Trust diminishes as an editor is knocked off his pedestal

Born from the Economic Weekly started by Sachin Chaudhuri in 1949, the Economic and Political Weekly emerged when Chaudhuri closed down the Economic Weekly in 1966. Friends and well-wishers got together to form the Sameeksha Trust, so that the journal could run freely and without interference.

Sadly, the last two editors have left because of problems of interference from the Trust. First C. Rammanohar Reddy quit after 10 years with EPW. Admirers thought the ship would steady when Paranjoy Guha Thakurta was appointed last year. Instead, his resignation has really shaken not just the EPW community but the larger world of the media and academia.

Guha Thakurta is a formidable business and investigative journalist. His work has targeted some of India’s biggest industrial and business houses from Sahara to the Ambanis. In 2010, he co-authored a report with L. Sreenivas Reddy, commissioned by the Press Council of India, on the paid news menace which was destroying the credibility of the media. (That the report was buried by the PCI is another matter.)

Guha Thakurta was apparently hired by the Sameeksha Trust because of his reputation as an investigative journalist. What sense did it then make to attempt to humiliate him because he added investigative articles to EPW? To go back in time, Guha Thakurta worked with a group of journalists to investigate a tax rebate which an Adani Group company received, apparently for a tax it did not pay in the first place. Anyone who follows the news in India knows that the Adani Group is perceived to be close to the current NDA Government at the Centre.

The Group sent a legal letter to EPW. So far, so normal. Any journalist who has written anything remotely controversial will have received legal notices. In most cases, the management appoints a lawyer or the company’s legal department asks questions of the journalist and editor and a reply is drafted or further action is taken.

Guha Thakurta’s ‘mistake’ is that he hired a lawyer without consulting the publishers, in this case the Sameeksha Trust. He also put up the legal letter and

(Continued on page 3)
A passing phase, or are ominous dark clouds gathering overhead?

Paranjoy Guha Thakurta is a name that is well known in media circles. His is a familiar byline in print; his is a familiar face on television. He is a journalist and editor of stature and repute. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that he studied in La Martiniere, Calcutta, the city where I grew up. Paranjoy would probably have become an economist or an Economics professor if he hadn’t decided to become a journalist – he graduated in Economics from St Stephen’s, Delhi, and went on to earn a master’s at the Delhi School of Economics. But Journalism gained (it got a top-draw investigative reporter) and, am sure, Paranjoy did as well (nothing can compensate for the satisfaction derived as a journalist in exposing wrong-doings/corruption).

It is said that it was the Emergency of 1975-77 that motivated Paranjoy to become a journalist. And, no doubt, it must have been the Emergency and all the things that were wrong during the period that goaded him to become not just an ordinary reporter, but a hardcore investigative reporter. That then, is the background of the man who has been a journalist for forty years now, who has earned his spurs.

In April last year, the Sameeksha Trust, which publishes the Economic and Political Weekly, hired Paranjoy as editor-in-chief to replace C. Rammanohar Reddy who was editor of the publication for a decade or so. Reddy resigned; his was not a happy exit as some reports have suggested. However, there were no ripples as such then. Rammanohar is the son of C.G.K. Reddy, Business manager of The Hindu who helped found the Research Institute for Newspaper Development in 1979. Rammanohar, too, has had a close view of the Emergency, with his father (CGK) being arrested in 1976. In an article (When Friends Disappeared) he had written for The Hindu some years ago, he mentions how the “memories of the summer of 1976 in Delhi occasionally still send a chill down my spine”.

Paranjoy’s resignation now has created more than just ripples. There’s been a lot about it in the media; prominent figures like Ashok Mitra and Ramachandra Guha have written about how he was unceremoniously shown the door (you can read all of it on The Wire website). The two lead articles in this issue, by Ranjona Banerji and Bharat Dogra, dwell on the subject. It all really boils down to an article being taken down (from the EPW website) at the behest of Sameeksha Trust and the editor’s position being compromised, the editor being badly let down. Yes, there might have been some administrative matter that Paranjoy didn’t handle the right way and which the trustees didn’t like, but letting go of an editor this way is definitely not on.

When the Trust appointed Paranjoy as editor-in-chief, the trustees must surely have known his background as an investigative journalist. His report (he was part of a committee set up by the Press Council of India) on ‘paid news’, for example, had created a storm seven years ago. He had written books – on crony capitalism and the Ambanis (no less), and how corporate entities were affecting reportage and democracy. So, did the Sameeksha Trust bow down to pressure from the powers that be or was it due to the fear of litigation? In any case, it’s not something you would expect from the trustees – all people of eminence – of such a respected journal like the Economic and Political Weekly. You would expect a journal with such pedigree as EPW to stand up and be counted. But not in this fashion. Harsh words have been used in some of the articles that have appeared (Murdering a Great Journal, etc), but suffice to say that what has happened at EPW is deeply dismaying and does not augur well for healthy and robust journalism. The least the Sameeksha Trust can do is to provide its side of the story and try to clear the air, appoint another editor of stature, never again bow down to pressure or succumb to fear of any kind, and restore EPW’s lost glory. Strangely, the headline used in my edit piece (As freedom shrinks, it’s hard times for investigative journalism) in the previous issue of Vidura once again echoes loud and clear. It’s high time we took notice.

Sashi Nair
editorpiirind@gmail.com
July-September 2017 | VIDURA

Paranjoy Guha Thakurta.

(Continued from page 1)

the EPW response on the journal’s website. For these “transgressions”, the Trust asked him to take down the article and the two letters from the website. He was also told that whatever he wrote in the future would have to be vetted by a co-editor and that his byline could no longer appear in EPW.

Guha Thakurta had no option but to resign. No editor with any self-respect would have stayed in such circumstances. What has shocked many is that the Sameeksha Trustees include some of India’s most admired academic names – Romila Thapar, Deepak Nayyar, Dipankar Gupta and Andre Beteille, to name just a few. That they are unable to support journalistic integrity and the reputation of their editor over a threat from a corporate group spells doom for other editors who work with less exalted managements.

Many people have commented that the average age of the Trust is the problem, which sounds somewhat ageist. In their individual capacities, these names are not easily intimidated by threats from the establishment which they have faced all their lives. Reddy could not work with the Trust and he did not venture far from the tenets set by Krishna Raj, who edited EPW from 1966 to 2004. Yet he also had problems with the Trust, after being editor for over 10 years.

Reddy has disagreed with Guha Thakurta’s style since the controversy broke, but he has also written in detail about how the way the Trust functions has greatly damaged the journal. Several academics have also questioned the Trust’s decisions in this case. Ashok Mitra, economist and former finance minister of West Bengal, wrote in a letter to some of the trustees: “But the latest development, which has gone to the length of the trustees insisting that the editor must abide by the views of a co-editor who will vet whatever he writes is against the very purpose of setting up the trust in 1966...”

“Please allow me to recount some bits of past history. Sachin Chaudhuri had founded a unique journal, the Economic Weekly in 1949. It was a unique experiment because alongside comments on contemporary issues, it also carried serious academic essays concerning the various aspects of different social sciences...”

“The trustees are supposed to protect the sovereignty of editorial policies from interference from any quarters. It is ironical that the present trustees have decided to do precisely the reverse of the original purpose for establishing the trust. The role of the Sameeksha Trust was never to act as super editors who will oversee the editorial competence of the editor selected by them barely a year ago...”

Mitra is 89, so perhaps age is not necessarily why the Trust has problems with its editors. From the outside, it looks like issues of control. This is in fact an age-old problem when it comes to editors and managements, whether they are celebrated academics or money-minded businessmen. Editors in the mainstream media will invariably come up against the management when a story that impacts either money or political influence. It is a daily enervating battle and it is sometimes inevitable that an editor will give in.

But this is not what one would expect from EPW. A journal that has prided itself on its researched scholarly articles and also reports on growth and development issues that few mainstream publications would touch now finds itself in that same miserable cesspit of power play and fear of authority. Rather than draw courage from EPW’s strong past and its independent nature, the Trust appears to have fallen prey to the current atmosphere of media capitulation in the face of a massive electoral force. An open letter by 150 academics to the Trust goes straight to the crux of the matter:

“It is one thing to wonder if the editor may have erred in initiating legal action on behalf of the Trust without first consulting its board, and quite another to withdraw an already published article from the journal. If the board believes the article to be mistaken in its facts, it must issue a public apology and retraction. If it is only concerned that due deference was not shown to the board, it must publicly stand by the article. By forcing the editor’s resignation without clarifying its stand on the substance of the article, the board has diminished the institution that it is mandated to nurture.”

There are two issues that the EPW community and the Trust need to fix: The first is how to restore the dignity of both the Trust and the editor of the EPW after this surprising demonstration of cowardice by the Trustees. The second is to understand that when management interferes in the functioning of senior editorial staff, nothing good can come of it. The Sameeksha Trust clearly needs to develop a little trust – in itself and in its employees. Otherwise, here be dragons and death.

(The writer has worked in the media for over 30 years in various publications. She has been deputy editor of Mid-Day, deputy resident editor of The Times of India’s Ahmedabad edition and senior editor with DNA. She is currently a freelance columnist.)
An editor’s exit reflects perils of investigative journalism

The controversy relating to a legal notice from Adani’s lawyers precipitating a crisis in the prestigious journal, Economic and Political Weekly, culminating in the resignation of its editor, senior and eminent journalist Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, has many aspects to it. Bharat Dogra examines the two articles* which led to the crisis from the perspective of professional journalism.

The first thing to note here is that the two articles that led to the ouster of the Economic and Political Weekly’s editor Paranjoy Guha Thakurta fall in the category of public interest journalism. There is clearly a need, expressed by the government also many times, to increase revenue. Several welfare and even basic needs programmes have been suffering from serious cuts in budgets. There is also widespread agreement that the increase in revenue should avoid increasing the burden on common people, small operators and the informal sector, which are already reeling in serious crisis and, in some contexts, with unprecedented problems.

Increase in revenue has to come from a better and more careful scrutiny of the biggest operators, particularly operators who have already been on the radar of the investigating agencies for years and against whom a lot of evidence has already been gathered. Without effective improvements in such investigations as well as improvements in follow-up action, it is unlikely that the resources necessary for welfare and basic needs can be raised.

It is also very clear that the two articles in question which focus entirely on how loss of hundreds of crores of rupees can be avoided to the public exchequer clearly belong to the category of public interest journalism. While the cases involve several hundred crores of rupees, the articles also make it amply clear that the proceedings of the cases will also have a bearing on other cases; for instance, of circular trading, so that it is possible that the results of the cases can lead to loss or gains of several times more revenue for public exchequer.

Another matter of public interest which is often discussed but often about without specific examples relates to changes that are made in existing rules with the specific intent of giving huge benefits to certain parties. The articles are also relevant from this perspective as specific examples are discussed in detail. Hence, the public interest nature of the articles is very clear as the issues raised can potentially result in increasing government revenue by hundreds or even thousands of crores of rupees (for example, if these also have a bearing on other cases of circular trading).

The other important thing that emerges from a careful reading of the articles is that care has been taken to observe the various norms of responsible journalism. Of course, I have not researched the subject matter of the articles myself and, so, I avoid commenting on this. My comment is only related to the procedures followed by the writers which come out clearly from a careful reading of the two articles.

It is clear that the writers had prepared detailed questionnaires which they sent to various ministries, departments or other government organisations dealing with the cases. The questionnaires were sent by email as well as by regular post so as to have a proper record of the same. In addition, the relevant questionnaires were also sent to Adani and his lawyers.

If a reply from a government source came, it has been mentioned in the articles. However, for the most part, the concerned government departments chose not to respond at all. Even in their case, the writers have been generous enough to add that when a reply comes it will be added to the article. In the case of questionnaires sent to Adani and/or his lawyers, replies came and extracts from them giving their point of view have been carried (within the main articles). In fact, even the legal notice sent by them was later posted next to the articles.

All the necessary sources of statistics, tables, etc have been provided at the proper places. It is obvious that the writers had obtained copies of documents such as notices already served by investigating agencies which built a strong case for investigating the matter further. The writers have also been careful about giving relevant extracts from court judgments.

The concerned government authorities who have the challenging task ahead of increasing revenue without at the same time increasing the burden on common people should welcome such journalism but in the kind of troubled times through which we are passing these days, the more likely response is likely to be harass and victimise the...
concerned journalists. This clearly calls for much greater solidarity on the part of the journalists themselves, and also greater solidarity of the common people with such kind of investigative journalists.

“The two articles in question are: Did the Adani Group Evade Rs 1000 Crore in Taxes, published on January 14 this year, and Modi Government’s Rs 500 Crore Bonanza published on June 24.

(The writer has been involved with public interest journalism and was a co-recipient of the prestigious Sachin Chaudhari Award (named after the founding editor of EPW) for financial journalism.)

Welcome initiative to bridge rural-urban digital divide

The MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in Chennai is ready to pilot an Android application to disseminate need-based information and knowledge packages through public libraries

The MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has been working to bridge the rural-urban digital divide using Information Technology. Specifically, they have been focusing on community newspapers as a means to disseminate key scientific information to rural communities. Embracing technological advancements, it is now ready to pilot a new initiative — m-ICE or mobile - Information for Community Empowerment, a natural progression of the community newspaper initiative that the foundation has been associated with for years.

A part of the Repositioning and Strengthening the Public Libraries as Knowledge and Learning Centres of India Project implemented by MSSRF with the support of the Indian Public Library Movement and the NASSCOM Foundation, the initiative hinges on the m-ICE app. An extension of a concept which has worked well in rural communities, it will be introduced in public libraries in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra through library innovators.

The library innovators are selected through the International Network of Emerging Library Innovators (INELI, India and South Asia). The m-ICE app will disseminate need-based information and knowledge packages that can help librarians strengthen the functioning of public libraries.

Technologies are now well integrated with various outreach programmes. Today, globally, institutions are looking at synergetic approaches to enhance knowledge. Global literacy is on the UN’s agenda, and public libraries in various parts of the world are tapping their potential to enhance community knowledge and function as learning labs. In that sense, India is still behind the times.

That said, India is well known for its indigenous knowledge. The m-ICE app project is an example of how Village Resource Centres (VRCs) at MSSRF are capitalising on the strength of traditional tools such as the community newspapers. Community newspapers have emerged as efficient channels for disseminating key scientific information to rural communities in Maharashtra and in the Union Territory of Puducherry. As a result, the lives and livelihood of these communities have improved.

MSSRF, which has more than 16 years of experience in the community newspaper field in terms of design, presentation and content development, used the continuous feedback received from regular readers to bring about qualitative changes in the product. It evolved to a point where it has something of interest for all age groups. The introduction of a token subscription fee has enhanced the sense of value and ownership regarding the product among readers.

The community newspapers, aptly titled Namma Ooru Seithi and Amchi Gram Vartha in Tamil and Marathi, respectively (both meaning ‘our village news’), provide locale specific, proactive and demand responsive information to the community. The monthly publications are widely circulated to various audiences such as government officials, individual households and NGOs.

In the emerging market scenario coloured by the omnipresence of the smartphone, it is possible to meet various needs of diverse communities and varied stakeholders.

Through smartphone and social media applications, farmers and fisher communities can access relevant information and educate themselves on a wide range of subjects. Translation services are also available for wider outreach. The MSSRF community papers have close to 3000 readers, and as the communities are adapting to the latest technologies, the newspaper has evolved into a mobile-Community Newspaper (m-CNP) using an Android application.

The m-CNP carries general advisories on crop, livestock and fisheries management, government announcements, schemes, district news and entitlements, job opportunities, games for youth and children, information on health, diet, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, practices, traditional healing and medicinal practices and benefits of yoga.

Helplines connect the user to regional experts on agriculture and fisheries. The application is monitored on daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis, on various parameters.

(Courtesy: The MS Swaminathan Research Foundation)
Looking Back and Looking Ahead

Needed: Sentiments of daring and social vigilance

Journalism as therapy? It was indeed, for Sakuntala Narasimhan. No kidding, she says. Here, she traverses a broad canvas while looking back on the 51 years that have gone by since she started writing. She is convinced that the Fourth Estate is an important pillar upholding citizens’ rights, along with the legislature, judiciary and executive wings. Journalists have an increasingly important role to play in safeguarding basic rights enshrined in our Constitution, she says, especially when political pressures become threats against dissent and debate.

