



## Power games

The AAP government in Delhi should repair its relationship with the bureaucracy

The Delhi government under Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has had a history of conflict and confrontation with the police and the bureaucracy. But even Mr. Kejriwal's worst detractors would have found it hard to imagine that his Aam Aadmi Party MLAs would be accused of assaulting the Chief Secretary in his presence. The shocking incident, which is said to have occurred when Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash was summoned to Mr. Kejriwal's residence at midnight, has led to the arrest of one AAP MLA and a display of solidarity within the bureaucracy, which has refused to attend any meeting called by the CM until he apologises and takes action against the MLAs. Versions of what transpired radically differ, including the reason why Mr. Prakash was called late in the night. While the AAP has described Mr. Prakash's charge as ludicrous, the implication that it was a product of his fevered imagination and part of a larger political conspiracy has convinced few in the bureaucracy. The timing of the meeting and the presence of a large number of MLAs at the residence give rise to the suspicion that it may have been called to intimidate the Chief Secretary. It is well known that Mr. Kejriwal's discomfiture with the bureaucracy is a result of having to deal with officers who report directly to the Lt. Governor, who is not bound to act on the aid and advice of his council of ministers. To feel that this is a restrictive administrative environment and seek greater powers for Delhi under the Constitution is one thing. But until Delhi is a full State, Mr. Kejriwal and his party would do well to understand that they have to work within the existing institutional arrangement.

Mr. Kejriwal may have good reason to believe that the BJP, the AAP's main rival, is attempting to stymie its attempts to govern Delhi effectively. The AAP has for long complained that the Centre is paralysing its executive functions through the Lt. Governor and that the bureaucracy is refusing to obey government orders. But the proper response to this is to keep pushing for the constitutional changes that will give Delhi full statehood rather than targeting police officers and civil servants. In the three years it has been in power in Delhi, the AAP government has positives to show in terms of governance, including ushering in greater accountability and transparency in its welfare programmes. In the long run, the party's political future will depend more on how it governs Delhi and less on how aggressively it protests about its lack of administrative power. Both the Centre and the Delhi government must work together to see that the administration is not brought to a halt in the Union Territory. While the Centre should refrain from politically exploiting the issue, the AAP government must take a step back and assure the bureaucracy it will let officials work without fear of intimidation.

## Fire and fury

The Syrian regime's offensive in Eastern Ghouta keeps up the brutality of the civil war

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has demonstrated once again that his regime cares little about the lives of its own people. The barbaric campaign of airstrikes and bombardments launched by government forces in rebel-held Eastern Ghouta, on the outskirts of Damascus, have killed at least 270 people in three days. Eastern Ghouta, with an estimated population of 400,000, is one of the last significant areas held by militants fighting the regime. It fell into the hands of the rebels in the early stages of the seven-year-long civil war, and repeated government attempts to overrun it were foiled. It was here that chemical weapons were used in 2013, killing hundreds of people. When most other rebel-held parts of Syria, including Aleppo, were recaptured by government troops, militants have moved to Eastern Ghouta and Idlib. Now both areas are under attack. In the use of heavy firepower, the assault resembles the government campaign in Aleppo and elsewhere. In Aleppo, one of Syria's largest cities, Syrian and Russian jets pounded rebel targets in late 2016; this was followed by a ground attack by government troops and Iran-trained militants. Similarly, Eastern Ghouta, which was under a government blockade for years, appears to have been surrounded by ground forces, which could advance to rebel positions inside the city any time.

There is a wide range of militant groups in Eastern Ghouta, including the Saudi-backed Jaysh al-Islam, the Qatar-funded Faylaq al-Rahman, and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda. The government says the city is occupied by terrorists from these groups and that the few civilians remaining there are used as human shields. The militants in Eastern Ghouta and the jihadist elements amongst them have repeatedly shelled government-controlled neighbourhoods in Damascus. Generally the rebels appear to have lost the momentum against Mr. Assad in the civil war. Nonetheless, the government narrative is problematic as it holds all residents of Eastern Ghouta responsible for the occupation of the area by militants. The years-long blockade of the area that has deprived Eastern Ghouta of food and medicines, and the indiscriminate bombing, killing of unarmed civilians including children, expose the monstrosity of the Assad regime. From the very beginning of the civil war, the regime and its Russian and Iranian backers have paid little attention to human suffering, be it in Hama, Homs, Aleppo or Eastern Ghouta. Given the brutality it has unleashed now, the government could capture Eastern Ghouta as well. But at what cost? After seven years of war and 400,000 deaths, Syria is a broken, bleeding land, thanks to Mr. Assad and his friends and foes. The real tragedy is that none of the parties involved is interested in ending this war.

