium. Rumour has historically found its way around communication walls, and it can only be effectively blocked through old-fashioned information campaigns and administrative alertness. Rumour's potency predates mobile phones, even if there is no denying that smartphones, with their ability to instantly transmit text and images, have a tendency, in this era of fake news, to rapidly spread panic and anger. This happens in different ways across the world, but in India the problem has assumed truly distressing proportions. It is well-known that an unrelated video of an act of violence that went viral was responsible for fuelling communal hatred in Muzaffarnagar in 2013. It is puzzling that district administrations and gram panchayats have not been asked to reach out to locals to persuade them against falling for rumours, and to come to the authorities if they have any fears. The messaging needs to be amplified – merely appealing to WhatsApp is hardly the solution.

## Allies, interrupted

India and the U.S. must urgently take steps to arrest the drift in bilateral ties

There are enough signs that relations between India and the United States have suffered, with officials in both capitals now freely conceding that their interests are diverging. From the U.S. side, policy decisions by President Donald Trump to walk out of the multilateral nuclear deal with Iran, and the U.S. Congress's CAATSA law sanctioning Iran and Russia have set up an inevitable conflict. Mr. Trump's insistence on tough sanctions against all those continuing to engage with Iran and Russia limits India's options on energy security and defence procurement. During her visit last week, Nikki Haley, the U.S. envoy to the UN, told India to "revise" its relationship with Iran; this line is expected to be reiterated by U.S. interlocutors in the coming days. Added to this confrontation is the U.S.'s tough policy on trade tariffs, applied to ally and adversary alike, including India. For its part, the Narendra Modi government has taken a policy turn away from four years of a pro-U.S. tilt. Mr. Modi's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue last month, in which he invoked the long-lapsed phrase "strategic autonomy", set at rest any doubt that there is a reset in his foreign policy. Since January, he has personally reached out to the Chinese and Russian Presidents in informal summits, and invited the Iranian President to Delhi. At variance with the U.S. position on limiting engagement with these very countries, India promised to raise oil imports from Iran this year, committed to far greater engagement on the Chabahar port project and oilfields in Iran, while negotiating a \$5.5 billion deal with Russia for the S-400 Triumf missile systems. These will trigger U.S. sanctions unless the two countries reach a compromise.

What is more troubling for bilateral ties is that despite the obvious problems, the political will to address these issues is now considerably diminished. In contrast to his meetings with the Russian and Chinese leaders, Mr. Modi has had little contact with Mr. Trump since their meeting in Manila last November, which by all accounts did not go well. Now, the postponement of the Indian Foreign and Defence Ministers' "2+2" dialogue with their U.S. counterparts has denied the governments a chance to gather together the fraying bilateral threads. It is imperative that the dialogue be quickly rescheduled. While the U.S. has traditionally applied pressure on its allies to limit their engagement with countries it considers to be threats to the international order, the manner in which deadlines have been publicly issued by the State Department twice this week will only make its demands more difficult for India to even consider. India must now decide how best to deal with the ultimatums, with U.S. sanctions kicking in by November. The clock is ticking on the relationship.

# Why we need Governors

The case made by Mahatma Gandhi for their all-pervasive moral influence still holds



GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

There is a disquiet in Raj Nivases and Bhavans today. What does the Constitution Bench's order betoken? Are we, Lieutenant Governors and Governors must be thinking, redundant? Are we a mere ornament, like the chandelier overhead or the carpet underfoot? Is there nothing to our office, to us, than having an ADC escort us, a liveried chaperon wait on us, and callers address us as 'Your Excellency'? Is signing the files that come to us in 'aid and advice' from our Chief Ministers and Ministers, receiving the President and Vice President and Prime Minister when they arrive at the airport, driving with them into the city, and then, after hosting a banquet for them, seeing them off our sole function?

### Message from Bengal

The most telling answer to those questions has been provided by M.K. Gandhi. On October 30, 1946, Gandhi was in Calcutta. Consistently with his sense of etiquette, he called on the Governor. The last Governor of undivided – and communally disturbed – Bengal, Frederick Burrows, asked him, "What would you like me to do?" A popular government headed by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy had been installed in the State and maintaining peace in the State was now the responsibility of the elected ministry. The answer to "What would you like me to do?" was courteous,

but crisp. "Nothing, Your Excellency," Gandhi said. He meant that after the British declaration to quit, the Governor's position in India's provinces was that of a constitutional head of state and he must "let" the representative government do its duty.