The Media Foundation of Delhi, founded by the late B.G. Verghese, who served as a highly respected editor in mainstream media, put together, in 2012, a collection of personal anecdotes by winners of the prestigious annual Chameli Devi Award for Outstanding Women Journalists, describing how and why each one of us (winners) came to journalism. I had recalled in my reminiscences therein, that it was journalism that resurrected me from a deep and corrosive depression caused by setbacks on the way to the goals I was aiming at.

Writing as a serious pursuit was not even remotely on my radar during my adolescence and early youth. I was trained to be a musician (my mother and her mother were classical musicians, and I had begun to sing in public at the age of three, going on to win ten gold medals by age 16). However, I wanted to be an IAS officer. After I joined college, my Economics professor decided I would make an excellent economist (I often recall how he would take me to national seminars and introduce me as "a future finance minister" or "a World Bank expert").

In the end (Man proposes, God disposes, as I remarked in my piece in the book), I couldn’t pursue music or economics or the IAS (married women were not allowed in the IAS in 1962, the year I was married); pursuing my doctorate in Economics got stalled too, through housekeeping and lack of time for research. In the meantime my advisor also moved abroad on a UN assignment. Music likewise went on the backburner due to a prolonged psychosomatic throat ailment and full-time housekeeping duties.

Stuck at home with a premature infant on my hands and no help, and all three career options closed, I was feeling almost suicidal (I couldn’t leave a motherless infant behind). What resurrected me was a chance decision to try my hand at writing one day while the baby slept. I had written for my school magazine and enjoyed stringing together words. I borrowed a typewriter and sent off a short, humorous piece to Femina. It got published (in July 1966) for which I got paid Rs 30 – all my own, earned through my own effort. It was a heady feeling that pulled me out of depression.

I wrote another piece a month later and this got published in The Hindu. Another 30 rupees! This was an unexpected door opening. I sent off pieces to Shankar’s Weekly (now defunct) and these got published too. Thereafter, I set myself a target of writing at least one piece per month. Twenty six days would go by with no time to put pen to paper, but then I would force myself to stay up late after sterilising the baby’s bottle, and write something.

A year later, a short story I wrote won the first prize in a nationwide fiction contest; fiction was the only genre (besides lighter vein pieces) that I could do, given my splintered time and housekeeping obligations, but when I was offered a job as sub-editor at Femina seven years later, I jumped at it and learned the ropes of editing, page-making and doing reports based on background research and investigations.

After winning a couple of awards (The Chameli Devi and PUCL Awards), I became a columnist for a regional paper. This was enormously satisfying; these were probably the first such columns on gender and consumer rights, in a leading daily (1981). I kept it up for 27 years, and earned enough to build myself a small apartment in Bengaluru (1992). Through journalism I felt I was combining the pleasures of creative work, giving voice to feminist perspectives, and doing something for the community by sharing my findings and views with a large readership.

For me, writing was also a stress buster – a lot of the fiction I wrote initially (during the 1970s) was about educated women forced to conform to a conservative role of housekeeping and childcare, and this, I found, resonated with a lot of women readers who found themselves caught between the old and the new social ethos. Even fiction can be a vehicle for making a statement.

I recall one incident when I was stuck, unable to find a denouement for a short story. While I wrestled...
with this, the piece of paper on which I had drafted the story (remember, no computers in the 1970s) flew out of our eighth floor window and drifted into the backwaters beyond the compound wall. That was it – I had the denouement I was searching for; the paper on which the woman protagonist had written something, flies out of the window, never to be retrieved. Problem solved. That was hilarious, even if losing my draft was upsetting.

A related bonus from journalism was that I could donate royalties from one of my books to help Vimochana, a women’s help group in Bangalore, for their work on assisting battered women. A handsome cash award of Rs 24000 likewise went to put an orphan girl through school. That was enormously satisfying.

A related bonus from journalism was that I could donate royalties from one of my books to help Vimochana, a women’s help group in Bangalore, for their work on assisting battered women. A handsome cash award of Rs 24000 likewise went to put an orphan girl through school. That was enormously satisfying.

Corrective facial surgery for a girl burnt by her husband for dowry. That was enormously satisfying too.

As were the teaching assignments abroad, and invitations to present papers at international conferences on four continents, to share social perspectives from the developing world. All because of journalism. As I wrote in my reminiscences, “It is one thing to be an anti-corruption activist or crusader, but far more exciting to write about corruption-related issues, sharing it with lakhs of readers and helping to mobilise public opinion towards the betterment of the community.”

Recounting all this, I found, also helped enthuse other women, by showing that journalism offers an outlet when other full-time professions and involvements seem barred.

Looking back on these 51 years since I began writing, I find that the scenario has today some good points and some not-so-good. There was no Internet during the 1960s, one had to do legwork to gather information and pore over clippings files in a reference library. Editing was harder -- paragraphs could not be moved round as on a computer, one had to rip out typed sheets and begin all over again.

It is marvelous to be able to Google search on any topic. On the other hand, the profusion of information itself promotes laziness and less-than-thorough drafting – I find youngsters asking for ‘two sentences’ commenting on a topic he/ she is reporting on, and cutting and pasting, without any face-to-face interactions (which can give so much more insights compared to ‘two sentences’ of comments).

I also find that, with increasing corporatisation of ownership of the media, sales figures and profits take precedence over serious issues (gender, consumer protection, exposing malpractices even if it means harming ad revenues—I remember how a cosmetics manufacturer threatened to pull out ads for the next six months after I wrote a piece on harmful chemicals in cosmetics; the marketing manager was furious). I and the paper I wrote for were threatened with a law suit.

With mainstream media now wanting ‘food, fashion and films’, which could boost readership and revenues (through ads), outlets for my kind of writing are shrinking. Editorial stances get dictated by management’s allegiances to business interests or political leanings. This had already started, during the mid-1980s, when I was told to pull out an editorial page if an extra ad was received at the last minute after the issue’s pages were made up (which often meant I had to limit some articles to single page features, even if they merited more than one page).

Money rules, not any obligation to serve society through exposing wrongdoing. “Play it down” (to
protect some politician close to the media owner) or “play this up” (to pull down someone against whom the owner has a grudge) both happen, as part of instructions to editors. Media today is also more entertainment than it used to be two generations ago. There are non-mainstream media that are fearless and unconcerned about ‘hurting VIPs’ but their bottom lines are predictably shaky, and survival becomes difficult without mass subscription. They do not get the kind of lucrative ads that mainstream media towing a particular political line enjoy.

Also, today downloading material from the Internet whittles the chances of cross-checking for authenticity – anyone can put out information on the web (even Wikipedia), so what happens to my credibility if I rely on the internet for my sources? How much homework do today’s journalists do, in putting together their copy? Once fake news gets put out, how does one undo the damage? The rebuttals, suing for defamation etc merely provide more ‘masala’ for boosting sales further (or pushing up TRP ratings). In my time we had to take notes while doing interviews; today no one takes notes; comments can be recorded – but recordings and videos can also be doctored. Where does that leave ethics in journalism?

A journalist fresh out of college once remarked, “I love the power – I just have to lift the phone and say I am a reporter from this paper, and I get instant access even to the chief minister.” Power, yes – but is it always used to do good, to clean up the corridors of power? “C’mon, be practical, I’ll lose my job,” she said. Pragmatism vs professional obligations?

There were threats 25 years ago too, when I exposed malpractices – anonymous calls, warnings, pressure on editors to stop publishing my pieces. But it is worse today, with political pressures from extremist groups causing not just threats but worse – even ‘eliminations’. But if citizens enroll in the army or police, knowing that they could face dangerous assignments, that same sentiment, of daring, and exposing wrongdoing, as one’s contribution towards social vigilance, is, as I see it, very much part of journalism.

(The writer, based in Bengaluru, is a recipient of the Media Foundation’s Chameli Devi Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist 1983. Her fortnightly columns on gender issues and consumer rights ran in the Deccan Herald for 27 years. She had earlier worked for The Times of India Group in Mumbai.)

**DD News launches new website**

DD News has launched a new website, www.ddnews.gov.in. The new DD News website gives an insight of news and features from across the world. Stories can be read in Hindi and English and a live webcast lets you watch DD News on the go.

The new website has a richer colour scheme. The open source technology used in the website makes it more responsive. For instance, if you open it on your mobile phone, it will adjust according to your screen size, so that you can read the website easily on your mobile, tablet, laptop or computer.

The new website also displays real-time weather updates. Viewers can also share stories from the website on social media platforms.
Fake news on an upswing, thanks to a president

While fake news has been a menace the public has had to contend with probably ever since men began to communicate with each other, it has recently been taken to a different level, mainly by the style of functioning of the 45th president of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump. M. R. Dua has more

Fake news, which can be described as attempts to mislead the public, is probably as old as communication. However, it has recently been making news, so to speak, mainly because of the style of campaigning and also subsequent comments and statements by USA’s President Donald J. Trump. As the Republican Party’s nominee, Donald Trump’s campaign was studded with unsavoury, offensive, even defamatory remarks against national leaders and institutions, the then Obama administration’s
policies, and political, social and cultural organisations, which were largely unsubstantiated.

On another front, according to a Russian media expert, Peter Pomerantsev, two news outlets on the Kremlin payroll, RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik, churn out stories such as Black Lives Matter that create protests and social tensions.

John Pantalone, associate professor of Journalism and Programme chair at the University of Rhode Island (URI), defines fake news as “a deliberate effort to mislead, and the Internet has magnified it, because it’s an open highway—anyone can get on. It makes (one) crazy”. Noted media scholar Renee Hobbs, professor of Communication Studies at the Harrington School of Communication and Media Studies in Phoenix, Arizona, has categorised fake news into six types: disinformation, hoaxes, propaganda, satire /parody, partisanship, and inaccuracies in journalism.

“Fake news lumps together all of those different kinds of information without considering the purposes, the motives and the outcomes,” says Hobbs. Yet another URI scholar, Scott Kushner, believes “it’s really a slippery concept, and the reason it’s so is because it means different things to different people”.

In the USA, many followers of TV news channels, including Fox News and MNSBC, told this writer that the channels often transmit stories that are less than credible.

In India, too, there are many newspapers, magazines and journals that purvey news that is incorrect, based on rumours, spin, and everything else that exists for reasons beyond the intrinsic value of disseminating truth. The Registrar of Newspapers of India has mentioned in annual reports that such publications appear and disappear without anyone even noticing.

Meanwhile, even after having taken oath as USA’s 45th president, Donald Trump keeps up his habit of throwing up unsupported, whimsical comments and has catapulted the ‘fake news’ culture into active circulation. The good news is, newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and many websites like factcheck.org and ask.com, as also sites like Huzlers, Stupid, World Daily News Report and others, keep exposing these untruths and half-truths.

(Indian Express)
‘If we aren’t paid, we don’t eat’

Matthew Winkler, co-founder and editor-in-chief emeritus, Bloomberg News, was in Chennai to deliver the inaugural address of the Asian College of Journalism’s class of 2017-18. Renowned for his focus on accuracy in news reporting, Winkler spoke on a range of issues to Suresh Seshadri and K. Bharat Kumar. Excerpts:

Did you ever have to worry about content becoming free?
We have had this truly existential debate as long as we have been around. What it comes down to is, we all would love everything we do to be paid for directly. And, first and foremost, Mike Bloomberg, the founder, owner and CEO of Bloomberg has been explicit that if we don’t get paid for what we do, we don’t eat. And, I agree. However, we have also said that we want our journalists to be as influential as they could possibly be. In order to be influential, at least some of what they do has to be read, heard and viewed by the widest possible audience. Because you never know, there could be someone in that audience who could be affected by that reporting in some way who would not necessarily be a Bloomberg Terminal user and we want our reporters to be most influential. So, we have always had this debate – what can be unbundled from Bloomberg, that isn’t a set price. It’s an issue that won’t go away.

Your reputation precedes you, given your relentless focus on facts...
Just because things are asserted, it does not make them true. I have said that and continue to say that. The risk, in the period or time we are in now, our time, people can and do say anything. Whatever they say, travels instantly around the world and it’s preserved forever, even if it’s not true. And even if it’s not true and it’s important, then it is calamitous. Just because people say things does not mean they are newsworthy. And, having something asserted does not make it true.

How should journalists prepare for reporting in today’s world?
Part of being a successful journalist is knowing how to learn and that learning is continuous, it’s perpetual; that, to be a worthy journalist is to be a learner willing to learn, which means having the capacity to obtain as much factual information about whatever the subject is. To do that requires knowledge and skill: knowledge as in knowing what you don’t know and how to know what you don’t know; and skill as in where to obtain that knowledge. Journalists should be aware of how the global, national, regional economy works, what drives business, what goes into technology, how markets work. Those are very important parts of the equation that are marginalised and I think they should be put in front of everybody as the main focus. If journalists have that knowledge and understanding, they can be much more effective reporting on events.

With proliferation of fake news, do you see a redefinition of ethics for journalists?
Every journalist should start with the premise that if it isn’t true, it isn’t news. So, every journalist should always go about his or her reporting or editing with the aspiration: ‘accuracy above all else’. That is not new, but a traditional mandate and I still think the same mandate [is the same] today as it was decades ago.

(From left) Sukumar Ranganathan, editor, Mint; N Ram, trustee, Media Development Foundation; Matthew Winkler, co-founder and editor-in-chief Emeritus, Bloomberg News; Sashi Kumar, chairman and trustee, MDF; Parry Ravi, managing director International, Bloomberg Media; and Raghavan Srinivasan, editor, BusinessLine, during the inauguration of The Asian College of Journalism-Bloomberg Programme on business and financial journalism in Chennai.
going outside your comfort zone. That is what learning is about – being always to seek information, so that a generalist. Because, the way of saying what you would consider a generalist. A compliment, and an asset, not a liability.

With availability of data increasing, are financial journalists in danger of being only analysts?
I don’t think that financial journalism is any worse or better than people who are political, sports or entertainment reporters. The risk of inserting one’s opinion is universal, not specialised.

In today’s world of fake news, what signs should one watch out for?
As in any presentation, in any field, any discipline or subject, the use of facts can be superficial or comprehensive. The more comprehensive and detailed, the more credible the information. Most fake news, if not all of it, is typically a superficial assemblage… It’s light or superficial packaging. Readers who want only accurate information should be skittish about what is presented as factual that you can see is porous in its content. It’s missing too many data points to be taken seriously. Again, a lot of fake news is asserted, as opposed to reported.

In the age of Twitter, with its 140-character limit, what do you see for long-form journalism?
Long-form journalism has as much a future as it ever had. And that’s reflected in so many periodicals, publications, news organisations that happily deliver narratives that are in the 1000s of words. They wouldn’t be doing it if there wasn’t an appetite for it and that appetite has been and always will be robust, even as we consume the Tweets with greater interest than ever.

Can there ever be a human side to financial reporting? Is it easier to bring in the human element in other forms of journalism?
No. I would say that financial or economic reporting has all kinds of opportunities for what you just referred to as the human element. It takes some effort, skill and knowledge to get the examples and the anecdotes that reveal the human element. But they are there. In fact, I would argue that in some ways, they are more prevalent in a financial or economic context than they are in some other categories. The reason for that is, wherever there are a lot of data points, the individuals can’t be far behind. The data refers to the people. It’s about human behaviour. The data reported in the financial context, whether it’s out of the market, the economy or corporate performance, is about human behaviour. It is not theoretical. It’s factual.

What would you pick as the biggest story, in your time, that has changed or touched the world?
Bloomberg News came into its own in the years leading up to throughout the financial crisis and the following recession. Because, all the skills and knowledge we had acquired in our youth, our adolescence as a news organisation, we definitely put to use in the most challenging circumstances for the world, to good effect. An example of that is… Bloomberg News was the first news organisation to put two words together in the context of the global economy: toxic debt. And toxic debt was the principal cause of the financial crisis. Bloomberg News was the first news organisation to really dissect the creation, supply and distribution of toxic debt from Wall Street to the world. Bloomberg News, following the crisis and the recession that ensued, was the only news organisation, (it still is), to sue the Federal Reserve to obtain what it considered in the public interest, data about the bailout of
the banks, [as to] who have got what monies from the Fed. It was trillions of dollars at the time, and the Fed was not willing to share that information even though the Fed is the agent if you will, of the public. And Bloomberg News successfully, in court, got the Fed to release all the data that showed the scope of the rescue of the financial industry. So, I think that period for us was extraordinary and we made an invaluable contribution.

