



Stress and strain

In politically charged Karnataka, words gather the power to unsettle those in authority

No relationship is free of tense moments and conflicting emotions. But the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) alliance in Karnataka seems to have more than its share of stress and strain. The pressures on the post-poll tie-up are from multiple points: the Opposition BJP that believes it was robbed of its mandate, and is looking to win over some of the MLAs of the Congress to topple the government; Congress members, especially those owing allegiance to former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who argue that the chief ministership should not have been handed over to the junior partner, the JD(S); and the leadership of the JD(S) that tries to assert itself within the alliance and expand the party's base at the Congress's expense. With the Lok Sabha election approaching, the stakes are high for all. The JD (S) wants to ensure it gets a good share of the seats as part of the alliance; the Congress realises it will have to concede ground to the JD(S) to keep the BJP out of the political turf, and the BJP knows the importance of being in power at the time of polls. After days of high drama, when the BJP and the Congress herded their MLAs in resorts to protect them from poaching, the pressure point on the government is from Siddaramaiah loyalists. Congress MLA S.T. Somashekar, on being appointed as the chairperson of the Bangalore Development Authority, claimed the city had not seen any development under the coalition government. Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy promptly offered to quit if his style of functioning was found to be unacceptable, forcing a rattled Congress leadership to rush to make amends. While Mr. Siddaramaiah signalled to his supporters and the party leadership he was not manoeuvring to be Chief Minister again, Mr. Somashekar apologised after KPCC president Dinesh Gundu Rao said he was at fault.

That a statement by one MLA can create such a storm speaks to the structural instability of the arrangement. The Congress and the JD(S) came together in a marriage of convenience; the JD(S) was allowed to head the government to prevent it from entering into a deal with the BJP. The only thing the Congress could offer the JD (S) that the BJP could not was the chief ministership. This was no gesture of magnanimity; only pragmatic deal-making. As negotiations on seat-sharing for the Lok Sabha polls begin, the strain is beginning to show. In these trying circumstances, the level of political discourse is also falling. While Union Minister Anantkumar Hegde made personal, derogatory comments about Mr. Rao, Mr. Siddaramaiah shouted at a party worker and grabbed the mike from her when she complained about the failure of officials to redress the grievances of her townspeople. In the surcharged atmosphere now, a remark is often enough of a spark to set off a ravaging fire.

Clearer TV

New TRAI order provides for greater choice and transparency on pricing of channels

The tariff order on broadcasting and cable services issued by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is set to become effective on February 1, giving the consumer the option to pay only for those channels she wants to watch. Under the scheme, there is also a maximum price for pay channels declared by the broadcaster, which is reported to TRAI, bringing about greater transparency. Each channel will be available on an *a la carte* basis. The effect is that the consumer's subscription cost on a base package of 100 standard definition television channels is fixed in the form of a network capacity fee. And even within this group, there is freedom to choose channels, with a provision for appropriate revision for any pay channels. This is a welcome departure from a regime where combinations of free and pay channels were decided by distributors and broadcasters as bouquets that did not reflect actual demand for individual channels. Efforts to introduce *a la carte* choice were thwarted by pricing individual channels almost as high as the bouquets they were part of. Bouquets are enabled in the new scheme, but with the stipulation that at least 85% of the total price of all channels that form part of a bouquet be charged, removing the incentive to distort prices. Distributors including cable and DTH platforms, and advertisers, should welcome the order, which strengthens price discovery and eliminates inflated claims of the subscriber base.

Television in the conventional sense has changed in the era of the Internet, with the emergence of new distribution possibilities. Many broadcasters, including popular news channels, provide their content free on platforms such as YouTube and through mobile phone applications, reaching global audiences. Global Over the Top (OTT) providers such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have opened a new front and are competing for viewers who get advertisement-free programming streamed on subscription. TRAI has made clear that since broadcast licensing does not apply to such new technology platforms, these do not come under price regulation. In the fast-changing competitive landscape of home entertainment, conventional TV must now compete on the strength of transparent pricing and better programming for subscription revenue growth and viewer time that attracts advertising. Industry data show that there are about 197 million homes in India with a TV set, and 100 million more homes without one represent scope for growth. This can be achieved through regulatory schemes that empower broadcasters and subscribers alike. TRAI has done well to put up a calculator on its website to help consumers calculate bills under the new regime before signing up for a package with the operator. The broadcast industry must welcome a new era that promises to remove distribution bottlenecks and empower consumers with choice.