# As the borders begin to close

India's policymakers must be alive to uncertainty in migrant remittances from the West and West Asia



S. IRUDAYA RAJAN

After the global financial crisis in 2008, the world has begun looking to developing nations to show the way to high economic growth and development. Emerging economies, India and China for example, have become increasingly involved in influencing global economic policies and voicing their development concerns and priorities in various multilateral fora. These economies have benefited from increasing globalisation and the growing movement of goods and people between countries. Consequently, they are among the largest recipients of global remittances.

Twenty-three countries, led by India and followed by China, the Philippines, Mexico, Pakistan and Nigeria, receive over 80% of global remittances. However, as a share of gross domestic product (GDP), the top five recipients are smaller nations: Haiti, the Kyrgyz Republic, Liberia, Nepal and Tajikistan. In these low- and middle-income countries, remittances have helped lift millions out of poverty and unemployment and enhanced their standard of living and human development. In this context, India's case is no different. The positive impact of migration on economic growth and development through increased remittances is well established. The experience of Kerala, which receives remittances equalling 36.3% of its gross State domestic product, is testimony to this.

India has witnessed sharp remittance growth since 1991. Remittances, which were valued at \$2.1 billion in 1991, touched \$70.4 billion in 2014. Since then, the value of remittances to India has seen a modest decline: \$68.9 billion in 2015 and \$62.7 billion in 2016. There was a slight improvement

last year – \$65.4 billion. However, in a world that is now witnessing a fractious debate on migration, considerable uncertainties about remittances remain.

India receives about 56% of its remittances from migrants in West Asia, with the remainder from mainly North America and Europe. Rapid changes in the economy and the sociopolitical climate in West Asia have had an impact on remittances. Additionally, developments such as Brexit and the Trump presidency in the U.S. have further complicated matters. Simply put, the more a rich nation starts to rely on its own workforce and tightly controlled borders, the less a poorer nation can rely on remittances for its development needs and to achieve the sustainable development goals.

### The case of West Asia

While it was expected that remittances would recede after the recession in 2008, they barely did. However, the Arab Spring in 2010 and subsequent counter-revolutionary moves by states had an impact. The theme of nationalisation took over the Arab world. Along with declining oil prices and sluggish regional economies, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the regional governments decided to prioritise filling their workforce with their nationals.

Among the six GCC countries, only the United Arab Emirates and Oman continue to maintain their erstwhile immigration policy. However, Oman began "Omanisation", a policy aimed at replacing expatriate workers with trained Omani personnel, back in 1988. The other four, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have tightened their immigration policies to appease increasingly restive youth, many of whom were unemployed and participated in protests during the Arab uprisings. In 2011, the Saudi government enacted "Saudisation", officially known as Saudi Nationalisation Scheme or Nitaqat system in Arabic, with a view to reducing unemployment



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

among Saudi nationals, with incentives being announced for companies and enterprises performing in accordance with this system.

Governments in West Asia have been trying to reduce unemployment and "demographically engineer" the workforce whereby legal, social and political separations between nationals and non-nationals would shift. There were gains in many ways. Kuwait, for example, between 2016 and 2017, reduced unemployment from 16.5% to 1%. Saudi Arabia regularised five million irregular workers and cracked down on illegal migrants. There were also attempts to increase control over foreign workers, as opposed to sponsors, and curtail abuse by employers, though these efforts were timid. It is evident that the younger natives of West Asia, who are increasingly becoming educated, will replace migrants in the coming years, in turn leading to a reduction in remittances, especially to the South Asian and Southeast Asian regions.

### Kerala's remittance economy

It is not unfair to say that without remittances, Kerala would have had to adopt an entirely different economic growth path. Since the 1970s, the Gulf region has attracted millions of Malayalis, with remittances amounting to over 36% of the State's GDP. Kerala is unique in this sense that no other large State in India depends so much on remittances. This also makes the southern State the perfect setting to study the phenomenon of

migration.

The Kerala Migration Surveys, conducted by the Centre for Development Studies, have studied migration from Kerala since 1998. In 2016, for the first time in 20 years, the Malayali migrant community got smaller by 10% to 2.2 million. This was on account of nationalisation policies and because decades of migration had made Malayalis educated and skilled enough to aim for more specialised professions. Unskilled and semi-skilled migrants from Kerala were not only replaced by migrants from other Asian countries such as the Philippines and Nepal, but also by other Indian migrants from Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This 10% decrease in migration is expected to result in a similar decrease in remittances to the State.

Remittances to Kerala exceeded ₹71,000 crore in 2014. A migrant supports three to four family members back home and a third of the population directly benefits through migration. Another third benefits indirectly through multiplier effects. Remittance flows to Kerala saw a sharp rise of over 40% between 2011-2014. Of late, this trend has reversed. If the State does not identify alternative means of employment and revenue generation for its labour force as well as returned emigrants, it will turn out to be problematic. Return emigrants account for 1.2 million of Kerala's population. The State thus faces the huge challenge of reintegrating and rehabilitating them into the society and the economy. This demands innovative policies targeted at skilling, reskilling and educating both prospective and returned emigrants.