You have been uncomfortable with anonymous sourcing of stories...?

What I thought was difficult, to say the least, was in the course of reporting what people reported as mergers and acquisitions deals. Acquisitions is what they really are. One company acquires another. Because so much of that kind of reporting was anonymously sourced, it was far too subject to the risk of being misleading. Because, it favoured the sources of information.

I'll give you an example. It was a really big deal, the biggest of the time. German car company Daimler acquiring Chrysler – 1998. In the initial reporting of that acquisition, which was anonymous, was first of all said to be ‘a merger of equals’. And, it was also reported as going to be an ‘example of one of the great deals of our time’. It was the end of the 20th Century, two very big companies, on opposite sides of the Atlantic, were getting together in a merger of equals, it was going to be a great deal...

Well, it was the worst deal in the history of Daimler. It took, dare I say, more than 10 years for Daimler shareholders to recover from that disaster, that transaction. It was so bad for Daimler shareholders.

Had the reporting of it at the time been transparent, if people who did not have a vested interest been able to talk about that deal, the initial reporting would have been very different from what it was. It was a giant commercial, if you will, for the investment bankers doing the deal, who got paid a lot of money for the deal. But that deal was fundamentally not in the interest of the acquiring company – the proof is, it was a disaster for Daimler shareholders. That is what I mean about how hazardous anonymous reporting is.

What would be an ideal process? Would you insist on two different sources confirming the news?

Here’s the thing. When you are talking to sources who are by agreement, anonymous, there are all kinds of restrictions. Some of it may be that you can’t share this with anyone else. If you are a reporter and would like to interview a professor of mergers and acquisitions and get a perspective on it to share with your readers, and you say to the professor, ‘By the way, I am about to report that Daimler is acquiring Chrysler. What do you think about it?’ But the restriction is that you can’t share it with the professor because your source does not want the professor to know. The deal has not been disclosed. So you can’t do the reporting you would otherwise do. You can’t go where you need to go to make that reporting complete. So, when you are totally reliant on anonymous sources, you are already handicapped. You are already operating as a journalist with restrictions that prevent you from sharing the whole truth and nothing but the truth with your readers.

What is your view on identity of sources having to be shared with editors?

It think that is essential. The editor is also responsible for not only content but [for] the other reporters, the reputation, the well-being of and what’s at stake for his or her news company... So every precaution should be taken to ensure that in the process of reporting and editing, everything that can be done to be sure that what’s reported is accurate, is being done. That is at a minimum, a necessity. Because, the editor has a professional obligation to ensure that all reporting is true.

Even when the Washington Post was breaking stories on the Watergate scandal, the publisher didn’t really know the identity of the main source.

Ben Bradlee was the editor and Bradlee did know what the reporters were doing and had more than an idea of the process of their reporting. He was pretty rigorous about it. But they also made mistakes. It’s in their book. And it wasn’t just over Watergate. Washington Post got into a few difficulties with anonymous reporting. It was over Jimmy’s World — a 10-year old drug addict. Except that Jimmy was completely made up – fake news. They got a Pulitzer Prize for that and had to return the prize for Jimmy’s World which was a non-story, fake news. That was the Washington Post, the great Washington Post that Bradlee created. By the way, he didn’t have anything to do with this story, directly. But it shows you the hazards of anonymous reporting.

Did you ever have to insist on reporters revealing sources? Was it rare or frequent?

Fortunately, we didn’t have any great mistakes over anonymously sourced stories. That would be the total irony — after fighting it for so long if we got into trouble for anonymous reporting. Fortunately, we didn’t have that mishap. We made other mistakes, far too many other mistakes.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)
Have you left the confines of your native village or town and moved to a bustling city? Do you crave for news of ‘home’ and its environs? If you belong to the Hindi belt, then small Hindi newspapers are your best bet. The same goes for other regions of the country too – the smaller vernacular newspapers cover life in the rural and semi-urban areas much more effectively than the big ones. And they cost less too.

The total number of pages in some of the Hindi newspapers may be much lower than in English newspapers, particularly if your count includes the supplements; yet rural and small towns are better represented.

Let us take a single day – May 3 this year – and analyse the spectrum of coverage in a range of Delhi editions of various newspapers.
The *Rajasthan Patrika* carried an important article on the leakage of chlorine from a water purifying plant near Jaipur, raising serious safety concerns about such facilities. The details of the accident and its impact on people were described and its wider implications were mentioned.

The newspaper also had a story about large-scale bungling in the public distribution system, despite Aadhaar links being provided. Then there was a heartwarming story from Sultanpur, Rajasthan, about a youth coming forward to stop the marriage of his two under-age sisters, notwithstanding stiff opposition from elders in the family.

There was a news item about increasing the power of panchayats in villages located close to cities. There was a report about decay and neglect of water tanks in and near Varanasi, and another on the sanitation campaign in the area. In addition, there were several reports about atrocities against women and girls.

The *Bhaskar* on the day published two important reports about mining-related accidents. One of these highlighted the concerns of villagers near Dostpur, Rajasthan, that some workers may still be trapped under mounds of rubble. This newspaper also published a detailed report on how the victims of a sinking boat in Gujarat struggled till the very end to save themselves. None of these news items found mention in the big English newspapers.

Various vernacular newspapers have their own strengths. While Delhi’s top dailies like *Navbharat Times*, *Hindustan*, *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagran* are better in terms of the coverage of places close to Delhi and the National Capital Region, *Rajasthan Patrika* and *Bhaskar* are placed better in terms of covering a wider part of the Hindi-speaking region. Their coverage of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is particularly good.

*Jansatta* and *Deshbandhu* fulfill another niche requirement as the papers sometime carry news not published elsewhere. In its early years, *Jansatta*’s theme pages had room for detailed reports from rural areas, but this has in fact reduced now. *Deshbandhu* still has the space for detailed reports in its theme pages.

At present, *Rajasthan Patrika* appears to be taking the lead in the coverage of rural and small-town news from the Hindi-speaking region. This is because of better selection of news as well as better presentation. Its headlines are longer than normal, and geared to catch readers’ attention.

*Amar Ujala* has a good network of reporters and does some very useful reporting from small towns. These assets can be used to publish a Delhi edition which has carefully selected news from its other editions as well. Indeed, both *Amar Ujala* and *Hindustan* had used their wide network of reporters to bring out special pages on the impact of demonetisation, particularly in villages and small towns some time ago.

Some Hindi newspapers may not be very visible in Delhi but they are still sought after for their coverage of particular areas. For example, *Dainik Tribune* is known particularly for its good coverage of Haryana and, to a lesser extent, of Himachal Pradesh.

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**Ashish Bagga quits India Today Group**

Ashish Bagga has resigned as Group CEO of India Today Group. He was part of the group for 15 years. Prior to being the CEO, he was the additional director of TV Today Network from August 2013 till March 2014. Bagga started his career with the India Today Group in 1983 and was responsible for launching Music Today, the video magazine on current affairs, Newstrack, and the four vernaculars editions - Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam - of *India Today*. Before re-joining the India Today Group in 2001, Bagga briefly served as president and CEO with *Business Standard’s* e-initiative, in association with *Financial Times*, London.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
Mobile journalism – ever-widening horizons

Mobile devices have been used in news gathering for some years, but recent advances in technology, combined with the swelling reach of social media has made mobile journalism, or MoJo, a genre in itself. Susan Philip on how the smartphone has literally overtaken everything else and is capable of providing all the technology required by a reporter to record, edit and transmit news on the spot.

Jay Lauf, publisher and president, Quartz, said at a recent WAN-IFRA conference that statistics show more people are spending more time on mobile phones, reading news than ever before. He said 73 per cent of respondents in a survey had answered ‘mobile’ to the question, ‘When it comes to news, which device are you most likely to be using?’ ‘desktop’ was the answer given by 23 per cent, while print, TV and radio accounted for only 4 per cent, Lauf said, indicating the potential of mobile Journalism or MoJo.

“Mobile Journalism means different things to different people, but generally it involves journalists using mobile devices so they can tell stories anywhere, anytime, and in any way they choose,” says Mark Egan, an expert on the subject. Elaborating on the genre, he says

“In essence, mobile journalism is about overcoming the technical obstacles of the past to provide a more nimble form of journalism.”

Technology is at the heart of MoJo. Sweeping advancements have opened up scope in previously unimaginable ways. This implies a paradigm shift in the concept of news itself, its gathering and its dissemination. Yesterday’s news, is, well, yesterday’s news. The smartphone has overtaken the morning newspaper and, to an extent, the television news channel, because it can deliver live news on the go.

Where social media was previously considered an irritant or at best a distraction, it is now a crucial path to new readership. The younger generation far prefers it to the conventional newspaper. “Even busy executives prefer to consume news via their mobiles. It is easier than doing so over traditional media because of the form factor and ease,” notes Dinakaran Rengachary, head – Internet, The Hindu BusinessLine.

That works both ways. While the smartphone is always within reach of the news consumer, a reporter also always has it on hand. And there are so many apps, so many platforms available that a creative and enterprising journalist can single-handedly produce a multi-format news piece covering all angles of a story, and report news as it happens.

The technology is compact, which has brought about a sea-change in the procedure of news gathering. Previously, if audio and video feeds had to be included in a story, cumbersome, expensive equipment had to be used, requiring specially trained personnel for operation. It had to be a team effort and required considerable planning and coordination by the newsroom and other arms of a media establishment.

Now, a smartphone is capable of providing all the technology required by a reporter to record, edit and transmit news on the spot, as it happens, in text, audio and video formats.

This freedom to put out composite, polished news reports on social media or other platforms even while remaining at the location of a developing story is of tremendous value to a journalist. “Good journalism is about getting the most accurate version of events possible. By being able to gather news so effectively and maintain ultimate flexibility, you are ideally placed to cover events as well as possible,” says Egan.

The video and audio recordings done by a reporter can be used by the newsroom on multiple platforms. In other words, MoJo is not confined to the mobile platform, it has relevance across platforms.

MoJo is also redefining content. Where once news stories were filed for the print media and later reworked for the digital landscape, the procedure is now increasingly happening in reverse. Short, easy-to-digest pieces are the norm on smartphones. There is no room for opinion pieces and analyses on these devices. Many journalists file first for the smartphone and then re-work for the traditional newspaper.

Egan cites the instance of Yusuf Omar, the mobile editor at the Hindustan Times. “He is building a network of 750 mobile journalists across India. They are using the social platform Snapchat as a way of creating content. A good example is a recent story about drugs in the Punjab. Yusuf told the entire story on snapchat, in a style that fits the mobile audience, but then reversioned that content for other platforms.”
Social media platforms like Twitter enable direct contact with the news consumer. Even a traditional format such as a regular column by a subject expert, say in an education-related offering like BL on Campus, can be made interactive, by inviting readers to pose questions live to the columnist at pre-arranged times. This almost personalises news content, and is attractive to consumers.

Mobile journalism has also spawned a new category of journalists – the ‘citizen journalist’. The layman equipped with a smartphone can upload reports of events on social media platforms. But are they equal to trained journalists? That’s a moot question. Talking of this aspect, Egan feels the deciding factor will be whether they are trying to uphold certain ethics regarding impartiality. “I often see activists sympathetic to one side of an issue who call themselves citizen journalists. If they have an agenda and are promoting that cause, they are not journalists,” he says. But certainly, ‘citizen journalists’ make good sources for stories and, very often, reporters rely on them for first reports of breaking news.

Of course, there are challenges in MoJo. The rapidity of advancements in technology is one. The reporter has to be technology savvy and keep up-to-date with emerging apps and platforms to be on top of consumer demand and command loyalty. Other challenges would be poor connectivity and the problem of software advancements outstripping hardware – newer and newer smartphone models may be needed to keep pace with the new possibilities opened up by technological developments.

Print will remain an important part of the media landscape in the foreseeable future. But the fact remains that mobile journalism has appropriated a significant space in that landscape too. Smartphones and tablets are important channels for news dissemination, particularly for the younger generation, and no media organisation or journalist can afford to ignore MoJo’s potential.

(This article had appeared in the January/February 2017 issue of Asian News Media Focus, a WAN-IFRA publication.)

A welcome initiative in Indian cinema

The Indywood Film Carnival is a special initiative by Sohan Roy, a globally acclaimed film director, producer, exhibitor, writer and project designer who has many Oscar listings to his credit. Roy is an NRI with a dream. Indywood, of which he’s founder-director, helped him to partly realise the dream. Indywood is a 10-billion dollar project that aspires to elevate the Indian film industry to a global platform. He set the ball rolling in 2015 with the Indywood Film Carnival, one of the biggest film-based events in the country till date. The third edition of the event is scheduled to take place at Ramoji Film City, Hyderabad, from December 1 to 4 this year.

“The 2017 Carnival will be a mammoth one in terms of national and international participation of delegates. The event offers interactive sessions with eminent filmmakers from across the world, networking opportunities and entertainment programmes,” said Roy, speaking at the 2017 Awards of Media Excellence in Kolkata recently. Recognising the contribution of journalists from various fields in the different regions of India is part of Indywood’s agenda. At the Kolkata event, more than 30 journalists were given a trophy and a certificate each. The trophies and certificates were identical in shape, size, form and colour for every winner. There was no cash award.
Why we should speak up for Al Jazeera

The Saudi demand for shutting down the channel must be resisted on principle, says Karan Thapar

I wonder if you have noticed the strange silence with which the Saudi demand for shutting down Al Jazeera has been received by the rest of the world? This was one of the 13 demands made by the Saudis and their allies 10 days ago. At the least I would have thought it would be strongly criticised and opposed by journalists. After all, it affects them directly. Yet they seem to be largely silent. Not just in the Gulf. Not just in Delhi. But also, as far as I can tell, in London, Paris, Berlin and even Washington.

I cannot believe this would be the case if the demand had been for closing down the BBC or CNN or any Indian channel. So perhaps the reluctance to speak out in support of Al Jazeera arises from the fact that it is owned by the Qatari royal family. But does that really justify silence?

Al Jazeera has established itself as a credible and often outspoken source of news. Its coverage is different to that of the BBC and CNN and, therefore, irreplaceable. Its commentary provides a viewpoint that otherwise would not be heard. Its range covers not just the Arab world, but also countries in Africa and Latin America that are usually ignored. Surely that makes Al Jazeera an invaluable channel regardless of its ownership and any influence that might have on its management or editorial policy?

In fact, the truth is Al Jazeera is staffed with reputable Western journalists. Many seem to be from the BBC. They are people whose credentials have long been established. As far as I am concerned, their presence on the Al Jazeera screen affirms the channel’s credibility and reliability. How must they feel when their former colleagues in London keep quiet about the demand to close the channel?

Let me, however, go one step further. Once you rule out the ownership of the channel as grounds for keeping silent, then logically there can be only two other grounds for not speaking up in defence of Al Jazeera. First, that you believe the demand is only made rhetorically and not seriously. Second, that it’s not enforceable or, to be more precise, will not be accepted and acted upon by Qatar.

I’m afraid these are not credible grounds for silence. Even if the demand is made rhetorically, surely journalists — if no one else — should oppose a demand by any government to shut down a media organisation? Instead, we should riposte by asking, how dare the Saudis make this demand? How dare they try to throttle freedom of speech? How dare they try to restrict the right of the media to report, explore and expose as it thinks fit?

To let even a rhetorical demand go unchallenged, uncriticised and, therefore, not condemned is to accept the legitimacy of such rhetoric. Who knows when similar demands might be made in London or Washington, Delhi or Islamabad?

Much the same is true of the belief that the demand to shut down Al Jazeera is unenforceable or will not be accepted by the Qatari government. First, how can you be sure that is the case? And, second, why do you believe the Qatari royal family has the money, but who knows when or in what circumstances its political will might flag. Al Jazeera needs and, more importantly, deserves the support of all journalists. Not just because it’s a good and credible news channel. Nor because journalists must stand by and support each other, because if they don’t they will discourage others from doing so. All of that should be taken as given. The real reason why Al Jazeera must be supported has to do with our principles and our values.