Think universal basic capital

A simplistic universal basic income will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy



ARUN MAIRA

India's GDP is growing quite well, though there are disputes about whether it grew faster under the present or previous governments. There can be no dispute though that India needs to do much better to improve overall human development, in which it continues to be compared with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Even its poorer sub-continental neighbours are improving health and education faster. Benefits of India's economic growth must trickle down much faster to people at the bottom of the pyramid: to poorer farmers, landless rural labour, and hundreds of millions of workers living on the edge in low-paying, 'flexible' forms of employment with no social security.

Economists seem to be offering three solutions to the economy's structural problems. One, that there is no problem. Two, more privatisation. And, three, a universal basic income (UBI) to be provided by the state.

Ground still to be covered

Many economists are juggling with statistics to prove that the Indian economy is doing quite well. It is providing enough jobs, they say. And, statistically, poverty has reduced a lot. However, even these economists admit that a lot more must be done to improve education and health care, and to address the persistent informality and small scale of enterprises that are providing most of the employment in the country.

An ideological solution, accompanied with evidence that the go-

vernment is unable to provide them, is more privatisation of public services. As U.S. President Ronald Reagan said, government is not the solution, it is the problem. However, the private sector is structurally not designed to provide affordable public services equitably. Milton Friedman, who too is often cited, said, the business of business must be only business. Businesses must be run with a profit motive. They cannot take on the burden of subsidising citizens who cannot pay for their services.

Disruption and basic income

Structural forces within the global economy have been driving down wages and creating insecure employment while increasing the mobility of capital and increasing incomes from ownership of capital. Thomas Piketty and Oxfam have also drawn attention to increasing economic inequalities around the world. 'Industry 4.0', which has not yet spread too far, is expected to worsen these problems. An economic consequence of declining growth of wage incomes will be reduction of consumption. Which will create problems for owners of capital and automated Industry 4.0 production systems. For, who will buy all the material and services that these systems will produce? Therefore, the UBI has appeared as a silver bullet solution. It will be an income provided to everybody by the very state that the capitalists say should get out of their way, and to whom they are unwilling to pay more taxes.

The beauty of a 'universal' basic income, its proponents say, is that it avoids messy political questions about who deserves assistance. It also side-steps the challenge of actually providing the services required: education, health, food, etc. Just give the people cash: let them buy what they need. However,



er, if the cash will not provide citizens with good quality and affordable education and health, because neither the government nor the private sector is able or willing to, this will not solve the basic human development problems that must be solved.

Some economists who were proponents of UBI, such as Arvind Subramanian, the former Chief Economic Adviser to the Government, have begun to dilute their simplistic concept of UBI to make it financially and politically feasible. They propose a QUBRI (quasi-universal basic rural income), targeted only at poorer people in the rural areas. Their scheme is no longer universal. First, it will exclude the not-so-poor in rural areas as morally it should. Political questions about who should be included will have to be addressed. Second, it will not cover the masses of urban poor working for low and uncertain wages. Therefore, some other schemes will have to be drawn up for the urban sector, and entitlement and measurement issues will have to be addressed for these schemes too. All the schemes, rural and urban, could be cash transfer schemes, which Aadhar and the digitisation of financial services will facilitate. However, this still begs the question about how to provide good

Gandhi and the Socratic art of dying

There is a process of learning in the Gandhian act of self-suffering



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

Today is the 71st anniversary of Gandhi's death. His assassination was a great shock. But, strangely, his death unified those in India who had lost faith in non-violent co-existence. As Nehru said, "the urgent need of the hour is for all of us to function as closely and co-operatively as possible."

As a matter of fact, Gandhi's death taught everyone about the worth of civic friendship and social solidarity. Gandhi himself was well aware of this, long before his return to India and his rise as the non-violent leader of the Indian independence movement. For example, in a letter to his nephew on January 29, 1909, he wrote, "I may have to meet death in South Africa at the hands of my countrymen... If that happens you should rejoice. It will unite the Hindus and Muslims... The enemies of the community are constantly making efforts against such a unity. In such a great endeavour, someone will have to sacrifice his life."

It is interesting, how Gandhi, all through his life, talked about his death with a great deal of openness and with no sanctimony. It is as if for him the fundamental philosophical question - 'should I live or die; to be or not to be?' - had already found its answer in the idea of self-sacrifice.

