



Factoring in safety

Major industrial accidents point to the need for a stronger worker safety law

India's record in promoting occupational and industrial safety remains weak even with years of robust economic growth. Making work environments safer is a low priority, although the productivity benefits of such investments have always been clear. The consequences are frequently seen in the form of a large number of fatalities and injuries, but in a market that has a steady supply of labour, policymakers tend to ignore the wider impact of such losses. It will be no surprise, therefore, if the deaths of four people, including a senior officer, in a fire at the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation gas facility in Navi Mumbai, or the tragedy that killed nearly two dozen people at a firecracker factory in Batala, Punjab are quickly forgotten. Such incidents make it imperative that the Central government abandon its reductionist approach to the challenge, and engage in serious reform. There is not much evidence, however, of progressive moves. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019, introduced in the Lok Sabha in July to combine 13 existing laws relating to mines, factories, dock workers, building and construction, transport workers, inter-State migrant labour and so on, pays little attention to the sector-specific requirements of workers. One of its major shortcomings is that formation of safety committees and appointment of safety officers, the latter in the case of establishments with 500 workers, is left to the discretion of State governments. Evidently, the narrow stipulation on safety officers confines it to a small fraction of industries. On the other hand, the Factories Act currently mandates appointment of a bipartite committee in units that employ hazardous processes or substances, with exemptions being the exception. This provision clearly requires retention in the new Code.

A safe work environment is a basic right, and India's recent decades of high growth should have ushered in a framework of guarantees. Unfortunately, successive governments have not felt it necessary to ratify many fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) covering organised and unorganised sector workers' safety, including the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981. Those ILO instruments cover several areas of activity that the NDA government's occupational safety Code now seeks to amalgamate, but without the systemic reform that is necessary to empower workers. It is essential, therefore, that the new Code go back to the drawing board for careful scrutiny by experienced parliamentarians, aided by fresh inputs from employees, employers and experts. Industries that use hazardous processes and chemicals deserve particular attention, and the Code must have clear definitions, specifying limits of exposure for workers. Compromising on safety can lead to extreme consequences that go beyond factories, and leave something that is etched in the nation's memory as in the case of the Bhopal gas disaster.

Hard-fought glory

With his 19th Grand Slam win, Nadal closes in on Federer's record in the race for tennis' apex Rafael Nadal's relationship with hard courts can be described as tenuous at best. While he is the king of clay and quite adept on grass, the acrylic has often been his bane. Over the years, the Spaniard has found the surface unforgiving; from his back to both his hips right down to his knees, all have suffered significant wear and tear. Yet, none of this stopped the 33-year-old from securing his fourth U.S. Open title on Sunday, making him the most successful champion at Flushing Meadows this decade above Novak Djokovic (3). The thrilling five-set win over Russian Daniil Medvedev gave Nadal his 19th Major and puts him just one short of record-holder Roger Federer. To be sure, the surface is still his least favourite. Last month, when he won the Rogers Cup in Montreal, it was the first time in his illustrious career that he had defended a hard court title. As recently as in 2017-18, there was a stretch during which he retired or withdrew from 11 of the 12 hard court events he had entered. However, the latest triumph showed what a healthy, well-rested and mentally sharp Nadal could achieve. While in 2018 he had left New York limping, after three long, bruising encounters, Nadal this time, at least until the final, was supremely efficient. The court did its bit too; slightly below medium-pace, it gave Nadal a fraction extra to set up his shots and at the same time rewarded his recently acquired aggressive streak.

The success is also another indicator that the Big 3 of Federer, Nadal and Djokovic, all in their thirties, are still the hegemonic class in men's tennis. Medvedev appeared to usher in the next generation for a fleeting set or two but couldn't deny a 12th straight Major for the celebrated trio. In fact, an astonishing 51 of the last 59 Slams dating back to the 2005 French Open have been cornered by the three. What it now does is set up a tantalising endgame in the race to most Grand Slam titles. It is a competition that the protagonists Federer (20), Nadal (19) and Djokovic (16) attest to being least interested in. But coming as it does when the threat from the younger crop appears genuine, it is a compelling scenario for the fans at least. On the women's side, however, the thrill of novelty continued unabated with Canadian teen sensation Bianca Andreescu becoming the latest first-time Slam winner. In her remarkable straight sets victory over Serena Williams, the 19-year-old played with the kind of intelligence, imagination and audacity that is usually the preserve of the sport's very best, as she left the American legend's dream of a record-equalling 24th Major in tatters, yet again.