This is not to say that lower migration and remittances will be a disaster for the State. If the government adopts measures to utilise local resources and create jobs, it might end up in a better position overall. This is because migration comes with a lot of social costs. A migrant worker might make more money, but (s)he also leaves a family behind. Women, children and the elderly who are left be-

hind deal with issues such as loneliness, anxiety, depression and inadequate care.

### Reality of a closed world

As mentioned earlier, another chunk of remittances is from North America and Europe. Europe is also the largest remittance-sending region in the world, surpassing even West Asia. The recent refugee crisis, the largest since World War II, has unsettled European economies, fuelling xenophobic and anti-immigration sentiments. Brexit and the presidency of Donald Trump in the U.S. are also expected to have a drastic impact on migration and the flow of remittances. Data from the U.K. show a large exodus of other Europeans. The popular effect of Mr. Trump's stronger immigration policies and the temporary ban on immigrants from certain Muslim majority nations are conspicuous in the results of domestic elections and a surge in markets.

It seems obvious that migration and remittances will take on a more prominent role in internal and international politics. While the latter part of the last century was commanded by liberal ideas on migration and open borders, the near future seems to be influenced by populist, right-wing ideas. This negative reaction to migration among developed countries is likely to spread. Therefore, it is imperative that developing nations that have relied on remittances formulate strategies to compensate for the restricted flow of remittances that is expected in the near future. India must remember that with the rapid and large-scale economic and cultural changes in West Asia, Europe or the U.S., the future of emigration and remittances remains uncertain. The Kerala Migration Survey 2018 and the proposed India Migration Survey 2020 will explore these issues and evolve adequate policy responses.

*S. Irudaya Rajan is Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala*

# Learning from Cauvery

It's time political parties realise that their strident stands on water-sharing issues have no bearing on election outcomes



T. RAMAKRISHNAN

The long-awaited judgment of the Supreme Court on the Cauvery dispute, delivered last week, by and large caused hardly any disruption to life in the river's principal basin-States, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. This situation is refreshingly different from what was witnessed during many judicial pronouncements since the 1990s, leading to strikes, farmers' agitations, vandalism and the loss of human life.

### Joy and discomfort

The judgment has, however, brought joy in Karnataka, and discomfiture in certain sections of Tamil Nadu. The reason is not far to seek. The overall allocation of Karnataka was increased by 14.75 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft) at the cost of Tamil Nadu. The enhanced allocation includes 4.75 tmc ft exclusively for drinking water requirements of Bengaluru. The increase and decrease have

been worked out, keeping the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal's final order of 2007 as the reference point. On the eve of the verdict, a senior Karnataka Minister said that his government was hopeful of getting 30-40 tmc ft more than what was awarded by the tribunal.

Except this modification, the verdict has essentially stuck to the final order. It neither disturbed the allocations for Kerala and Puducherry, the other constituents of the Cauvery basin, nor the basis for apportioning river water or the extent of irrigated areas for the two principal States. In fact, to the relief of Tamil Nadu, the court was unequivocal on the formulation of a scheme to implement the modified final order, and it asked the Centre to draft the scheme in six weeks. The scheme entails the creation of an implementation mechanism, called the Cauvery Management Board (CMB). Regardless of the Centre using the same nomenclature or not, what looks certain is the establishment of a mechanism.

### Doubts persist

Already, doubts have been expressed in Tamil Nadu on whether the Central government will see to



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

it that the scheme is put in place within the given period as Karnataka goes to Assembly elections in a few months. This has been complemented with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's reiterating his opposition to the idea of the CMB. On this count, other political parties in Karnataka are also echoing the stand of the Chief Minister. Meanwhile, even though there exists only a limited scope for serious objections to the court's judgment, the Tamil Nadu government, now devoid of a strong leader like Jayalalithaa, is being pulled up by its political adversaries for not having done enough to protect interests of the State.

Such reactions are not surprising as political leaders of both States are, unfortunately, under the impression that their position on the Cauvery dispute would de-

termine their respective electoral fortunes. But, the reality is somewhat different. Otherwise, how would one explain the success of the Congress in the 2013 Karnataka Assembly elections despite facilitating the notification of the final order in the gazette of the Central government barely three months before the polls? The day before the publication of the order on February 19, 2013, the then Chief Minister of Karnataka, Jagadish Shettar of the Bharatiya Janata Party, led an all-party delegation and urged Manmohan Singh, who then headed the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government at the Centre, not to do so.