An intertwining

In the Gandhian philosophy of resistance, we can find the intertwining of non-violence and exemplary suffering. Perhaps, self-sacrifice is the closest we come to ethical dying, in the sense that it is a principled leave-taking from life; an abandonment of one's petty preoccupations in order to see things more clearly. As such, there is a process of learning in the Gandhian act of self-suffering. For Socrates, to philosophise was to learn how to die. In the same way, for Gandhi, the practice of non-violence began with an act of self-sacrifice and the courage of dying for truth.

Socrates inspired Gandhi on the importance of self-sacrifice and the art of dying at a time when the latter was developing his idea of *satyagraha* in South Africa. Gandhi referred to Socrates as a "Soldier of Truth" (*satyavir*) who had the willingness to fight unto death for his cause. His portrayal of So-



crates as a *satyagrahi* and a moral hero went hand in hand with the affirmation of the courage and audacity of a non-violent warrior in the face of life-threatening danger. Consequently, for Gandhi, there was a close link between the use of non-violence and the art of dying, in the same manner that cowardice was sharply related to the practice of violence.

Socratic aspects

Gandhi remained a Socratic dissenter all his life. Though not a philosopher, Gandhi admired moral and political philosophers, who, as a manner of Socrates, were ready to struggle for the truth. Like Socrates, Gandhi was neither a mystic nor a hermit. He was a practitioner of dissident citizenship. Gandhi considered Socrates' civic action as a source of virtue and moral strength. He affirmed: "We pray to God, and want our readers also to pray, that they, and we too, may have the moral

quality public services for people to buy.

A simplistic UBI will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy. An unavoidable solution to fix India's fundamental problems is the strengthening of institutions of the state to deliver the services the state must (public safety, justice, and basic education and health), which should be available to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay for them. The institutions of the state must be strengthened also to regulate delivery of services by the private sector and ensure fair competition in the market. The building of state institutions, to deliver and to regulate, will require stronger management, administrative, and political capabilities, not better economists.

Economic inequality matters

Some economists say that inequality does not matter so long as poverty is being reduced. In fact, some even say that inequality is necessary to reduce poverty. So long as the people have bread, why should they complain if the rich are eating more cake, they imply. However, economic inequality does matter because it increases social and political inequalities. Those with more wealth change the rules of the game to protect and increase their wealth and power. Thus, opportunities for progress become unequal. This is why economic inequality must be reduced to create a more just society.

In the present economic system, people at the top can make more profits by driving down prices and wages for people at the bottom. They may then recycle a small portion of their profits back as philanthropy, or corporate social responsibility. Or, if they were willing to, which they are not, pay the state more taxes to provide

services, and even a UBI, to people at the bottom. Tiny enterprises have very little clout compared with large capitalist enterprises; and individual workers have little power compared with their employers. Therefore, terms of trade remain unfair for small enterprises, and terms of employment unfair for unorganised workers. The solution is the aggregation of the small into larger associations, cooperatives, and unions. Aggregations of small producers, and unions of workers, can negotiate for more fair terms.

An alternative approach

A better solution to structural inequality than UBI is universal basic capital, or UBC, which has begun to pop up in international policy circles. In this alternative approach, people own the wealth they generate as shareholders of their collective enterprises. Amul, SEWA, Grameen, and others have shown a way. Some economists go further and also propose a 'dividend' for all citizens, by providing them a share of initial public offerings on the stock market, especially from companies that use 'public assets', such as publicly funded research, or environmental resources.

To conclude, three better solutions to create more equitable growth than the ones on offer are: one, focus on building state capacity beginning with implementation of the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission. Two, strengthen the missing middle-level institutions for aggregation of tiny enterprises and representation of workers. Three, the creativity of economists could be better applied to developing ideas for UBC than UBI.

Arun Maira was a member of the Planning Commission

strength which enabled Socrates to follow virtue to the end and to embrace death as if it were his beloved. We advise everyone to turn his mind again and again to Socrates' words and conduct." Gandhi's approach to death exemplified another Socratic aspect: courage. Gandhi believed that when fighting injustice, the actor must not only have the courage of his/her opinions but also be ready to give his/her life for the cause. As George Woodcock says, "the idea of perishing for a cause, for other men, for a village even, occurs more frequently in Gandhi's writings as time goes on. He had always held that *satyagraha* implied the willingness to accept not only suffering but also death for the sake of a principle."

Gandhi's dedication to justice in the face of death was an example of his courageous attitude of mind as a Socratic gadfly. Further, one can find in Gandhi a readiness to raise the matter of dying as public policy. This is a state of mind which we can find as the background motto of Gandhi's political and intellectual life. Indeed, for Gandhi, the art of dying was very often a public act and an act of publicising one's will to be free.