The drumbeaters of dystopia

The Indian media can barely question the state narrative on Kashmir, while global outlets can only pick holes in it



KRISHNA PRASAD

On the last morning of October 1984, Rajiv Gandhi was campaigning in West Bengal when a police jeep intercepted his Mercedes to deliver the message: "There's been an accident in the house. Return immediately to Delhi." His mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, had been shot at by her Sikh bodyguards in her garden, on the way to a TV interview. As he waited for a helicopter to take him to Calcutta, the Congress General Secretary turned on his transistor radio to get the latest. He tuned in, not to All India Radio but the BBC. The news was not good but that is not the point.

Even in pre-reforms India, when broadcast media was a government monopoly and mouthpiece, a would-be Prime Minister's first resort of trust was "Auntie", not mummy's Akashvani. Thirty-five years on, with 400 private TV news channels, 1,000 newspapers, and 3,000 radio stations, it is a telling commentary on the credibility of the Indian news media ecosystem – in fact, on the theology of "competition" in a free-market economy – that nearly every piece of information which contests the establishment narrative that all is well in Kashmir, has come from a non-Indian source.

Stark contrast in coverage

Here's a baker's dozen since the "lockdown" began: First video of protests, firing: BBC, 'Al Jazeera', Reuters; Number of arrested: AFP, AP, Time, The New York Times; Minors among those detained: The Washington Post; Detenus flown out of overcrowded jails: AFP; First pellet injury death: 'Huffington Post'; Soura, epicentre of resistance: Reuters; First bullet injury death: France 24; Beatings, torture: BBC, The Independent; Ha-

rassment, sexual abuse of women: Deutsche Welle; Civilians forced to chant 'Vande Mataram': Foreign Policy; Doctor detained for speaking of shortage of medicines: BBC; Hospitals turning into 'graveyards': The Wall Street Journal; Emerging medical emergency: The Lancet editorial.

With most "national media" plunging into the patriotic duty of drumming up support for the "constitutionally contentious" move – privileging the interests of a rampaging State over that of the caged citizen – the contrast provided by global outlets unmasking the suppression of human, civil and fundamental rights of Kashmiris, has been so stark that one website was constrained to ask: "Are foreign and Indian media reporting on the same place?" A mainland journalist on assignment says she has encountered so much hatred for the media's part in painting a monochromatic picture, that she has had to apologise on behalf of her fraternity multiple times.

Ground zero in Kashmir

Therein lies the great paradox. For a whole month in the 21st century, Kashmiri journalists have worked in the 20th. They have not been able to freely use the phone and the Internet, write or transmit stories, print or distribute newspapers. They have been denied curfew passes, harassed at security checkpoints, made to delete photos and videos. They have had to beg travellers flying out of Srinagar to carry pen drives and printouts of mobile screenshots. Of the Valley's 174 dailies, fewer than 10 are being published; their e-papers are frozen in time, on August 5. One editor going abroad for training was stopped inside an airport after he had picked up his boarding passes.

Yet, with foreign correspondents being denied permits to go to Kashmir, American, Arabic, British, French and German media organisations have relied entirely on home-grown journalists for their stand-out coverage, which



begs the question as to why Indian mainstream media (MSM) vehicles have not been able to find the space or the resources for them. Or, why they have felt duty-bound to "broadcast sunshine stories that life is back to normal and getting better every day", in the words of a British academic. Either the Indian media is so true to its craft, or so craven, that not a single report has had to be disputed. For the first time since 2014, the parrot cannot hear the cries of the majority, Muslim in this case.

Near capitulation

It is not as if all the Indian media has buried the story: there have been tiny isles of valiance in an ocean of conformity. Just that, after the initial flurry, the giants are coasting in the routine and the official, as per the sage advice: "Some news is best not reported". Pockets of English print and digital journalism still offer some exceptions but large swathes of language media have served unvarnished, Islamophobic propaganda sans scrutiny. "Whatever [the] Indian media is reporting, the opposite is true," says one Kashmiri journalist. "Editors give directions to field reporters on the kind of soundbites they want from the ground to fit into their studio scripts. People oblige but viewers do not see the security men behind the camera."