Gandhi's advice was consistent with Walter Bagehot's dictum about the Crown having 'the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn' but not to be the engine of government. And it anticipated the Supreme Court's July 4, 2018 order. But did he mean that they should go, their offices and their carpets rolled up? He did not.

And so, returning to the question posed at the head of this column, are Governors then a mere and rather costly superfluity? Is the Governor then, in a word, just a figurehead?

Certainly not. Now is that not odd, very odd? Can someone, something or anyone, anything, that has no 'role' be yet valuable? Curiously enough, yes.

### Constituent Assembly debates

During the Constituent Assembly's deliberations on the office of the Governor, the thoughtful S.N. Agrawal, then Principal of a College at Wardha, later better known as Shriman Narayan, a dedicated Gandhian who was later to be a Governor himself, reflected on it. In the last weeks of 1947 he wrote in an article: "In my opinion there is no necessity for a Governor. The Chief Minister should be able to take his place and peoples' money to the tune of Rs 5000 a month for the sinecure of the Governor will be saved." Gandhi, whose advice



VINO JOHN

to Burrows we have noted, responded to Agrawal in *Harijan* (December 21, 1947) as follows: "There is much to be said in favour of the argument advanced by Principal Agrawal about the appointment of provincial Governors. I must confess that I have not been able to follow the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly... Much as I would like to spare every pice of the public treasury it would be bad economy to do away with provincial Governors and regard Chief Ministers as a perfect equivalent. Whist I would resent much power of interference to be given to Governors, I do not think that they should be mere figureheads. They should have enough power enabling them to influence ministerial policy for the better. In their detached position they would be able to see things in their proper perspective and thus prevent mistakes by their cabinets. Theirs must be an all-pervasive moral influence in their provinces."

This has to be one of the best summations of the value of that office and, indeed, of the difference between 'interference' and 'influence'.

A look at the attendees at one of the early conferences of Governors on May 8, 1949 would show present in the domed hall an array

of Governors, each strong-minded but self-composed, not interested in putting his Chief Minister in the shade or himself in the limelight: the industrialist Homi Mody (United Provinces), the veteran non-Congress leader M.S. Aney (Bihar), the free-thinking lawyer Asaf Ali (Orissa), the old-time Congressman K.N. Katju (West Bengal), Bhavsinhji, the sagacious Maharaaja of Bhavnagar (Madras), the ICS veteran C.M. Trivedi (Punjab). They did not look upon themselves as figureheads who could do nothing, nor as martinets who could do any and everything. They knew that they lacked power, but wielded influence, influence to do good, as the Governor General, Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the day wanted them to, "without friction and without prejudice to the march of democracy."

The key words to be taken away from those are 'interference' versus 'influence', 'detached position' versus 'figurehead', 'perspective' versus 'prejudice' and overarching all this, the key phrase: 'all-pervasive moral influence'.

### Vital positions

Governors and, for that matter, the President of India are vital, not because they can hold up or hold back anything – indeed, they should not and cannot – but because they can and should exert the moral voltage, the sense of the rightness and wrongness of things that would underscore the republican credence and democratic credentials of elected governments.

This is where the choice of the incumbent becomes crucial. I

have given a few of the names of the first crop of Governors attending the Governors' Conference in May 1949. 'But,' the despondent cynic may ask, 'do we have such persons in our midst today?' At first pulse, it may seem we do not, and that we are going through a drought in stature. But reflection would correct that thought. Women and men in education, commerce, administration, science, medicine, law and public life within and outside of politics, across the party divide, can surely be found who, as well-wishers, will strengthen and not threaten elected governments working 'for the better'.

Chief Ministers and Prime Ministers head the government. Governors and Presidents head the state. Governments govern, states sustain. And in a democratic republic, the people power both. They do so, wanting the Chief Minister to act conscientiously and the Governor to act constitutionally, to ensure self-government is good government, *swa-raj* is also *su-raj*.