There is something revealing in the parallel that Gandhi established between the struggle for

freedom and the art of dying. In a speech at a meeting of the Congress in Bombay in August 1942, he invited his fellow freedom fighters to follow a new mantra: "Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give to you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is 'Do or Die.' We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery... He who loses his life will gain it, he who will seek to save it shall lose it. Freedom is not for the coward or the faint-hearted."

Note here both the conviction in Gandhi that no other decision but dying was possible if the declaration of freedom was unachieved. Unsurprisingly, straightforward and honest. Which brings us back to January 30, 1948 when Mahatma Gandhi fell to the bullets of Nathuram Godse. One can understand this event as a variety of the Sophoclean saying: "Call no man happy until he is dead." Like it or not, it seems that for Gandhi, to be human was to have the capacity, at each and every moment, to confront death as fulfillment of a Socratic life.

Ramin Jahanbegloo is Director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace, Jindal Global University, Sonapat

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.

Congress's promise

The promise of a 'minimum income guarantee' by the Congress party offers hope of dignity to millions of the poor in India (Page 1, "Rahul promises income guarantee to the poor", January 29). If the scheme is well designed, with the honest intention of bringing succour to the poor, it is not difficult to find the resources needed to implement it. The scheme could be started in a few backward districts in each State as a pilot study for a year before it is fine-tuned for the rest of the country. Out of the elements of the slogan '*roti kapada aur makaan*', such a scheme should at least ensure '*roti*' to most of the poor.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI, Hyderabad

■ Our politicians are known for their spectacular promises but Congress President Rahul Gandhi's

plan seems to be a bit different especially when it comes to helping the poor. If implemented in a water-tight way, it could spell great relief to the poor.

P.U. KRISHNAN, Udhagamandalam

■ Where does Mr. Gandhi expect to find resources from to provide such an income? What is the criteria to be used in declaring someone 'poor'? The promise appears to be a very fluid one. No citizen wants to thrive on a 'freebie' culture, but instead looks for free and good education, employment opportunities, good infrastructure, better health care and affordable housing. Mr. Gandhi, if voted to power, should concentrate on making an individual well enough to stand on his own feet and not make him 'poor' to avail of an 'income guarantee'.

A. JAINULABDEEN, Chennai

■ 'Garibi Hatao' (Remove poverty) was the theme and slogan of Indira Gandhi's 1971 election campaign. Had it been implemented or fulfilled, after almost half a century, her grandson and Congress president Rahul Gandhi, would not have promised a minimum income guarantee. The people of the country have a right to know how he and his party propose to fund such a scheme. The Election Commission of India needs to look into unreasonable and unimplementable election promises.

C.G. KURIAKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

Shrinking habitats

We are responsible for the plight of the Indian tiger (Inside pages, "India can't handle more big cats", January 29). Unbridled human activities are leaving no space for the great cat. The solutions lie in identifying and creating

more tiger reserves with the help of the *India State of Forest Report*. India should also take a leaf out of the book of Australia which has its Green Army of Australia to oversee environmental issues. There must be more aggressive reforestation so that there are more habitats for the tiger. Finally, we must sensitise young Indians on the importance of the tiger as a keystone species in the Indian environment.

DIWAKAR PRASAD TIWARI, Bara, Satna, Madhya Pradesh

Unfair characterisation

It is startling that even the judiciary appears hesitant to recognise the talent and the potential of the disabled (Editorial page, "Capable even if disabled", January 29). We may become more sensitive in identifying the disabled ("visually challenged, differently abled"), but when it comes to accepting them in mainstream society, there

still seems to be a flood of doubts. In the case that was highlighted in the article, the judiciary could have recommended a year's apprenticeship for the applicant. It was inspiring to read about the writer too, who has also demonstrated that there is no hurdle that can stop the disabled.

RADHIKA KUMAR, Bengaluru

■ When I began reading the article, I was sceptical at first, wondering whether this

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the story on Cognizant's 25th year headline "Future will see man-machine managers" (Business page, Jan. 28, 2019), there was a reference to growth of 6-9% organic in constant currency and 7-9% including inorganic options. It should have been 7-11% including inorganic options"

An agency report titled "Diesel prices up by 10 paise, petrol unchanged" (Jan. 28, 2019) was erroneous. Indian Oil Corporation authorities said that there had not been any price increase in diesel since January 25.

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