In a democracy, where free speech is cherished, every voice is valuable, particularly when it’s unpopular and even if it’s wrong. The media exists as a mirror to reflect the reality of our lives and our society. This gives it the right to expose, provoke, offend and disturb. If in the process it’s occasionally wrong, so be it. That might call for correction but never for closing down a channel.

The present journalistic silence in response to what’s happening to Al Jazeera is not just inexplicable but also unforgivable.

(Courtesy: The Hindu. The writer is a veteran broadcast journalist)
Can ‘peace-mongering’ ever become news?

Warmongering is news for the media. ‘Peacemongering’ isn’t. That, sadly, is the reality. Which explains why mainstream media took no note of a recent initiative for urging dialogues for peace between India and Pakistan, in the wake of the belligerence connected to the sentencing of an Indian by Pakistan on charges of spying, and the staying of his death sentence by the International Court of Justice. Sakuntala Narasimhan wonders why war is news, but peace isn’t.

A ‘peacemongering’ initiative put out a resolution (http://amankiasha.com/?p=6426) that has been supported by leaders in diverse fields on both sides of the border -- from Romila Thapar and Aruna Roy to Gulzar, Mahesh Bhat, Girish Karnad, Naseeruddin Shah, Nandita Das, Anand Patwardhan, K.M. Panikkar, retired army chiefs and Air vice-marshals, former Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Ramdas, musicians, journalists, and internationally known personalities like Asma Jahangir of Pakistan. Many young students have also endorsed the press statement which says, “In the 70 years since Independence and Partition, the people of India and Pakistan have seen too many conflicts and the loss of many valuable lives. Enough of the distrust and tensions…”

While government-to-government relations flare up, the people-to-people equations among the citizenry reflect an entirely different picture. During each of my three visits to Pakistan (Islamabad and Karachi, for conferences), I found that people-to-people interactions are hearteningly cordial.

Among my most memorable moments is that of an incident at a roadside market stall in Karachi. I bought a shawl as a souvenir, and the shopkeeper refused to accept payment, saying, “Aap to mehmaan hain (you are a guest in our country), aap se paise nahiin lenge (I can’t take money from you).” He could have easily made some extra money, seeing that I was a tourist.

The young waiter at the hotel I was staying at, in Islamabad, asked as I sat down for breakfast, “Aap India se (Are you from India)?” Thereafter, he would ply me with extra coffee and solicitous attention. His grandfather, it turned out, used to reminisce about playing cricket as a schoolboy near where I lived in Delhi, before the family migrated to Pakistan. The boy wanted to visit his grandfather’s ancestral home and see the places he had fond memories of, but of course, there was little chance of his getting a visa.

I, too, got my visa only at the very last moment, causing much worry and tension. A consular employee told me, “They (Pakistanis) harass those seeking visas for India, so we too make it difficult…” A famous dancer from Karachi, who gets routinely invited to Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru, for workshops, has the same experience -- she never knows till the very last moment whether she will make the trip.

Likewise, a professor from Rawalpindi whom I met at the conference we were both attending in Islamabad, said effusively, “Aap hamare yahaan chai peene zaroor aaye (please come to tea at my place).” I had to decline, although Rawalpindi was just a few minutes away down the road from the conference venue, because my visa was marked boldly and circled, “Only valid for Islamabad”. In that case, “she said, “I will bring tea here, for you.”

In Karachi, on my next trip, when I asked for Karachi halwa to take back (I recalled the times we as children used to buy Karachi halwa from Bengali market at Delhi -- this would be the authentic stuff, I told myself), the sweets shop man said jocularly, “No aap (sister), I will give you Bombay halwa.” And he too refused to take payment, insisting that it was a gift. It was the same stuff – Indians call it Karachi halwa and Pakistanis call it Bombay halwa.

As a Pakistani said to me at Lahore airport, “Our grandparents were, after all, all from India -- in that sense we are all of Indian origin.” Quite. The Pakistan Airlines pilots who saw a group of us stranded in transit in Lahore after missing our connecting flight to Delhi, handed over to us (with their compliments) the lunch packets they were carrying for themselves.

Hostility? Not once. The food was the same, the language, dress and music were the same, the wedding I watched was no different from those in Delhi or Mumbai. The bride announced with pride that her trousseau shopping had been done in Delhi.

As the resolution released in May this year by the ‘peacemongers’ on both sides says, it is time to sort out differences through dialogue, no matter how long it takes. Former Indian Ambassador Mani Shankar Aiyar says, endorsing the
resolution, “Make dialogue – do dosti karen (let’s be friends).”

The Jang Group of Pakistan and The Times of India have been collaborating for some time, on an Aman ki Asha (hoping for peace) series, and musicians have linked hands to come up with new ragas like Aman (peace) in Indo-Pak collaboration among artistes. There also exists a People’s SAARC initiative, for joining hands across the border, through people-to-people linkages, and a Pakistan India Forum for Peace and Democracy.

In the land of Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, whom we revere as the Father of the Nation, urging dialogue rather than confrontation to defuse disagreements, seems the logical option, not something farfetched or impractical. If people in large numbers on both sides, support this resolution, it is not fanciful to expect that the governments on both sides will heed the suggestion. An eye for an eye, after all, leaves both parties blind, and a bullet for a bullet only adds to the pile of cadavers.

Yes, there is barbarity in violent encounters, and unacceptable intrusions which cannot – and should not – be ignored or dismissed. But the fact is that both countries have pervasive poverty to address and eradicate; neither country can afford to spend so many billions on weapons that could go instead towards ensuring basic needs for the people. Who benefits from war, except the supplier of all those costly weapons?

Can strength lie also in forcing a dialogue? The peacemongers’ resolution says yes; and those who have signed it are high achievers who claim credibility and respect. However, how will the people at large, the millions of citizens on both sides who stand to benefit through a resolution of disagreements via peaceful dialogue, get to know about such initiatives unless the media gives it publicity?

RedInk Awards for Vinod Dua, Raj Kamal Jha

The Mumbai Press Club’s RedInk Awards for Excellence in Journalism 2017 were presented on June 7 in Mumbai. Veteran journalist Vinod Dua, considered among the country’s first psephologists, was conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to journalism in “different formats and subjects.”

Indian Express chief editor Raj Kamal Jha got the Journalist of the Year Award for the overall coverage of the global money laundering scam known as The Panama Papers. Govind Tupe of Sakal was given a newly instituted award, Mumbai’s Star Reporter, for his reports on the offices of cabinet ministers being brought under the purview of RTI.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis was the chief guest. He said that he does not believe that there is threat to the fourth estate. “Constructive journalism has its own value. And we always are open to criticism,” he said. This year, the RedInk team received over 1500 entries across various categories, a significant jump from last year.

(Courtesy: The Times of India)
Nationalism, and the media’s responsible role

“I ndia arrests 15 for celebrating Pakistan’s cricket win,” read the headline on an international news website. The reactions to the unexpected defeat suffered by the Indian cricket team in the Champions Trophy (2017) finals brought home to me the fact that in the Subcontinent, cricket isn’t just a game; it is a symbol of nationalism.

Nationalism has become one of the most debated ‘isms’ of today. In this era of 2.0 technology, when everyone has their own public space to express views, this particular ‘ism’ is being extensively deliberated. It raises the issue of responsibility which goes with the freedom to air uncensored views over social media. For instance, trolls in social media on the cricket match in question covered issues from Kashmir to beef. Sensationalism and exaggeration are no more restricted to electronic news media. Emerging social media platforms have also become very adept at politicising sensitivities.

The post-modern idea of subjective truth defines nationalism as the product of interaction among social, historical and political elements. So, the perception of this ‘ism’ may differ from person to person and from context to context. Why then is there such a stress on affirming our emotional bond with the motherland especially when watching a movie in a cinema hall? Portrayal of cricket as a symbol of nationalism, specially a cricket game between India and Pakistan, is very common in Indian cinema. For example, in the movie Bajrangi Bhaijaan, cricket was depicted as a way of establishing the nationality of the little girl, Munni, from Pakistan who got lost in India. The scene where she kissed Pakistan’s flag traumatised the entire family of the protagonist, played by Bollywood star Salman Khan.

The nationalistic overtones the game has taken has even made people question Indian tennis ace Sania Mirza’s loyalties. The media has an important role to play in such situations, as it can balance the negative effects of such insensitive statements. Controversial statements which may hurt someone’s dignity can well be filtered out in higher interests.

The question remains, why has cricket been assigned this special link with nationalism, rather than other games? For instance, there were few updates on Facebook cheering the Indian hockey team playing against Pakistan at the same time that the cricket teams of the two countries were meeting on the Champions Trophy field. The answer could be found in the fact that cricket has become a commodity with high demand in the media market.

Even 70 years after the India-Pakistan separation, we are still stuck with the same thoughts, trapped in history. The increasing gap between the theory of media education and practice in journalism is a concern, and immediate changes are called for in the functioning of the media as the Fourth Estate in a democracy.

(The writer is a doctoral research scholar in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University, Assam.)

Qaumi Awaz to resume publication

The Associated Journals, a not-for-profit company founded in 1937 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, has announced its plans to resume the publication of its Urdu newspaper, Qaumi Awaz, along with a digital version. Qaumi Awaz had temporarily suspended publication in 2008, following which Urdu readers across the country felt its absence.

Veteran journalist Zafar Agha has been appointed as the editor-in-chief of the paper as well as the digital property with immediate effect. The publication’s tagline is ‘Freedom is in peril, defend it with all your might’. The publication and digital website will seek to give voice to the vision of Nehru and continue to occupy a liberal, progressive, secular space, furthering the best values of the Freedom Movement—that of building a modern, democratic, just, equitable, liberal and socially harmonious nation, free of sectarian strife.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
POSITIONS FOR INDIA IN THE UNITED NATIONS

Keeping options open in a changed global order

The Government of India has no clear-cut stand and approach when it comes to campaigning for positions in the United Nations, including specialised agencies of the world body and formations such as the Group of 77 (G77). The reason, according to informed sources and diplomats who have had a ringside view of past campaigns, says Shastri Ramachandaran, is that the “calculated ambivalence” has served India’s interests “up to expectations and beyond”.

What importance does New Delhi attach to the G77? How much is India interested in G77, comprising 134 developing countries, including China? When posed these two questions, all officials – both serving and retired diplomats – agreed to respond on condition of anonymity. The only exception was India’s former UN Under-Secretary General Shashi Tharoor, currently member of Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram.

Tharoor said that his Congress Party and the United Progress Alliance it had helmed for 10 years in government “certainly attached a great deal of importance to the G77, a body which India often led at the UN as the ‘global trade union of developing countries’. However as the G20, the global ‘management’ of the world’s economy, grew in importance, there has inevitably been some diminishing of the prominence given to the G77”.

Tharoor, who had served as India’s minister of State of External Affairs under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is well-regarded across the political spectrum. Even the current regime headed by BJP’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sought to utilise Tharoor’s diplomatic and drafting expertise when it comes to critical issues with a hostile neighbour such as Pakistan.

China, UNIDO and India

How far is India interested in top positions such as director-general of UN organisations, as for example, UNIDO in Vienna? Tharoor, who moved out after 29 years at the UN when he came second to Ban Ki-moon in the elections in 2006 for the secretary-general, says India is certainly interested in UN leadership positions. “India mounts a campaign only when there is buy-in at the political level. Understandably, we tend to throw our hat in the ring only when we are reasonably confident of majority support. But, sometimes, New Delhi’s indifference can mean India missing out on a position we could have won.”

UNIDO’s current director-general is China’s Li Yong, who was appointed in 2013 with strong backing from the government in Beijing. Much to the dismay of many diplomats in Vienna, Li is said to be recruiting Chinese to senior positions in UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation). However, at least one official who was asked for his reaction appeared least perturbed by the development. “We do not have to meet the expectations of the West when it comes to China’s role in these bodies,” says the diplomat who recently retired in the rank of secretary from India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

He has served in the mission to the UN and as ambassador in a major Asian and western capital. This veteran of many tricky diplomatic negotiations revealed that it is nothing unusual for India to be encouraged by “interested powers” and their camps to contest against contenders from China and Iran. These two countries are ‘targeted’ for a variety of historical, political, strategic and cultural reasons by the West.

Earlier, in February this year, when Iran’s permanent representative (PR) to the UN in Vienna, Reza Najafi, was consensus choice to Chair the G77 for a one-year term, the outcome was attributed to India’s “lack of interest”. A former foreign secretary said the MEA knew that a few PRs to the UN in Vienna wanted the Indian envoy, Renu Pall -- who had presented her credentials in February 2017 -- as the chair of the G77’s Vienna chapter. However, New Delhi did not appear “enthusiastic”.

G77

A former PR of India to the UN says that India held the G77 chair first in 1970. “After that we have not held the chair with a view to encourage stakeholdership and participation of smaller developing countries, as a way of democratising participation.” He points out that India is one of the “institutional leaders” of G77 with a decisive leadership role. “For example, in 2013, India led the consensus in finalising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at Rio+20. Our influence is not always determined by a formal position.” He emphasises, “India is a strong...
The success of SDGs is India’s contribution. A former foreign secretary, who is well acquainted with the matter, says India has been part of the G77 Experts Group, which works towards finalising a common position on issues before taking it to the others. In his view, New Delhi has desisted from openly pushing for top UN positions because as a Rising Power, such positions should come to India without campaigning. “Ten years ago, the MEA was the diplomatic spearhead. It set the direction and shaped India’s role in the UN and UN organisations. Today, this is done by a variety of nodal ministries ranging from Finance and Commerce to Energy and Environment besides the Prime Minister’s Office.”

These ministries, he says, lack the diplomatic expertise to steer India and Indians to top positions in UN organisations, and they do not wish to concede leadership to MEA in areas they guard as their turf. As a result, says another diplomat, India’s profile does not reflect its real influence, which is much more. This official said that while nodal ministries have the technical expertise and subject competence, they are not skilled in making a diplomatic pitch within a policy framework and they are also lacking in the diplomatic capability and finesse for negotiations in international forums. Thus, the diminished importance of the MEA has had its adverse effects.

Another diplomat who had served in major world capitals and the UN – and enjoyed the confidence of successive prime ministers – said that India is very active in G77 as it is in other UN organisations. “But, at times, we want to stay apart. We don’t want to be tied to collective positions on all issues such as, for example, climate change. Similarly, on SDGs, although India led the consensus, there were a few top UN positions today, it is because this is no longer an issue that can be clinched by the MEA. “Ten years ago, the MEA was the diplomatic spearhead. It set the direction and shaped India’s role in the UN and UN organisations. Today, this is done by a variety of nodal ministries ranging from Finance and Commerce to Energy and Environment besides the Prime Minister’s Office.”

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few objectives on which India had reservations.”

**A powerful presence**

There are advantages and disadvantages in being tied to collective position. “In recent years, India has more often had reasons to not be tied to collective positions. This does not mean that India is any way less influential. It is a powerful presence with a decisive say,” the diplomat adds.

A former ambassador to China, who has also worked with the UN, says New Delhi does not share the Western view of China and Iran, and does not find it necessary to be pitted against these countries when India’s interests are not affected. “In fact, more often than not, India has shared interests with Iran and China. China is not a problem for India at all times and in all forums as the West may imagine or would want it to be. There are strategic, political and geopolitical issues where China and India differ but these don’t surface in all forums,” he says.

Another former foreign secretary, who has served as ambassador to the US, says India is interested in positions but not given to campaigning. India wants to avoid too many trials of strength as it can create “credibility problems”. He emphasised that there is no problem in “attaining our objectives”, especially when it comes to India’s special interests. Tharoor says India’s special interests obviously vary from agency to agency. But successive governments have tended to have a fairly consistent view about what is “good for India”. An informed observer, who was close to the Prime Minister’s Office until a few years ago, best sums up the situation: “When it comes to the UN and multilateral forums, we are where we want to be. We are not where we were in the 1990s. Today’s India would like to keep its options open in many situations and retain elbow room without the straitjacket of a formal leadership position.”

(The author is a senior editor of IDN-INPS and independent commentator on regional and global affairs based in New Delhi. This article has appeared in IDN-InDepthNews in May this year. IDN is the flagship agency of the International Press Syndicate.)

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**PIB help to audit circulation figures?**

The Union Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) is believed to be taking steps to involve the Press Information Bureau (PIB) in the task of auditing the circulation figures of print publications. According to sources privy to internal developments, the MIB is under a lot of pressure owing to rising complaints and allegations of “fudging numbers” vis-à-vis the number of copies printed and sold by each publication. Similar concerns have also been raised in relation to the current system of television audience measurement.