The country has to congratulate the Aam Aadmi Party and its leader, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, for having elicited from the Supreme Court a benchmark ruling. But it can do more. It can reflect on how, as a Chief Minister acquires a popular mandate, the Governor exercises that "all-pervasive moral influence", both together providing the people in their jurisdiction the assurance that they are in secure and mutually composed, not conflicted, hands.

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## A legend, a demystifier

With 'Mile Sur Mera Tumhara' and other ventures, Balamuralikrishna expanded the reach of Carnatic music



GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM

The 1991 album of Dr. Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna, whose 88th birth anniversary is marked today, captures brilliantly the larger narrative of the times. The record, one among the ubiquitous title of Maestro's Choice Series 1, was released at a juncture when Indian classical music was enjoying a period of renewal from the 1980s.

SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth) was a pioneer in this regard. The periodic *baithaks* on campuses under its aegis offered a version of melding tradition with modernity and bridging boundaries of language and geography, even as it brought celebrities closer to the commoner. For those uninitiated to this genre of music, the SPIC MACAY endeavour clearly went well beyond the exposure via Bollywood and 'Vividh Bharati'.

Complementing this non-profit's novel initiative was the com-

mercial launch of thematic albums, with an avowed mission to popularise classical music. The Music Today label offered listeners a menu of ragas appropriate for different times of the day and seasons of the year.

### Part of the renaissance

Balamuralikrishna himself had played a unique part in this renaissance, building on the nationwide appeal of 'Mile Sur Mera Tumhara' with innumerable vocalists and dancers. His journey with jugalbandis began around the same time, continuing until his very end and sharing the stage with almost all the top artists from the north. Nearer home, his sensational Doordarshan serial, 'Svara Raga Sudha', in Tamil and Telugu, did much to demystify this melodic but ossified art form and untangle its many technical nuances.

When the 1991 Maestro's Choice series was released, the stage had been set for a pan-Indian musical venture that would explore the greater depths of aesthetic refinement. The galaxy of artists gathered from the Hindustani and Carnatic styles were all recorded both on cassettes and compact discs, the latter a relative novelty in those days. Balamuralikrishna's selection for the album, besides



those of other *vidvans*, was compiled as representative of southern Indian classical music.

### Five magical pieces

The five pieces the composer musician featured in his album were typical of the genre, but arguably only in rather broad terms. The opening kriti in Raga Poorvikalyani is a plaintive imploration to the presiding deity of the Kanakadurga temple in Vijayawada. The song in Raga Abhogi is a plea to the god of Pandharpur not to put devotees to test. The tribute to Lord Shiva in Raga Kanada is his spontaneous outpouring during the circumambulation at Thanjavur's Brihadeeswarar temple. The originality of the composition on Durga lies in the fact that Raga Lavangi happens to be one among the scales Balamuralikrishna created, deploying

just four notes. The final *thillana* in Raga Behag extols the 19th century composer Thyagaraja as occupying an exalted status among musicians and composers (like him) alike.

Balamuralikrishna had penned each of the above at different stages in his long career and performed them umpteen times. The difference on this occasion was their rendition in a single sequence, lending the amalgam a distinctive flavour and identity of its own. The album conforms to the Carnatic style in form; its substance was far more nuanced. With the exception of one, the other scales readily resemble a counterpart in the Hindustani repertoire, a shrewd choice, possibly influenced by his invitation to perform on this broader platform.

The deliberately long alaps to each kriti – even the *thillana* was unlike his habitually jaunty and upbeat deliveries – seem designed to make an eloquent statement, not just of the man's incredible vocal range. The effort also underscores the inherently improvisational nature that underpins India's music, a unity which all other differences in form and language could not conceal. But he was not given to mouthing such homilies off stage.

Should this analysis sound far-fetched, an anecdote from the December 1991 music season could shed further light. On Christmas day, at the Bala Mandir German Hall in Chennai, Balamuralikrishna offered to take questions for a good two hours, singing the odd hymn only to embellish a point. Someone asked for his opinion on the difference between the Carnatic and Hindustani systems. He recalled being witness to a music lesson on a trip he made to Pune as a boy with his guru. He then sang the aroh and avroh to Raga Malkauns in a slow leisurely tempo. He repeated exactly the same notes, this time in a brisk pace, to indicate Raga Hindolam, and in effect to downplay, if not to dispute, any difference between the two methods.