A charitable explanation for the near-wholesale capitulation – the "underhand censorship" as one media watcher called it – is that, in the epoch of hyper-nationalism,

The larger picture about inclusive programming

India is in a unique position to scale up 'same language subtitling', improving both media access and reading literacy



BRIJ KOTHARI

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) recently mandated captioning for TV programming in order to make it accessible to the Deaf or Hard of Hearing population. The decision comes nearly four decades after the United States first implemented captioning for the same purpose. India's phase-wise implementation plan requires all 800 plus channels to start this on at least one programme a week, beginning August 15, 2019, Independence Day. By 2020, 10% of all programming must have captions; the figure is to grow by 10% every year, covering up to 50% of all programming by 2025.

The wellspring

The policy impetus for this decision is rooted in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 which made "sub-titles" on TV a right. The major challenge for the Ministry now is to ensure compliance by all channels, state and private, as set in the time table.

Captioning on TV for the aurally-challenged is not new. Many countries have followed the U.S.'s

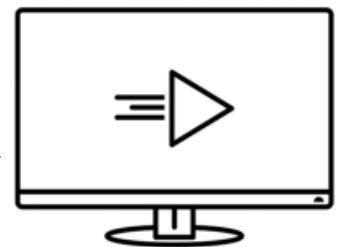
lead. Still, India's foray into TV captioning is significant for two reasons. It is one of the first major countries in the Global South to embrace captioning for media access, Brazil being the other one. But India is the first country where the importance of captioning, or Same Language Subtitling (SLS) has been established for mass reading literacy.

Key goals

At a time when countries are searching for scalable and evidence-based solutions to achieve their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SLS in India, if implemented as mandated, is poised to make a massive contribution to SDG-4 on quality education; this is because quality education, foundationally, depends on good reading skills.

India has a billion TV viewers. The average Indian watches TV for 3 hours and 46 minutes every day, according to the latest FICCI-EY Media & Entertainment report (2019). Film (24%) and general entertainment (53%) are the dominant genres. All of this content is now required to have SLS, in all languages.

Scientific evidence suggests that SLS on TV would serve three goals: daily and automatic reading literacy practice for one billion viewers, including 500 million weak-readers who would benefit the most; Indian language improvement for



one billion viewers, and, finally, media access for 65 million aurally challenged people.

All English channels in India have been implementing SLS for film and general entertainment content for over a decade. A fascinating study that compared 'dubbing' with 'subtitling' countries of English content on TV found that the population in the latter group has better English language proficiency. English channels in India added SLS on their own to help the Indian ear grasp unfamiliar English accents, causing a rise in viewership. Importantly, the English SLS experience establishes that it is not difficult for the entertainment industry to implement SLS system-wide, if it so desires.

Studies in India are at the global forefront of advancing SLS for reading literacy, having proven in several TV pilots that: SLS causes automatic and inescapable reading engagement even among very weak readers who can barely decode a few letters; regular exposure to SLS leads to measurable

reading skill improvement, and improved reading skills result in much higher rates of newspaper and other forms of reading. With frequent exposure to SLS over three to five years on content that people watch in any case, most weak readers can become functional and even good readers.

Inspired by the Indian experience, there is an active campaign in the United Kingdom to Turn-On-The-Subtitles (TOTS) by default in children's programming. Ironically, while India plans to follow in the footsteps of the U.S. and the U.K. to get started on captioning for media access, the U.K. is drawing on SLS work in India for reading literacy. India is in a unique position to scale up SLS on TV for both goals: media access and reading literacy.

The cost of SLS is negligible for new content when incorporated in the production process itself. To institutionalise SLS on TV, broadcast policy could, therefore, simply mandate it for all new content produced and telecast after a set date.

For more than a decade, the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) have found that, nationally, half the rural children in standard 5 cannot read standard 2-level text. Despite all the system-level inputs on quality education, this outcome measure has stubbornly resisted any noteworthy improvement. If India is to

equation.

Despite Brexit and Hong Kong, Kashmir has sparked a scramble among international news media houses, each trying to scoop the other. As the communications blackout took hold, BBC Radio thumbed its nose at Delhi by increasing the duration of its Hindi and Urdu bulletins with the teasing tagline: "Neither Internet shut-downs nor power cuts can stop independent news". Meanwhile, the Indian MSM was resting its oars, having done its bit in the sacred task of manufacturing consent on the mainland. With the hashtag #KashmirWithModi trending on social media even without Kashmir being connected to the grid, Umberto Eco's warning of the "invasion of the idiots" has come good.