To maintain the credibility of the auditing process, the MIB is apparently keen to provide the PIB with some space in the given assignment. However, highly placed industry sources in touch with the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) officials, claimed that PIB “might not be competent” enough to successfully carry out the job. Expressing their apprehensions, the officials reportedly indicated that they are confident of the entire work pertaining to auditing and certification being handed back to RNI. A nodal agency of the Government of India, the PIB was set up during the time of British Raj in 1919. The agency plays a pivotal role in communicating critical information on behalf of the union government through press releases to the media.

Nevertheless, it is far removed from the auditing work at present. According to an industry source, the current audit of newspapers and magazines is carried out in two ways. While the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) takes care of publications with a claimed circulation of over 45000 copies, the ones below that figure require an audit from an accountant which is followed by RNI certification. Established in 1956, the RNI is a Central Government institution performing both statutory and non-statutory functions. The former includes issuing certificates of registration and scrutiny of annual statements whereas the latter entails the preparation of the newsprint allocation policy. On the other hand, ABC is a voluntary organisation of publishers, media and advertising agencies, advertisers and government bodies like the Directorate of Advertising & Visual Publicity (DAVP).

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**Smriti Irani is the new Information & Broadcasting minister**

Following the resignation of Union Minister Venkaiah Naidu (after his name was announced as India’s vice-presidential candidate), Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday made Smriti Irani the Information and Broadcasting minister (additional charge). Irani is the fourth I&B Minister of Modi Government. Initially, Prakash Javadekar took the charge of the ministry but it was shortly after handed over to Arun Jaitley for a period of two years from 2014-2016. Thereafter, Naidu took over the reins of MIB.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
Demonitisation – the decision and the impact

The Modi Government took the nation by surprise with its demonitisation move in November 2016. More than six months after the shock announcement, Shreejay Sinha takes stock of its impact, applying the wisdom of hindsight. Considering the enormous social and economic costs that demonetisation exacted, the question that will remain unanswered for many years to come, he says, is: Was it worth it?

On the evening of 8th November last year, television channels were abuzz with news that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would address the nation. They speculated that he would announce tough military action against our neighbour Pakistan, perhaps even declare war. The speculation was not without basis. On September 29, India’s director-general of Military Operations had announced that the special forces of the Army had conducted “surgical strikes” along the Line of Control to destroy terror launch pads and neutralise terrorists who were preparing to infiltrate.

At 8 pm, the prime minister appeared on state television to declare a war – not on Pakistan but on black money, fake currency, terror funding and corruption – by demonetising 500-rupee and 1000-rupee banknotes, which constituted nearly 86 per cent of currency in circulation in India and amounted to 15.44 lakh crore rupees.

Each currency note, as also a coin, is guaranteed by the Central Government and ‘promises’ to pay the bearer the sum of money printed on the same. A coin or a banknote is legal tender, which means that it must be accepted if offered in payment of a debt. According to Section 26 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, the Central Bank is liable to pay the value of the banknote. This is to be paid on demand by the RBI, since it is the issuer. It must be borne in mind that each currency note or coin is a liability of the Central Bank.

Demonetisation involves withdrawing the legal-tender status of currency notes, rendering them “just worthless piece of paper”, as the prime minister said in his November 8 address. Demonetisation makes banknotes invalid for public use. Put simply, it voids a currency note or coin of its money value. The abrupt cancellation of high-value currency notes in November has precedents, both domestically and internationally.

In 1978, Prime Minister Morarji Desai, a Gujarati like Modi, who led the Janata Party Government immediately after the Emergency was withdrawn, demonetised 1000-rupee, 5000-rupee, and 10000-rupee notes in order to wipe out illicit cash and tackle corruption. Zimbabwe, a country battling hyperinflation for years, withdrew its currency, replacing it with the US dollar in 2015. Myanmar, the erstwhile USSR, Nigeria and Brazil, among others, have demonetised their currencies, ostensibly for tackling high inflation and curbing parallel economies.

Rationale – stated and unstated

Global experience suggests that a currency ban is almost always based on the government’s intent to tackle hyperinflation, corruption, criminal activities, counterfeit notes and black economy.

India’s rationale for the shock demonetisation move was no different. The nation has been a victim of a string of terrorist acts, funded by counterfeit currency notes. Prices of real estate and gold, both receptacles for tainted money, have remained perennially high. Prices of financial assets such as stocks have often peaked even when economic fundamentals were unsupportive.

There is also a significant political subtext to Modi’s demonetisation move. The second term of the Congress-led UPA Government was riddled with gigantic corruption scandals and policy paralysis. By contrast, Modi’s key electoral planks in 2014 were tackling illicit wealth and providing good governance.

In one of his election rallies, Modi averred that should the government unearth all black money and bring back illicit wealth stashed away in foreign banks, each Indian would get richer by 15 lakh rupees. Once the BJP came to power, opposition leaders and journalists alike began asking for the ‘promised’ sum, which was dismissed by the party president as mere chunavi jumla or election-time rhetoric, inviting widespread ridicule.

Modi’s decision to scrap the currency notes underscored his resolve to follow through with his pre-election pledge of curbing black economy. The so-called black economy generally refers to economic activities outside formal banking channels and includes cash transactions in physical assets such...
monetisation was a harrowing experience, especially for the poor, even as the entire range of consequences are still being played out. The move forced millions to queue up outside bank branches for hours to deposit old notes and withdraw limited cash, as ATMs, awaiting recalibration due to changes in the size of new currency notes, remained bereft of cash for days.

Demand for gold surged immediately after demonetisation, as people rushed to convert their savings into the precious yellow metal. The rich employed the poor as black-money mules, and they stood outside bank branches for hours for a commission to exchange defunct notes for new ones. This went on for days.

Daily wage earners in the rural hinterland were among the worst hit, as the acute cash crunch made it difficult for them to get hired, pushing their families into penury. The sudden withdrawal of currency notes in a largely cash-fed economy inflicted a shock which sent ripples across sectors. Several media reports have documented severe job losses and stress in the informal sector, including the farm sector, which relies almost entirely on cash to conduct its business.

The cash ban severely hampered economic activity in the country, crimping consumption as well as investment demand. The result is plain for all to see. Inflation, an important incentive for investment, slumped to a five-year low at 2.18 per cent in May, led by a decline in food prices.

Demonetisation was one of the policy decisions that has impacted the GDP numbers, India’s chief statistician T.C.A. Anant told reporters on May 31, after the government released the GDP data.

Farmers across India are on the boil, as prices for their produce have crashed after demonetisation emptied mandis (granaries) of cash, forcing several state governments to announce farm loan waivers.

The bottom line
The government’s decision to demonetise high-value notes, in itself a bold move with the right intent, hasn’t quite produced the intended results. The window to exchange demonetised notes with new ones closed on December 30 last year. A Bloomberg News report says about 97 per cent of the banned notes was deposited with banks by that date. Banks had received 14.97 lakh crore rupees of the outlawed 15.44 lakh crore rupees ‘promised’ by the 500-rupee and 1000-rupee notes.

However, the RBI is yet to reveal how much money has returned to the banking system. As R. Jagannathan, editorial director of Swarajya magazine, noted in his June 14 piece, “If the deposits have hit this number (15.44 lakh crore rupees) or even exceeded it, it would mean not only a major embarrassment for the government, but also the RBI. It would imply that fake notes got exchanged for new notes.”

True, demonetisation has boosted digital transactions, but a gradual shift towards a less-cash economy could have been achieved by the RBI slowly reducing the notes in circulation. One significant upshot was that real estate transactions witnessed a seizure of sorts immediately after the currency ban, and prices drooped. The property market, a favoured haven for parking illicit money, has yet to recover from the shock. If land prices remain low, the government’s pledge to provide housing for all by 2022 may well succeed.

(The writer is a financial journalist based in New Delhi.)
No reference to caste or creed please... we are all Indians

One of the primary duties of a Government is to make good education universally accessible to the children of the country. Institutions of learning should be set up with a purely national outlook, with the primary goal of creating citizens who are Indians first, says Prof. J.V. Vil'anilam. It is time cosmopolitan leaders came together on one platform to discuss matters of national moment and ways to fashion Indianness without reference to caste or religion. That’s the need of the hour – not a cashless, but a casteless society, he points out.

Brutal rape of women aspiring to live a productive life tending for themselves and their families, caste discrimination and communalism, millions of landless, homeless, jobless and illiterate citizens, and the baseless dubbing of one half of all humanity as naturally ‘impure’ -- these are some current scenarios in India. How do they match up with the vision behind the Make in India initiative of the Modi Government, the National Education Act of 2009 and the erstwhile goals of the founders of our nation of providing land for the landless and the tiller?

The establishing of ‘manhood’ by cruel attacks on the weak and unarmed, the requirement of ‘donations’ in return for a chance to avail of basic education, and the practice of powerful land mafias hounding illiterate and unaware tribal populations out of their traditional environments and chasing them from hill to hill or from one jungle to the next can only be stopped with basic changes in the focus of governments, irrespective of party affiliations or philosophical bent, and a consequent shift in the thrust of education.

One of the primary duties of a Government is to make good education universally accessible to the children of the country. Secular education for the future citizens of India is a must. The National Education Act was commendable, but there was no follow-up effort to provide necessary infrastructure in every one of the 600000 villages spread over the country.

The Modi Government held out the hope that future generations of school students would receive new skills in a casteless society. But the education system is still local and regional; it is communal to the core. Educational institutions set up by religion- or caste-based organisations have to be specially aware of their responsibility to facilitate education of all children born in this country, irrespective of caste or creed. Education must be organised and governed by the civil society, not by vested interests. Institutions of learning should be set up with a purely national outlook, with the primary goal of creating citizens who are Indians first.

Will the makers of New India provide all facilities in every part of the nation to systematically develop essential skills for living in the modern world? Will our outlook on religion be re-shaped through education for building a humanitarian society with people respecting the universality of all religions, the essential oneness of all beings under one Creator, accepting all creations as essential for maintaining the essential balance in the Universe?

Will all religious institutions in India stress the multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious structure of the country, where the emphasis is on harmonious living rather than the superiority of any particular faith?

Changes can be wrought only by a change in outlook fostered by education. And a new system of education can be ushered in smoothly only when certain basic changes are introduced in our polity. Since there is no national or state religion, the followers of no single religion should be entitled to any special privileges. Every citizen of the country must be free to live in any part of India, dress the way he or she likes, eat the food that he or she prefers, and worship according to his or her faith, provided that such worship does not harm other humans, or promote social problems.

People’s eating habits, religious faith and practices, and rights as citizens of the same country should never be questioned by governments at the Central or State level. This is the essence of secularism and recent events that question the rights to citizenship of a person based on his or her religion or diet go against the concept of India.

Another area which deserves attention in order to promote harmony and equality is land rights. Naxalite agitations were for land – particularly for people living in remote forest areas – and basic human rights, especially for women and the poor. But land reform is still a distant dream for tribals and aboriginals, including some SCs. Attappady is a name I have been...
The tribals in the area find mention in every election campaign in Kerala but their struggle continues. For multinational companies and their local collaborators who build ‘smart cities’ and exclusive economic zones, however, right to land seems to be a given.

It is time we acknowledged that the bulk of India’s cultivable land is in the hands of a tiny minority of rich landlords, the bureaucracy, and Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsi, Jain and Buddhist religious institutions. There are millions of landless, homeless, jobless and illiterate citizens in India whose plight does not seem to be of any great concern to planners (or non-planners) who hold the reins of national development. How will the illiterate and unskilled masses of India get the means of survival? Can capitalist developers help them?

Alternatively, can the promoters of a cashless society achieve the feat? Remember, the majority of India’s 1.3 billion people have been living hand-to-mouth ‘cashlessly’ for the past several decades, if not centuries. The majority of people in every one of the 29 States of India are politically bamboozled at least once in five years. But their socio-economic condition remains pitiable poor at all times, irrespective of the party or coalition of parties in power. Structural changes are the need of the hour. Leaders of all political parties should go back to the basics and hold firmly to the principles of equality, secularism, social justice and fraternity — not as mere slogans but as guiding principles to make life meaningful for the masses.

(The writer is former vice-chancellor and head, Department of Communication & Journalism, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.)
Time higher education is given the focus it deserves

College density in India leaves a lot to be desired. The all-India figure of the number of colleges per lakh eligible population (between 18 and 23 years) is only 27.58. In some states like Bihar, it is as low as seven. A mere 33 per cent of colleges offer postgraduate courses and only 1.7 per cent. PhD programmes. Providing this backdrop, Mario Noronha says thousands of students who want to study further after completing schooling are unable to access higher education.

In the Union Budget speech 2017-18 made in Parliament, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley proposed a framework to infuse quality into higher education. A slew of measures, including greater administrative and academic autonomy for educational institutions, are on the anvil. Will this be a game-changer for countless youth in the country? Will this open out the potential in their lives and in the process lead to further advancement of India?

After completing his schooling, Sonam who hails from Ladakh, a high-altitude icy desert in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), wanted to study further. The problem was that the region has just one college. It does not have a university. Sonam like so many of his fellow students was left with no choice but to leave home. Now, a student of Jammu University, he says, “We face a lot of problems here. So many expenses – rent, tuition fees, food; it’s difficult to manage.”

Still Sonam considers himself lucky. “There are many young people back home who want a college education but simply can’t afford it.” It does not count even if one is a brilliant student. “Getting a scholarship does not help either. First you have to spend the money, only then you’ll get the refund. Where does one get the money in the first place?” exclaims Sonam, clearly pained.

The lament from students in Ladakh finds an echo in other regions too. Kaustav Baul, from Vapi, Gujarat, is doing a postgraduate course at the Delhi School of Communication, a leading B-School in the capital. Like him, there are scores of students from different corners of the country. It is a huge struggle not only to find the right college but also a place to stay, eat and commute in a city that can be harsh. Often, budgets are extremely restrictive. “It’s never as easy as it sounds. Adapting to a different culture, language, lifestyles and food can be really tough.”

The issue is not limited to whether a university exists in a particular area or does not. In J&K, while Ladakh does not have a university, Jammu region has one. This would imply that for students there, higher education is more accessible. But Zafar, a student at the university hailing from a rural area in Jammu, has a different tale to tell. “Young people in backward areas have no idea about university admission, the procedures, or when entrance exams are held. Many of them don’t even know that they have to appear for entrance exams in order to get admission.”

We are today a young nation primed to reap the demographic dividend. The focus on higher education is an imperative that we simply cannot afford to ignore.

Arguably, higher education in India has reached a quantum; yet figures disappoint. The gross enrolment ratio (calculated for 18-23 age-group) for 2014-15 at 23.6 per cent was low. This prompted the fixing of the target for 2017-18 at 25.2 per cent, to be increased to 30 per cent by 2020-21.

Even so, the scenario remains daunting. The All India Survey on Higher Education 2014 lists three broad categories of institutions and their numbers – 760 universities, 38498 colleges and 12276 stand-alone institutions. Interestingly, 35 per cent of colleges are located in the top 50 districts. College density or the number of colleges per lakh eligible population (between 18 and 23 years) is skewed. In Bihar, it is seven. This is in sharp contrast to Telangana that has a whopping 60. The all-India average lies...
somewhere in the middle, at 27.58. Of the total number of colleges, 58 per cent are located in the rural belt that is vast in proportion to the urban.

The survey shows up a gender gap reflected in the gross enrolment ration in higher education—25.3 per cent for men and 23.2 per cent for women. It also shows that exclusive colleges for women make up 10.7 per cent of the total. Only 33 per cent colleges offer postgraduate courses while those offering PhD programmes stand at an abysmal of 1.7 per cent. A sizable chunk of colleges (41 per cent) run only a single programme. Of these, 81 per cent are privately managed. Among them, 33 per cent offer only BEd courses.

The Department of Higher Education, under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, is guided by its vision ‘to realise India’s human resource potential to its fullest in the higher education sector, with equity and inclusion’. The current dispensation has indicated its policy intent in this direction. In his budget speech, Jaitley made a pitch for “quality education to energise our youth”.

According to Kumar, teachers can play the role as mentors and counselors. “Higher education needs to become much more human at the delivery platform,” she says.