Balamuralikrishna's general unease with needless emphasis on boundaries is of course not limited to the classical genre. Much the same understanding was evident in his stance on film music. Looking back on that landmark album after nearly 30 years, much of what it conveyed may seem commonplace, or perhaps not. But the enduring value of his eclecticism is beyond doubt.

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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.

### Ruling NCR

After reining in the Governor of Karnataka at the time of government formation in the State, the Supreme Court has now clipped the wings of the Lieutenant Governor of the National Capital Territory whose overbearing attitude has rendered Delhi in a state of deadlock too often ("How to rule Delhi", July 5). However, by giving the option of referring cases of dispute to the President without mentioning the specific type of disputes that can be referred, the court has also given space to the Lieutenant Governor to manoeuvre. Moreover, why should the President's role be that of an arbitrator? The court could have thought of a dispute mechanism to resolve contentious issues, unless the issue under dispute is of far-reaching importance, say, a piece of new legislation to be enacted. Though Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has

achieved what he wanted, he should attempt to maintain cordial relations with the Lieutenant Governor instead of adopting a combative approach.

V. SUBRAMANIAM,  
Chennai

This is not a landmark judgment. The court has only reiterated the actual constitutional position. Neither is collaborative federalism a new concept. It is the principle guiding the functioning of the Central and State governments.

C.V. VENUGOPALAN,  
Palakkad

The Supreme Court has, in effect, overruled the Delhi High Court order by stating that the Lieutenant Governor is bound by the advice of the elected government. But the court has also not hesitated to rebuke the elected government – both obstructionism and

anarchism have come under criticism. By reiterating the responsibility of both the Lieutenant Governor and the Chief Minister to maintain cordial relations and run a smooth administration, the court has played the role of a powerful arbitrator.

S.V. VENKATKRISHNAN,  
San Jose

The judgment is a vindication for the Aam Aadmi Party government but it also has a clear message for Mr. Kejriwal. The people of Delhi have elected him to govern, not to indulge in theatrics like sitting in dharna at the Lieutenant Governor's office, and alleging financial irregularities in the Delhi and District Cricket Association and then apportioning blame. It is high time Mr. Kejriwal got down to the serious business of governance.

V. JAYARAMAN,  
Chennai

The AAP government in Delhi has clearly been a thorn in the flesh of the BJP. It is not difficult to see that the Central government has been exercising its powers to bring the functioning of the Delhi government to a standstill. Given this scenario, the verdict is welcome. It demonstrates the strength of the Constitution, where the will of the people is supreme.

UNIKRISHNAN E.S.,  
Thirissur

The verdict has some relevance for Tamil Nadu where the Governor is in the eye of the storm owing to his frequent visits to government offices at the district level on the plea that he needs to review and send reports to the Centre. The Centre, however, keeps a studied silence in the matter. While the Opposition criticises the Governor's review meetings as infringing on the right of the State government, the Chief Minister himself hails

it as constructive. However, the Governor's review of government offices is an overreach. When there is a well-defined hierarchy for monitoring the functioning of each department, his interference will only create needless confusion.

K. NATARAJAN,  
Madurai

### Bursting at its seams

I spent my youth in Mumbai and feel upset reading about the tragic incidents related to the monsoon there ("Illegal cables weakened bridge: railway officials", July 5). There was water logging in the suburban railway tracks

and roads in Mumbai in the '70s and '80s too, but not at the level seen now. It is not fair to entirely blame the BMC and the State government for the plight of the city. There is a limit to the infrastructure that can support a burgeoning population. Hundreds come to the city every day for jobs, most of them from interior Maharashtra. It is time for the government to develop other cities in the State by setting up industries so that not everyone is forced to move.

MURLI NAIR,  
Thirissur

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### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: EPD

In "71% Indian firms upbeat on EU data privacy law: survey" (agency report, Opportunities page, July 4, 2018, some editions), the term GDPR had been erroneously expanded as *Global Data Privacy Regulation*. The correct expansion is *General Data Protection Regulation*.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 855 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com