In the "Brave New World" of Kashmir, the Indian state has worked out the Huxleyan circuitry of how to make the media relay a unitary message without explicitly making it appear so. Therefore, a scarcity of dissent in spite of a plethora of evidence. It is a model that can be developed further and replicated anywhere else at short notice – within the pretence of a democratic framework.

In 1954, Gabriel García Márquez wrote: "Journalism is a biological necessity of humanity." To the eternal shame of the Republic, in 2019, from the judges of the Supreme Court to the former judge who heads the Press Council, from the Information and Broadcasting Minister to industry bodies, the open-ended trade fineprint "Conditions Apply" seems to be the operative clause. And to think that the train of events – from the BJP pulling out of the coalition, to the abrogation of Article 370 – was set off by the assassination of a journalist: Shujaat Bukhari, the founding editor of 'Rising Kashmir'. But, then, does a Chinar tree make noise when it falls, if the Indian media is not around?

Krishna Prasad is former Editor-in-Chief, 'Outlook' magazine, and former member, Press Council of India

Other platforms

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has taken the most important step toward mainstreaming TV captioning. Now, together with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, policy needs to mandate SLS on all digital Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms. Although translation subtitling is commonplace on OTT platforms and they offer SLS in English, none of them has SLS in the Indian languages, such as Hindi subtitles for Hindi content and so on. This is simply because policy does not yet require SLS on OTT.

Civil society has shown how SLS can be implemented cost-effectively. Academia has provided strong evidence that SLS works remarkably well to achieve the multiple goals of media access, reading literacy and language learning. The entertainment industry must play its part by turning on SLS for audio-visual content in all Indian languages. SLS is a right. Let us do the right thing.

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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.

Amazon fires

We now know the obverse side of the "Amazon forest fire" story and the need to prioritise fossil fuel emission reduction (Editorial page, "The Amazon fires, an alarm that lacks proportion", September 10). However, we should not forget that the Amazon forests are the lungs of the earth and their conservation is a must. There can be no quibbling about this. The politics over the cause of the fires must end. And is there anyone who is championing the cause of the natives whose only source of livelihood is the Amazon forest? The world must get together

and get the Brazilian leader to see reason in saving this jewel of the earth.

PRAVEEN B.,
Hyderabad

Chief Justice's transfer

Too much is being read into the "unusual transfer" of the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, Justice Vijaya Kamlesh Tahilramani to the Meghalaya High Court (Editorial, September 10). Instead of looking at it as a step done with the best intention of leveraging her experience of having served at various courts across India, the hue and cry over it shows our scant regard for the collective decision of the collegium. After all, it

is just a transfer of a Chief Justice of one High Court to another. Criticising the prerogative of the collegium that is mandated to make such judicial transfers is uncalled for.

R. PRABHU RAJ,
Bengaluru

■ It is only the justice delivery system and the public at large that stand to lose, being unable to make use of Justice Tahilramani's vast judicial experience (Page 1, "Don't wish to discuss my transfer or resignation, says Tahilramani", September 10). Though it is arguable that "one high court is as good as any other", perhaps

the collegium could have considered her request to roll back its decision.

A. JAINULABDEEN,
Chennai

■ During my service as the head of a division in a Central government department, I often encountered several cases of refusal by staff under my charge to get transferred to "undesirable areas" – North-east India, Jammu and Kashmir, or even the Andaman Islands even though they were liable for transfer anywhere in India according to service rules. The person concerned would try to move heaven and earth to get the order

cancelled, with the result that posts in these areas remained unfilled, thereby delaying development. More often than not, such a transfer was not viewed as in public interest but as being biased, punitive in nature and unusual. There is need to change this attitude. Perhaps Justice Tahilramani would have sent out a powerful signal had she accepted the order.

N. RAMA RAO,
Chennai

New traffic rules

There needs to be a relook of the new traffic rules with their provision for huge fines and being enthusiastically enforced across India. If

deterrence is the main objective, then the fines too should be realistic. However, for dangerous or drunken driving or wilful violation of traffic rules, the fines may be reasonably higher. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the dismal condition of roads and the absence of signalling at many intersections are responsible for numerous accidents. Moreover, fines are seldom imposed for vehicles that emit plumes of smoke from tailpipes, those without functioning lights and horn or even visible number plates.

SHIVAJI K. MOTTRA,
Kharagpur, West Bengal

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