(Courtesy: Charkha Features. The writer is CEO, Charkha Development Communication Network based in New Delhi, a non-profit organisation that connects developmental issues on the ground with the media.)

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**Madhura Swaminathan selected for Global Food Security panel**

Madhura Swaminathan, chairperson, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, has been selected to serve as an expert on the group writing a report on Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to Finance and Improve Food Security and Nutrition in the Framework of the 2030 Agenda. The group is constituted by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Madhura Swaminathan is among five international experts selected out of 78 global candidates. The others are from South Africa, Brazil, Sudan and Germany. The announcement came recently from Rome, the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). She is also professor and head of the Economic Analysis Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, Bengaluru.

A development economist, she has authored eight books including one on food policy in India. She has served on Government of India’s High Level Committee on Long Term Grain Policy, the UN Committee on Development Policy and on the Board of International Potato Centre in Lima.

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**Sanjay Gupta is chairman, IIM-Amritsar**

According to media reports, Sanjay Gupta, CEO of Jagran Prakashan, has been appointed chairman of the Society and Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Amritsar. It is being reported that Gupta will hold the post for five years starting from June 23. Gupta is a full-time director at Jagran Prakashan and also holds the position of chief editor of Dainik Jagran. He is a director at Mid-day Infomedia, MMI Online, Naidunia Media and member of the executive committee of The Indian Newspaper Society.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
Getting the better of online harassment isn’t easy at all

How can we strengthen institutional response mechanisms to technology-enabled violence against women in India? How can women be encouraged to face the onslaught bravely? It’s a tough task, says Pushpa Achanta, especially since only a few women seek legal remedies because most police, lawyers and judges are considered sexist.

“Dr Sheila J. (name changed), a physician in her late twenties in Bangalore, contacted Vimochana stating that she was receiving telephone calls from strangers asking for her charges. Apparently, her photograph was displayed on a website with her name and mobile number identifying her as a paid escort. We guided her in approaching the police who quickly ensured that her picture and other details were removed from the website,” reveals Donna Fernandes, co-founder, Vimochana, a non-profit forum in Bangalore assisting distressed women and girls.

Hearteningly, Sheila got quick and satisfactory assistance. But, not surprisingly, she decided against legal redress. That could be expensive, long and produce an unfavourable outcome. Further, most police personnel, lawyers and judiciary are insensitive even towards rape survivors.

Actually, no specific law in India addresses gender harassment and abuse using Information and Communications Technology (ICT). However, they are considered crimes under the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Rehabilitation) Act and Information Technology Act.

Further, Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 354A, 354C, 354D, 499, 507 and 509 can partially help when women and sometimes other genders experience cyberstalking, trolling, threats, slander, libel, online sexual harassment and abuse.

Says Geeta Ramaseshan, a lawyer of repute in Chennai, “A young woman from Tamil Nadu committed suicide as obscene photos of her displayed on the Internet were not deleted as a policeman to whom she complained about her online harassment was dissatisfied with the bribe.”

Flavia Agnes, an established litigator and trainer in Mumbai, recounts how a policeman raped a young woman in Maharashtra who sought his help in punishing her cyberstalker.

Discussing about strengthening institutional response mechanisms to technology-enabled violence against women in India, Anita Gurumurthy, co-founder and director, ITforChange (a Bengaluru NGO promoting ICTs for socio-economic change) wonders if a separate law or amending existing legislations can help. She says only a few women seek legal remedies because most police, lawyers and judges are sexist.

An international workshop in Bangalore on ‘virtual’ harassment demonstrated that it targeted gender, race, caste, faith, ideology and other socio-cultural identities of a person or group, worldwide. Faika Haroun, a human rights activist from South Africa says, “Gender based violence is similar online and offline. I received threats on Facebook for favouring CodePink (a group doing humanitarian work in Palestine). Faika has also faced religion-based abuse for backing the Boycott Disinvestment Sanctions (BDS) campaign against corporations trading with Israel. However, she has courageously continued being active online and says that we must counter or ignore abuse and proceed, though it is tough especially when unfamiliar or fake identities comment.

Faika also recalled how a girl felt threatened and shattered when her brother who molested her sent WhatsApp messages.

But the police doubted her as the brother lived in a different city, showing they were unaware that
harassment using ICT was location-independent.

Maria Vadero, a gender rights activist, performer and trainer from Spain, remarks that posting on social media about gender violence or any protests is tough. Yet, a social activist in Spain withstood cyber harassment and continued working. According to Maria, some websites wrongly state that violence is gender-independent.

“In many countries, lawmakers and laws are sexist and harm women,” feels Hila Fariyal, a law student from Afghanistan. She mentions a pop music singer of Afghani origin who inspired many to ‘follow’ her on social media after she survived cyber harassment. Hila adds that blocking unsavoury content is difficult owing to many security loopholes and technological limitations. But that should not discourage persons from minority groups from using the Internet.

Bindu Doddahatti, a lawyer in Bangalore, observes that men posting their pictures rarely face abuse unlike women or gender minorities. She added that women cannot express their views frankly, online. Hila and Faika mention that Facebook blocked their accounts perhaps because their posts were unacceptable and dissenters could misuse such provisions. Observing that blocking unsolicited content is sometimes difficult due to security loopholes, technological constraints etc, Hila says that one must continue being online despite abuse.

Highlighting that ‘revenge porn’ is increasing, Bindu recounts how a woman considered suicide after her ‘boyfriend’ circulated some of her private pictures. “India has a few laws to penalise/punish ICT-based gender crimes and victims / survivors can complain to cyber crime police cells, the National Commission for Women, and the National Human Rights Commission, as required. ICT-based gender crimes are tough to handle as pictures and videos travel fast and wide. Further, laws surrounding obtaining consent (for sharing personal information, having sexual relationships, etc) are weak, barely known and implemented poorly,” she explains.

“Political views of women on social media are deleted or criticised while nude pictures of women are morphed and distributed thereby degrading women,” says Hila. But, many able-bodied, heterosexual and dominant caste/race/faith/class men are rarely humiliated like women are. The USA’s National Security Agency has used nude pictures while the Indian Government can archive private text messages.

Rajeswari, a social worker says that posting views on social media about religion is considered wrong. Girls/women who are supposedly Hindu but do not sport a bindi (dot on the forehead) and wear jeans are regarded as being deviant or supporting religious or other minorities. It is tough especially for women to discuss being child-free. Such ideas are regarded as incorrect and unnecessary.

Faika suggests that when unknown or anonymous identities comment on posts negatively, we should block or ignore them and proceed, though forgetting such situations maybe tough. Further, blocking multiple hidden or unfamiliar accounts is difficult and the unknown identities could return with different names. Changing privacy or visibility settings may help. “I tell girls that they should use ICT but know the relevant pros and cons and learn how and when to answer or ignore messages or posts,” she says.

Disclosing experiences of getting unpalatable remarks via email, telephone and social media from acquaintances and strangers, this writer told workshop participants, “As a journalist writing regularly about human rights issues, I express myself candidly despite derogatory comments on my online articles.” I highlighted instances of how author Meena Kandasamy was threatened online after participating in a beef festival held at Osmania University, Hyderabad, how Kavita Krishnan survived Internet-based trolling, and how Tamil poet Kutti Revathi received hate email long after publishing her poem, Mulaihal (Breasts).

(The writer is a freelance journalist based in Bengaluru.)
Onus on individuals to make family planning work

Family Planning as a state intervention has connotations of heavy-handedness by the establishment. India in the 1970s has seen a disturbing phase of this. Adopting measures to space and limit births by people themselves, however, is all about exercising one’s choice. India in the new millennium is seeing more and more couples reaching out for these measures, says Mario Noronha. They are driven by the desire to give their off-springs the best care, support and nurturing within their means, he adds while pointing out that at the policy level there is a new thrust on family planning as a key strategy to reduce maternal and child mortalities and morbidities.

Rukhsana Bano, 45, living in Patna, Bihar is a mother of three. She has planned her family well. She and her husband were clear from the beginning – they wanted to limit the size of their family and wanted reasonable spacing between childbirths. This they believed was crucial for the health of the mother and child. However, they are an exception. For most people, family planning is a concept, far removed from their lives. Laments Rukhsana, “People think that it is a bad sign if you don’t have a baby soon after marriage. Even your own family members begin talking ill about you. Why don’t people stop to think about your health or that of your children?”

The thrust on family planning under the National Health Mission, Government of India programme, provides for a basket of contraceptive choices. This constitutes a mix of contraceptives that include injectables and oral pills. But Rukhsana is skeptical. “It is the couples who have to decide when and how many children they want to have. The choice is yours. The government has nothing to do with it.”

Rukhsana Bano has hit upon a home truth. Even in a city like Patna, women have very little say in matters related to their reproductive health. Chanda Kumari, a homeopathic doctor based in the city, provides an insight, “I find that many women visiting my clinic face issues of unwanted pregnancies. I share with them the information on various methods of family planning. But they have only one answer – their husbands do not want to use any of the methods. Still I persist and tell them to talk openly with their husbands. But I know that very few women will have the nerve to do so.”

According to World Health Organization figures, 5 million 29 thousand women die every year during childbirth globally. Of this, 1 lakh 36 thousand (25.7 per cent of the women) are from India. Figures also indicate that in India, every five minutes a mother dies during pregnancy and child birth. This is corroborated by Population Foundation of India, an NGO working towards effective formulation and implementation of gender sensitive population, health and development strategies and policies. According to its findings, close to 272000 women have lost their lives during pregnancy in a 10-year period from 1995 to 2015. These figures are deeply disturbing and the issue has merited a policy response, one that recognises the criticality of spacing and limiting births in order to control the galloping maternal and child deaths.

At the two-day National Summit on Family Planning on 5th April 2016, J.P. Nadda, Union minister of Health and Family Welfare, pointed in this direction, “There has been a...
paradigm shift and family planning has now emerged as a key strategy to reduce maternal and child mortalities and morbidities.”

Women like Rukhsana Bano represent the face of change, required for the policy thrust to take root amongst stakeholders – primarily men and women in the reproductive age group. Irfan Alam, a civil engineer with a company in Kuwait hailing from Jehanabad District in Bihar, recalls, “I grew up in a large family. From my earliest memories, I have seen how Ammi and Abbu have struggled to bring us all up, facing so many difficulties. By the time I grew up and got married, I was clear that I wanted a small family. I know how harmful it can be for a mother’s health if she has repeated pregnancies. This will equally impact the children.” Right from the outset Alam and his wife adopted family planning measures.

Although Rukhsana Bano and Irfan Alam represent a miniscule of the population where uptake of family planning measures is urgently required, they signify hope. Somewhere the old norms have to be shaken off, mindsets need to change so that family planning does not stay limited to a top-down programme driven by government policy. Men and women, mothers and fathers from across the country, from all sections of society really need to reach out and make it work in their lives. They could thus create family units that are healthy and happy. (Courtesy: Charkha Features)

Editors from Egypt, Kenya bag WAN-IFRA Awards

The Women in News Editorial Leadership Award recognises an exemplary contribution of an editor to her newsroom - and under her leadership the contribution of her newspaper - to society. Karima Kamal, columnist and contributing editor for the Egyptian daily, Al Masry Al Yom, has been named the 2017 Laureate for Middle East and Africa. Pamella Sittoni, editor of the International Desk for the Nation Media Group and managing editor for The East African, a weekly circulated in Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, has been named the 2017 Laureate for Africa.

“I am humbled by this great honour,” says 2017 Africa Laureate Pamella Sittoni. “This award is a strong confirmation that the world is taking notice of the important contribution that women leaders in media houses are making to the development of their countries, regions and the world. I’m confident that it will inspire other women journalists, particularly the younger ones, to aim for the top through diligence.”

On being named a winner, 2017 MENA Laureate Karima Kamal says: “I am very pleased to have received the Award as I feel it is the crown of my professional journey. The Award supports those who defend the freedom of the press, and is also a confirmation of the importance of promoting the presence of women equally and fairly within all strata of media.”

The Women in News Editorial Leadership Award is part of WAN-IFRA’s Gender and Media Freedom Strategy, made possible through support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. One Laureate from MENA and one Laureate from Africa are named, annually. Toyosi Ogunseye, editor of the Sunday Punch in Nigeria, was named 2014 Laureate for Africa.
Land contouring proves a boon for marginal farmers

The Indian coastal ecosystem comprises 10.78 million hectares along a 8129-km coastline. Of this, 3.1 million hectares is salt-affected. With a rising sea level due to global warming, the Sundarbans in West Bengal presents one of the worst case scenarios. Additionally, heavy rainfall, bad drainage, with much of the land lying below sea level, makes matters worse for farmers, nearly all of whom own marginal lands. Rina Mukherji tells us the story about how an initiative by the Central Soil and Salinity Research Institute has resulted in a turnaround for farmers in 32 villages in South 24-Parganas.

Take the case of Bimal Ghorami from Andharia Village in Canning 1 cluster in South 24-Parganas District of the Indian Sundarbans. His 0.40 ha yielded only the minimal kharif paddy, earning him a meagre annual income of Rs 3900, forcing him to seek employment in Kolkata as a daily wager to make ends meet.

Pachu Mondol from the same village, with a 0.33-ha farm, faced the same problem. He could only manage to make Rs 3800 annually, and had to seek employment to supplement his meagre means.

Although Tapan Mridha’s farm in Chandkhali Village in Canning had a ditch, it was only enough to rear some fish for home consumption. The salinity level on his farm was just too high, save for the kharif paddy. Thus, he could only earn an annual income of Rs 2800.

Once a land of abundant mangroves, the Sundarbans were extensively deforested by the British at the end of the 19th Century for habitation. Owing to the peculiar nature of mangroves that filter waste and chemicals from waters downstream, acid sulphates and sulphides abound just below the land surface. Despite good monsoons year after year, much of the land being at sea level has resulted in bad drainage and, hence, waterlogging in parts. Standing water is a major cause for salinity.

The numerous estuarine waterbodies that criss-cross the land are also salt-laden. The salinity levels are cyclical, with heavy rains in the monsoon diluting the salt content and improving the water quality. However, there is very little leaching into the groundwater, since the soil is of heavy texture. Besides, the rains see a lot of water getting lost as runoff, with the topsoil being left devoid of nutrients. Soils are especially low in phosphorus, potassium and calcium. Unlike other regions, groundwater irrigation cannot be resorted to here. The presence of acid sulphates and the pyrites of iron sulphates beyond a certain depth can turn the soil acidic in the presence of water.

The dry months are especially troublesome. Evaporation of surface water causes the saline salts to come up to the surface, making the land uncultivable and crops prone to failure. Thus, in spite of good rains, the Sundarbans remains perennially poor, with distress migration the
Taking into account all these problems, the Central Soil and Salinity Research Institute (CSSRI) has devised land contouring methods wherein a small plot of land can be used by a marginal farmer to yield multiple crops and rear fish for a living, while ensuring food security. Several techniques have been devised for the purpose, depending on the level of salinity to be dealt with, and the prevailing conditions.

**Farm pond technique:** In the farm pond technique, 20 per cent of the farm area is converted into an on-farm pond to harvest the excess rainwater. The dug-out soil is then used to contour the remaining farm into high, medium and low levels. However, this cannot work in areas of acute salinity. The high-level land here is used to grow vegetables and fruit throughout the year, while during the monsoon, the medium level land is used to cultivate paddy, and the low level is used for rearing fish. In the rabi (dry) season, low level land is used for paddy, while sunflower, groundnut and cotton are grown in the medium level land. This technique helps the farmer harvest nearly 5000 cubic metres of rainwater for irrigation, while also breeding fish.

**Paddy-cum-fish cultivation technique:** In this technique, a trench is dug all around a farm and a ditch maintained in one corner. The dug-out soil is used to raise the farm for better drainage and to prevent waterlogging. Dykes around the farm protect it from free-flowing water, while the trench helps rear fish. This method can help harvest 1400 cubic metres of water for every hectare of farmland. The dykes around the farm can be used to grow vegetables during the kharif season, while the grows paddy. In the rabi season, the water in the trenches can be used for irrigation to grow low-water crops.

**Ridge and furrow method:** This method of contouring has the ridges working as high-level sections for growing vegetables, while furrows can be used to grow paddy and breed fish. Variations of this method include high ridge and deep furrow, medium ridge and shallow furrow, and broad ridge and shallow furrow, in keeping with individual preferences.