Earlier, in October 2002, S.M. Krishna, who was then Chief Minister of Karnataka and still in the Congress, adopted a confrontational path by organising a nine-day march from Bengaluru to Mandya in the name of protecting farmers' interests. But, when the Assembly elections took place in May 2004, the Congress, which had won 132 seats in the 1999 elections, could win in just 65 constituencies.

### Competitive politics

Competitive politics on matters concerning water are not confined

only to Karnataka or Tamil Nadu politicians. The situation is the same in other parts of the country. Sadly, these leaders do not realise that their strident position on water does not guarantee victory. In July 2004, when faced with a Supreme Court direction to the Centre to ensure completion of the Sutej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal, Amarinder Singh, then Punjab Chief Minister, got a bill passed by the State Assembly and cleared by Governor O.P. Verma at lightning speed, terminating all previous agreements and accords on the Ravi and Beas river waters. But, his act of unilateralism did not ensure the victory of his party - the Congress - in the 2007 Assembly polls in Punjab. Capt. Singh had to wait for 10 years to return to power.

It should be obvious to the political class that electoral outcomes are shaped by a combination of complex factors. It is time that water issues are de-politicised and political parties learn to see reason and respect the rule of law without getting carried away by electoral considerations. The BJP-led Central government has got a golden opportunity on Cauvery to set a new, healthy trend.

*ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in*

## 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.

### Cold shoulder?

It is very unusual that the Central government hasn't taken any initiative to extend a warm welcome to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his family. Given that India is seeking stable ties with most countries and our Prime Minister's frequent visits abroad are to maximise benefits from these ties, a cold welcome such as the one extended to Mr. Trudeau is in bad taste. It is said that the "Khalistan" issue in Canada is a major irritant but this should not come in the way of receiving its leader. The issue can be sorted out diplomatically. India should also not forget that Canada is now more liberal in receiving immigrants, with a majority hailing from India. This has happened

under Mr. Trudeau's leadership.  
SALINT DAVID GEORGE,  
Vazhakkulam, Kerala

■ For a leader extremely partial to having photo-opportunities with visiting dignitaries, it is striking that the Indian Prime Minister has been oddly reticent during Mr. Trudeau's visit. Mr. Trudeau needs to acknowledge India's concerns about pro-Khalistani elements in Canada in order to take bilateral relations forward and build on the tremendous potential that exists in so many varied fields. India-Canada ties should not be allowed to flounder.  
K.S. JAYATHEERTHA,  
Bengaluru

**Handling the Maldives**  
If the prevailing crisis in Male

deepens and poses a grave threat to the Indian community and other foreign nationals living there, the strategy of diplomacy exercised in evacuating them on a humanitarian basis from strife-torn Yemen in 2015 should be thought of. Our naval forces in the Indian Ocean have to monitor the situation very discreetly. Any diplomatic reach the Indian government strategises should be for peace alone. The Indian Ocean is a geopolitical hub of world powers and any intervention should be to ensure overall peace in this zone. China is not to be trusted in a situation such as that in the Maldives and is bound to use the prevailing situation of political instability to its advantage.

N. VISVESWARAN,  
Chennai

### Checks and balances

An important function of any bank is to reconcile accounts particularly its 'Nostro' accounts to check the inflow and outflow of foreign funds. If only those in charge of 'Nostro' reconciliation at Punjab National Bank had done their duty diligently, they could have easily traced such huge money trails as a result of buyers' credit inflows and settlements of claims to overseas suppliers done under dubious LoUs issued to Nirav Modi's companies. In the case of the Rotomac Global scam, it is reported that the loan proceeds were not used for the purpose for which they were granted. Here again, banks in the consortium appear to have failed to verify the end use of such loans granted – another important aspect of banking.

By failing to verify the end use, the bankers have directly or indirectly helped the borrowers to divert funds to various shell companies and siphon off funds. There can be no second opinion that these two frauds happened on account of a failure of controls in the banks, especially the casual manner in which the most secretive SWIFT keys were allowed to be handled by

lower officials. The members on the boards of the two banks have also failed in their duties to exercise due diligence despite defaults in repayments, weak balance sheets. It is unfortunate that bank employees prefer to be more loyal to borrowers than to their banks.

THARCUS S. FERNANDO,  
Chennai

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

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Erroneous reporting: The report, "HC directive in Kanchi Acharya case" published on Feb. 21, 2018 (some editions), was wrong. There was a mix-up with another case. The Madras High Court had only directed the police to register an FIR against Sadagopa Ramanuja Jeeyar of Srivilliputhur if a cognisable offence was made out for his recent remarks that he knew how to hurl soda bottles. The case against the Kanchi seer came up for hearing only on Feb. 21, 2018, and it was adjourned by a week.

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, 859 & 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