Whatever the method opted for growing paddy alongside fish-breeding, the farmer, though, needs to be careful in selecting the fish species. As Buddheswar Maji, director, CSSRI, warns, “Carp varieties may be well-suited. But the farmer needs to steer clear of the grass carp, since this variety can eat up all the saplings in a paddy field. Care should be taken that grass carp do not ever slip into the fields, especially during the rains.” Provided the necessary pre-cautions are taken, land...
contouring can prove a boon for marginal farmers, though, as seen first-hand by many farmers here. Each of those who have opted for the techniques have now turned into full-time farmers and ceased working as daily wagers. Pachu Mondol and Tapan Mridha, who opted for land contouring since 2010, are reaping the benefits now. Mondol’s farm has been contoured as per the farm-pond technique, and now yields an annual income of Rs 23000, besides a daily income from vegetables and an intermittent income from fish.

Mridha had his farm contoured to enlarge his ditch to a 3-metre depth, widening it to 0.4 metre, as per the farm-pond technique. He now breeds fish throughout the year, besides growing both kharif and rabi vegetables, and fruits like papaya and bananas, earning a net income of more than Rs 17000 per annum.

Bimal Ghorami, who has opted for the ridge and furrow method since 2011-12, now earns an annual income of Rs 37000 from paddy, fish, and both kharif and rabi vegetables. In short, it has meant a total turnaround for farmers in 32 villages in South 24-Parganas.

At the moment, CSSRI is in the process of training farmers in sunflower and mushroom cultivation since these are well-suited to the soil conditions here and can provide a good supplementary income to farmers. There are also efforts afoot to upscale the programme with the help of other technical partners in the state.

(The writer is a freelance journalist based in Kolkata who specialises in developmental issues. She is the recipient of several national and international fellowships, besides India’s first-ever Laadli Extraordinaire Award for relentlessly fighting gender injustice.)

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**Media industry to clock Rs 291000 cr by 2021: PwC report**

India’s media and entertainment sector is expected to grow steadily over the next four years as per PwC’s Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2017-2021 report unveiled. According to the report, the industry is expected to exceed INR 291000 crore by 2021 growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.5 per cent between 2017 and 2021.

TV subscription revenues are expected to grow from INR 52755 crore in 2016 to INR 90713 crore in 2021 at a CAGR of 11.6 per cent. Publishing in India is expected to grow from INR 38601 crore in 2016 to INR 44391 crore in 2021 at a CAGR of 3.1 per cent. India’s internet video segment has produced revenues of INR 560 crore in 2016 and will grow at 22.4 per cent CAGR to reach a new high of INR 1540 crore in 2021.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
What ails Indian PR, and how it can be made effective

If India is the birthplace of human speech, as designated by American writer Mark Twain, it can also be taken as the place where Public Relations was born as a social science. C.V. Narasimha Reddi takes a look at the evolution of Public Relations, the areas in which it is lagging, and what India can do to catch up with the rest of the world.

More than 2500 years ago, when the term ‘communications’ was not even coined, Gautama Buddha made use of Public Relations techniques to spread Buddhism not only in India but also throughout Asia. Household interpersonal communication was his technique. Therefore, the Buddha is regarded not only as the Light of Asia but also as a public relations (PR) messiah and forerunner of today’s global PR techniques.

PR received a boost in India in the 1990s because of the new industrial policy and competitive marketing environment. India entered the global PR arena. PR as a discipline, with a thrust on media strategy, played a big role in transforming India both into the world’s largest democracy and an economic player poised to become the third biggest economy in the world.

Quantity vs quality

The distinguishing trait of Indian Public Relations is the ‘quantity of PR personnel’ rather than ‘quality of the PR profession’. The need of the hour is professional excellence. A recent survey by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry pegged the size of the PR industry at $6 billion (over Rs 30000) crore and predicted that it would grow further.

Credibility (or the lack of it) is the biggest factor affecting the health of Indian PR. In 2009, Ramalinga Raju, the erstwhile chairman of Satyam Computers, then India’s leading IT firm, admitted to fraud to the tune of Rs 14000 crore. Raju had used his Corporate Communications Division to mislead stakeholders by painting a glorious picture of the company. The media had eulogised him in consequence, and share values of his company had risen.

Radiagate is another case in point. Niira Radia’s Vaishnavi Corporate Communications indulged in nefarious power dealings and over 5000 incriminating conversations involving her and the then Telecom minister, A. Raja, were taped by the Income Tax Department.

The minister was forced to resign and Vaishnavi Corporate Communication was closed down. The credibility of Public Relations as a discipline took a hit in both cases.

Areas for improvement

Education and training: The lack of PR education and in-service training are major drawbacks faced by the PR industry in India. When the Dr BR Ambedkar Open University wanted to introduce a postgraduate degree in Mass Communication and Public Relations, the University Grants Commission rejected the proposal on the plea that the course was not on its approved list. In the West, PR is offered as a major at the UG level and also at the PG level.

Stakeholder relationships: As a strategic management function, PR is expected to reach out to every section of the public associated with the organisation in question, such as shareholders, investors, employees, customers, suppliers etc, to assess reactions to organisational goals. Unfortunately, there are rarely any one-to-one sessions between PR staff and the public to garner such information. The public is approached through representational media such as TV and newspapers rather than through presentational media face-to-face. While media relations is a primary focus of public relations departments, other responsibilities should not be ignored.

Measurement measures: In India, PR operates by and large as one way communication without any provision for effective feedback through research and measurement efforts. This needs to be changed.

Urban-rural divide: If one subscribes to the belief that India lives in its six lakh villages, housing 72 per cent of its population, then PR is out of sync with the country. PR is mostly confined to the 4000 cities and towns that make up urban India. There has to be increased focus on rural India.

A missing place on the board: PR should be a strategic management function and PR departments should hold responsibility for advising management on key communication strategies. Unfortunately, in India, its role is still more that of a technician than of a strategist. Ideally, the head of the PR Department must have a place on the board which devises and approves of policies. This rarely happens in India.

Identity Crisis: PR as a specialised discipline is yet to come
out of its ‘misconception shell’. It has many aliases, including Corporate Communications, Corporate Relations, Public Affairs, Publicity, etc. Just as Finance, HR, Marketing and Advertising are known universally by those terms, Public Relations should be a clearly recognised arm in all organisations.

Professional representation: Most countries have their own professional PR body to promote the recognition of Public Relations as a distinct profession and to improve and maintain standards among PR practitioners. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the world’s largest such body. Sadly, India, despite being the world’s largest democracy, does not have a strong PR professional body on par with those in western countries.

Upgrade to PR 2.0 model
The 125 crore people in India cannot be reached out to only through traditional influencers—mass media. Press releases, the traditional PR tool, are proving less effective as the audience’s preference for channels of information has changed.

The PR 2.0 model based on the merging of traditional PR with the Internet and social media, as developed by Brian Solis, a disruptive technology guru, should be adopted by Indian PR professionals to reinvent themselves. It allows people to establish networks to directly reach customers, business partners, stakeholders etc. with personalised messages for greater impact.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi provides a shining example of how social media can be used effectively. He interacts directly with the public through his Man Ki Baat radio programmes and social media formats such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, besides the pmindia.gov.in.en website.

According to estimates, there will be over a hundred crore Internet users in India by 2020. The prospects of the PR 2.0 model are undoubtedly bright. Let us not miss the tide.

(The writer is editor, Public Relations Voice, and former director, Information & PR Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh.)
As many as 20 journalists were killed in different parts of India between 2014 and 2017, with four media persons succumbing to attacks in the first six months of the current year alone. However, no killing has been reported from the Northeast during the period. Hariprakash, a Jharkhand-based scribe, Brajesh Kumar Singh of Bihar, and Shyam Sharma and Kamlesh Jain from Madhya Pradesh were the four whose work triggered the animosity of those they had exposed, leading to their deaths this year.

Various media organisations like the Madhya Pradesh Journalist Union (MPJU), Journalists' Forum Assam (JFA), National Federation of Newspaper Employees (NFNE) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) have expressed serious concern over the murder of the journalists and asked the authorities to book the culprits.

In a recent statement, the IFJ disclosed that 93 journalists were killed last year. Iraq had the highest number (15), followed by Afghanistan (13), Mexico (11), Yemen (8), Guatemala, Syria and India (all 6). Neighbouring Pakistan reported the murders of five journalists. Bangladesh witnessed the murder of one rural reporter – Abdul Hakim Shimul – this year, and tiny Maldives drew international attention with the sensational murder of a prominent journalist and human rights defender, Yameen Rasheed.

The eight states that comprise India's Northeast lost more than 30 journalists to violence in the last three decades. Manipur and Assam, where over 30 separatist armed militant outfits are still active, witnessed the murder of Dwijamani Nanao Singh in Imphal and Raihanul Nayum in Dhubri in 2012. Earlier, an Assamese editor, Anil Mazumdar, was killed in 2009 in Guwahati. Assam alone has lost 15 newsmen to armed militants since 1991, but shockingly no one has been convicted for any of these crimes till date.

The killing of Sujit Bhattacharya (proof reader), Ranjit Chowdhury (manager) and Balaram Ghosh (driver) at the premises of Dainik Ganadoot in Agartala made sensational news in 2013. After a lot of hue and cry, the Tripura police arrested Sushil Choudhury, the Dainik Ganadoot proprietor and editor. He was convicted by the west Tripura District and Session Court for the triple murders. But Choudhury was acquitted by the High Court, and the Government has now appealed against the verdict in the Supreme Court. After this date, no killing of media persons have been reported from the region.

Not a one-movie-wonder
Dr Santwana Bardoloi, a paedriatician by profession and a film-maker by choice, has proved she is no one-film-wonder, with her second full-length Assamese movie, Maj Rati Keteki (The Midnight Hawk-cuckoo), repeating the feat of her national award-winning debut film, Adajya (The Flight), which premiered in 1996. Maj Rati Keteki was adjudged the best Assamese feature film at the 64th National Film Awards 2016. Bollywood actor Adil Hussain, who hails from Assam, received a special mention for his performances in the 116-minute film and Mukti Bhawan in Hindi. Produced under the banner of Dr Bardoloi’s newly launched production house Udara Films, Maj Rati Keteki’s cast includes Kulada Kumar Bhattacharya, Sulakshana Barua, Mala Goswami, Pranami Bora, Indu Mohan Das, and Kasvi Songkorison. Gnaana Shekar V.S. was in charge of cinematography and music is by Anurag Saikia. Rupam Bhuyan rendered the only song in the movie. Ushma Bardoloi was both associate director and editor.

The film was screened at two international film festivals in Kerala and Karnataka recently, and won rave reviews from both audience and critics. It has also been included for screening at various prestigious film festivals across the country.
National award-winning Assamese film, ‘Maj Rati Keteki’ is a serious story about the life journey of a sensitive writer-poet-artist and how various events affect him. It goes to show how a writer’s life experiences seep into his writings whether he consciously chooses it or not and also how a special kind of courage is required to face life’s toughest truths.

This is a scene from the film.

and will be commercially released on October 27.

The story revolves around a writer who has returned to his native town after many years and is caught up in a series of events involving different personalities which redefine his life experiences and perceptions. The long whistling cry of the small keteki bird heard throughout the film echoes its title.

Dr Bardoloi’s Adajya was based on a popular Assamese novel tilted Donta Haatir Ulje Khowa Haoda by Indira Goswami. It won laurels at the 44th National Film Awards and was screened at various international film festivals. Addressing media persons at the Guwahati Press Club recently, Dr Bardoloi highlighted the crisis facing the Assamese film fraternity as regional cinemas were not attracting larger audiences. However, she was hopeful of audience support for the local film industry, going forward.

(The author is a senior journalist based in Guwahati.)

‘Print media players taking proactive steps to sustain circulation’

Here’s what M.V. Shreyams Kumar, joint MD, Mathrubhumi Group, has to say about the changing media landscape in India:

The print industry has died many deaths and its obituary has been written and re-written many times over the past few years. The ABC has challenged popular belief that print media in the country is dying, by releasing data that shows that 2.37 crore newspaper copies were added in the last 10 years despite stiff competition from television and digital media, they have all been touted to state that ‘writing is on the wall’, ‘death is not too far’.

There are multiple reasons driving the growth of paid print in this country. First, over the past decades, there has been an increase in literacy levels in India (from 64.8 per cent in 2001 to 74 per cent in 2011), which has expanded the target market for the industry.

Second, the Indian economy is a rural economy with more than 65 per cent of India’s population residing in the rural areas. A paradigm shift is visible in rural population where there is a strong depth in language readership, particularly in Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu among others, over the past five decades as they become one of the most influential consumer groups with increased income levels and changing tastes and preferences.

Additionally, the coverage of local news by regional language newspapers has given circulation the much needed momentum to express the consumers’ grievances and aspirations. Regional focus has further resulted in hyper-localisation leading to multi-edition newspapers with supplements.

Lastly, Indian newspapers are priced significantly lower than their global counterparts to enable a wider reader base. Annual subscription for an average Indian newspaper is less than INR 1000 which amounts to USD 15 (USD 1 = INR 67.)

As Internet access expands and technology advances take place, traditional print players are also experimenting with these changes and co-exist with them both in the physical and digital space. The print media players are taking proactive steps to sustain their circulation revenue and prevent cannibalisation from the new avenues of news and information.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com.)
Visionary editor, father of Indian Renaissance

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (sometimes also referred to as Rammohun) was a journalist, editor, writer, social reformer and scholar. He is widely regarded as the ‘father of Indian renaissance’. His extensive study, analysis and understanding of religious texts, propagation of reformist ideas for the betterment of society and crusade for change in government policies earned him the epithet. A man who used journalism and editorship for worthy causes, Ram Mohan Roy rightly earned respect from global intelligentsia and was truly a social visionary. The reverence for his work is, thus, not limited to India but finds mention in the history and consciousnes of the world. Mrinal Chatterjee describes the man and his life

Born to Ramkanta Roy and Tarini Devi at Radhanagore, Arambagh Subdivision, Hooghly District in Bengal Presidency (now West Bengal) on 22nd May 1772, Ram Mohan Roy began his education with the study of Bengali language. He was subsequently sent to Patna (now the capital city of Bihar state) where he learnt Persian and Arabic. His next educational stint was in Benaras (now in Uttar Pradesh), studying Sanskrit.

Within a short span of time, Ram Mohan became well-versed in Sanskrit literature, particularly the Upanishads (religious texts of the Hindus). It was this knowledge that helped him to comparatively analyse and point to the evils prevailing in the religion during that time. These, he reasoned, had no basis in the original writings of Hinduism. The idea germinated with 16-year-old Ram Mohan publishing his famous work, Idolatry. The teenager made history since this was the first literary work in Bengal prose.

In his 22nd year, Roy commenced the study of English and it took him six years to master it. It is believed that he acquired some knowledge of French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew as well. In 1800, he took service as a clerk in the Collectorate of Rungapore headed by Digby of the East India Company and earned lavish praises for his abilities. After 13 years, Roy retired as a sheristadar to follow his heart. After vacating office, Digby noted, “By perusing all my correspondence with diligence and attention, he acquired so correct a knowledge of the English language as to be enabled to write and speak it with considerable accuracy.”

While working at the East India Company, Roy extensively studied Christianity. This made him realise that some Hindu traditions and superstitions required reformation. In 1816, he founded Atmiya Sabha to propagate his doctrines of monotheistic Hinduism. He translated the Vedanta philosophy and the Vedantasara into English. He followed it up by rendering the Upanishads in Bengali and English in 1816 and 1817, respectively. He is credited with introducing the word, Hinduism, in the English language in 1816.

Roy published Precepts to Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness, a book in Bengali and Sanskrit in 1820. He argued that Jesus Christ was a religious preacher and not of divine origin. This irked the Christian Missionaries of Serampore no end. To defend his views, he printed his first and second Appeals. When the Baptist Mission Church refused to print his final Appeal, he established his own press and had it printed citing Greek and Hebrew quotations backing his stand.

The books gained attention in America and England, and this was the view of one Carpenter with reference to the second Appeal, “The excellent author is distinguished by the closeness of his reasoning, the critical accuracy of his scriptural knowledge, the comprehensiveness of his investigations and the acuteness and skill with which he controverts the positions of his opponents.” Countless controversies erupted and Roy started a periodical called

A portrait of Raja Ram Mohan Roy.
Brahminical Magazine to safeguard the religious books of Hindus. Atmiya Sabha published a weekly called Bengal Gazette, a newspaper in Persian, Mirat-ul-Akbar, and a Bengali weekly, Sambad Kaumudi.

The editorials of Sambad Kaumudi often carried editorials against the practise of sati daha (forced burning of the widow in the flames of her husband’s funeral pyre) and other reformist ideas. Roy through his weekly spoke fervently on issues he held dear: abolishing the practices of sati, polygamy and child marriage; advocated widow remarriage and property inheritance rights for women.He used the might of his pen to spread forth his ideas to rid Hinduism of its evils and dogmas, superstitions and elaborate rituals.

The orthodox Hindus did not take kindly to these suggestions. An association formed by the orthodox party, the Dharma Sabha, started a periodical, Samachar Chandrika, to counter Sambad Kaumudi. The editorial face-off between them became the order of the day, where the former batted for the status quo and the latter for reforms with Roy basing his arguments on the shasstras. He was the first great Indian reformer to advocate a plan for breaking down the barriers of the caste system by introducing inter-caste marriages and he cited authorities from the Hindu scriptures in support of his view. He justified widow remarriage, inter-caste and inter-racial marriages on the basis of religious scriptures and tradition.

Roy’s efforts bore fruit as his fight against sati daha (bride burning) caught the attention of Lord William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck. After Roy wrote vigorously professing his vehement disapproval of the inhuman tradition, Lord Bentick had several conferences with him on the subject. His twelve years of persistent endeavour against vehement opposition triumphed. On December 4, 1829, an act was passed abolishing the rite.

In 1828, Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta. It was an influential movement that did not discriminate between people belonging to different religions, castes or communities. Roy, who was against idol worship, propagated the oneness of God through the Brahmo Samaj. It was a movement of reformist high-caste Bengalis to fight against social evils.

Roy was the first Indian to raise voice against curbing of press freedom. He and five of his friends submitted a memorandum to the Supreme Court in Calcutta on the 31st March, 1823, saying that the ordinance issued by the acting governor general, Adams, which placed serious restrictions on the freedom of the press, be not accepted.

When the East India Company continued to muzzle the press, Roy composed two memorials (a sort of written appeal signed by some of the progressive intellectuals of the time) against this in 1829 and 1830, respectively. He championed the freedom of press through these. His memorial for the repeal of the draconian press ordinance of 1823 has been called the Aeropagitics of Indian History. Roy was a devoted educator and believed holistic social reform was essential. In 1817, in collaboration with David Hare and Sir Edward Hyde, he set up the Hindu College in Calcutta. Roy founded the Anglo-Hindu school in 1922 and Vendanta College four years later. At the latter institution, he aimed at courses as a synthesis of Indian and western learning.

Roy married three times. As a custom during those days, he was married as a child. When his child-bride died, he was married again. With the second wife, he had two sons: Radhaprasad in 1800 and Ramaprasad in 1812. One of his sons was appointed as the first Indian judge on the Calcutta High Court bench, though unfortunately he passed away before assuming office. His second wife passed away in 1824. Roy’s father got him married for a third time to Uma Devi, while his second wife was alive.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy died of meningitis on September 27, 1833 in Bristol. Uma Devi outlived him.

(The author, a journalist-turned-media academician, presently heads the Eastern India campus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication located in Dhenkanal, Odisha. This is the second in a series of profiles of great Indian newspaper editors who have, through the course of their work and career, made a signal contribution to India’s Freedom Movement, to the development of society and to the development of Journalism.)
INTERVIEW WITH APARNA SEN

‘I like to try different approaches in cinema’

Aparna Sen is acknowledged as one of the finest directors Indian cinema has produced. But curiously, her latest film, Sonata, vanished without a trace after a one-week run in a couple of theatres in Kolkata. In an exclusive interview with Shoma A. Chatterji, she talks about why she decided to turn Mahesh Elkunchwar’s one-act play in English into a 100-minute film.

Sonata is about three middle-aged women who are independent and have made their own choices in life. They are different in terms of ethnicity, profession, education and ideology. Yet, they find a strange bonding and hidden layers of their relationship are revealed as the film unfolds. Aparna was inspired to make the film after she watched the play directed by her close friend Sohag Sen, a theatre personality who runs her own group.

As a director who has always worked in films and as an actress who has worked on stage and in films, what prompted you to turn a single-set chamber drama into a full-length feature film?

Some of the directors I have admired the most, such as Ingmar Bergman and Roman Polanski, have directed beautiful chamber pieces. This is a genre where the narrative progresses through continuing conversation amongst the characters, and the line between stage and cinema is deliberately blurred. One realises that cinema and theatre do not have to be mutually exclusive. Performance is king here, and yet you can use the close-up (which is the essential stuff of cinema) to great effect.

Was it a challenge?

It is certainly a challenge – for the cinematographer who has to light up the set in a way that lends itself to continuous viewing for 90 to 100 minutes at a stretch; it is a challenge for the performers who have to be able to hold their audience in thrall just as on stage; finally, it is a challenge for the director who has to choreograph the entire film in a way that will not appear static. I was happy to take up that challenge.

But you have done this before?

I have done this before with my film Saari Raat based on Badal Sarkar’s play Saara Rattir (Bengali). That film too had one space and three characters and took place in the course of a single night. My DOP (director of Photography), my editor, my production designer and I all took the challenge of this project with a lot of relish. It worked out rather well, I have to say, and I wanted to repeat the exercise. It is also a great way of making a small budget film because it is confined to one location and with very few characters. I feel it is something that we independent (and regional) filmmakers can look into trying from time to time.

As a director who has made several outdoor-rooted films like Mr & Mrs Iyer, 15 Park Avenue, and Arshinagar, what made you explore the limited physical space of a living room as the main backdrop and keep away from the outside world?

I am a filmmaker who likes to try different approaches in cinema. In Arshinagar, you will remember, I tried to combine theatre and cinema, the two sister disciplines. I also veered away from everyday reality in many of my films – Yugant, 15
The characters are ethnically placed against the grain. Was this done by design or was it just a coincidence and if it was by design, why?

Well, the casting of Lillete was a foregone conclusion. Mahesh Elkunchwar, the playwright, wanted her as Subhadra (who he insisted was his ‘darling’ by the way!). Sohag Sen, our casting director and acting coach, wanted Lillete. I too, could see only Lillete in that role. In fact, we would have been in a fix had Lillete declined to play the role since all of us had set our hearts on her. I chose Shabana ‘against the grain’ as you put it, because she sings beautifully. I had not wanted playback in the film because my films are seen internationally. To foreign audiences, playback singing carries an association of mainstream cinema.

Now that you have watched the film with an audience, what is your viewer-cum-director response to your film?

I can only see faults in a film that I have finished making. It is torture for me to watch it with an audience. Also, I am strangely influenced by audience reactions. If I see the audience responding in the right way, I feel that I have possibly made a good film. Otherwise, I am convinced that the film is a disaster. So I don’t really trust my own reactions to my films.

(The writer is a senior journalist and film historian based in Kolkata. She has won the National Award for Best Writing on Cinema twice, the Bengal Film Journalists Association Award, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Laadly-UNFPA.)

Can Dündar receives Golden Pen of Freedom Award

The Golden Pen of Freedom, the annual press freedom award of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), was awarded to Turkish journalist and former editor-in-chief of Cumhuriyet newspaper, Can Dündar. The award, made in Durban during the opening ceremony of the 69th World News Media Congress and 24th World Editors Forum, recognised Dündar’s outstanding work in upholding the values of a free press along with his unwavering support for Turkish colleagues, some 150 of whom are currently in jail.

“Journalists need courage because there is a cloud of fear hanging over them – fear is everywhere, and it is so powerful,” said Dündar in his acceptance speech. “I come from the biggest prison for journalists in the world: currently 150 of my colleagues are behind bars in Turkey, and imprisoning one member of the press intimidates hundreds of others.

Following a July 2016 failed coup attempt, the government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has clamped down on an already stifling environment for independent media by using the penal code, criminal defamation legislation, and the country’s anti-terrorism laws to punish critical reporting. Journalists are facing growing violence, harassment, and intimidation from both state and non-state actors. Along with unprecedented numbers of arrests and imprisonment, often for supposed breaches of national security laws or for collusion in anti-state activities (for which there is rarely any evidence presented), the Turkish authorities have also reportedly shut down some 150 media organisations since the coup attempt.

Can Dündar, a journalist for nearly 40 years, has worked across magazines, daily newspapers, and television. He was dismissed from his post at Daily Milliyet in 2013 in a decision widely believed to have been a result of his critical commentary of the government’s handling of the Gezi Park unrest. He was transferred to Cumhuriyet, Turkey’s oldest newspaper, where he was named editor-in-chief in February 2015.

In November of the same year, Dündar was arrested together with his colleague, Ankara bureau chief Erdem Gül, following the publication of an article alleging Turkey’s intelligence services had attempted to send arms to Syrian rebel groups. President Erdoğan had previously claimed the trucks were delivering humanitarian aid. Authorities revealed the two journalists had been arrested for “knowingly and willingly aiding an armed terrorist organisation”, “membership of a terrorist organization”, and “obtaining and exposing secret state documents for means of political and military espionage”. After spending 92 days in jail, the pair was released on 26 February 2016 after the Turkish Supreme Court decided that their detention was an “undue deprivation of liberty”. Since June of that year, Can Dündar has been living in exile in Germany.
Using dance to bring a new flavour to the epics

A novel initiative explores unusual facets of well-known characters from the epics through solo dance performances. Shoma A. Chatterji describes the experience of watching two such interpretations.

Dance has expanded its horizons not only by embracing different styles, by the fusion between and among different styles and sustaining the purity of traditional styles to reach out to new areas of exploration, analysis and performance, but also in terms of content, storyline, plots and so on. Patra Parichaya, patra meaning ‘character’ and ‘parichaya’ meaning ‘introduction’ is a novel concept introduced to interpret marginal, controversial and negative characters from epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata through dance and present these interpretations with young performers trained in various schools of classical Indian dance styles.

Patra Parichaya is an innovation by Usha R.K. who has been orchestrating these performances for the past eight years across India, in New Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru and Kolkata.

Ravana, Karna, Ahalya, Soorpanakha and Draupadi are some of the characters that have been presented in different classical styles such as Kuchipudi and Kathak, but mainly through Bharata Natyam.

Recently, art aficionados in Kolkata were treated to a representation of Soorpanakha and Ahalya, in Bharata Natyam style. Organised by Usha under the auspices of the Alka Jalan Foundation, the two characters from the Ramayana were presented by Dakshina Vaidyanathan and Arupa Lahiry. While Dakshina is the disciple of Gurus Saroja Vaidyanathan and Rama Vaidyanathan and a third-generation Bharata Natyam dancer, Arupa’s guru is Chitra Visweswaran.

“We at Patra Parichaya decided to support young and talented dancers to hone their skills in this performing art and take the stage with something unique,” says Usha. “We follow different formats of Bharata Natyam and create a style that resembles a dance drama but is performed by a single dancer who sometimes slips under the skin of different characters only to return again and again to the character of the protagonist,” she adds.

Every character in the epics has several nuances, but most of us are familiar with only some of them. We have been conditioned not to look beyond those stereotypes. For instance, we see Ravana only as the villain who abducted Sita, and his sister Soorpanakha as the personification of evil. But there are positive elements in these characters too, and it is Patra Parichaya’s intention to draw attention to them,” explains Usha.

In the Patra Parichaya rendition of Soorpanakha, the Ramayana is presented not as a series of events which leads to the rescue of Sita but as a masterly game-plan hatched by Soorpanakha to kill Ravana, in revenge for the latter killing her husband Dushtabudhi, who she deeply loved. Ravana, who had initially granted many favours to Dushtabudhi, eventually felt threatened by his growth and had him killed. A devastated Soorpanakha fled to the mainland where she roamed the forests,
desolate and broken. And then one day, she set eyes on Lord Rama.

Dakshina Vaidyanathan is not only full of grace and femininity, but she also brings to her performance the ideal blend of nrilla (classical footwork) and nritya (facial expressions and hasta mudras). Her interpretation of Sūrpanakha encompasses many shades of the woman—the breach of trust by her brother, the emptiness she feels after her husband’s death, and the strong desire for revenge. “However, according to me, she had no physical interest in Rama whatsoever, as is usually interpreted from the epic,” says Dakshina.

The story opens with the beautiful child Meenakshi (the one with fish-shaped eyes) playing happily with her brother Ravana. She slowly evolves into Sūrpanakha (meaning, the one with long, sharp nails), filled with the mission of avenging her husband. The audience watched mesmerised as she projected the manipulations, the planning and the execution of the plot as she danced between rows of people, the Alka Jain Foundation having limited space and no proscenium.

Ahalya is known as the woman who was turned to stone by her husband Gautama, a rishi, as punishment for cohabiting with Lord Indra, who disguised himself as Gautama and visited Ahalya in her husband’s absence. She stayed a stone till Lord Rama touched her and set her free from the curse.

But what is less well-known is that Ahalya was a brahma-gyani, she knew exactly how her life would play out. She wasn’t hoodwinked by Lord Indra’s disguise; she knew he was certainly not her husband. Her surrender to him was mindfully made, a matter of choice, knowing full well what would happen when her husband came back.

Arupa Lahiry’s interpretation of Ahalya in Patra Parichaya is inspired by Rabindranath Tagore’s long poem on the subject. The performance conveys that Ahalya froze and became stone-like when her husband came back. She simply closed herself to the world around her, waiting for the mukti (deliverance) which only Lord Rama could give her. Arupa’s scintillating performance was more nrilla-based than nritya-centred. She moulded herself beautifully into the persona of a woman who had made a difficult choice and narrated the unusual take on the well-known story through her carefully trained body movements and facial expressions.

“The characters are picked and assigned to each performer. The dancers are told to prepare their performances according to their own perception of the character, and how they relate to them. Most of them read various works of literature and stories about the characters and then prepare their act,” says Usha.
Swinging Sixties — echoing the scent of youthful exuberance

“It’s a terrible world these days,” bemoaned Partab Ramchand’s friend, an old timer. “Look at the newspapers, the television, the Internet and all you get is news of rape, violence, mass destruction, terrorist attacks. There is an appalling lack of patience, tolerance and understanding. Our world was much better.” Ramchand expands that viewpoint and recalls the days of the Swinging Sixties.

Being a bit of an old-timer myself I could see my friend’s viewpoint since I too grew up in the much better world he was talking about. The Swinging Sixties was the decade we both grew up in and half a century ago it was a very different world with there being no ultra-modern huge shopping malls, no Internet, no social media, no bars and pubs and a host of swanky restaurants, no mobile phones with its allied features, no cable TV, no TV. Period.

All we had for entertainment were the cinema halls, the radio, a few restaurants and since we were lucky enough to be in Madras that is now Chennai there was the Marina beach to go to in the evenings – the cheapest entertainment in town where the much needed sea breeze came as a welcome relief from the uncomfortably humid heat that one experienced during the day.

And yet, we teenagers had a swell time. That’s why I always tell the youngsters of today’s generation that, given the facilities and amenities and avenues they enjoy today, if they have half the fun that we had they should consider themselves lucky.

For me, personally, my life centered round sports, movies and music and, simply put, the 1960s were a memorable period to live through as far as the artistic achievements were concerned. Belonging to the Sixties generation, I may be accused of bias but what have you to say when the youngsters of today whose parents were teenagers during the Sixties acknowledge freely that they should have been around during the decade.

The view is certified by numerous favourable comments on YouTube when after seeing an old movie or listening to music of our generation the youngsters sigh with regret that they were not around during that defining decade.

The same may be said about sport which, with all due respect to movies and music, was my first love during the period of growing up as a teenager. Some of the all-time great sportsmen were at the peak in the Sixties and I can reel off four straightaway – Rod Laver, Muhammad Ali, Gary Sobers and Pele. To be all too familiar with their record and follow their great feats firsthand was a rare privilege my generation and I savoured. Oh sure, we did not have TV but we keenly followed the events live on the radio. The garrulous and colourful Ali boxing his way to immortality, Sobers excelling with his all-round exploits on the cricket field, Pele dribbling his way to another classic goal and Laver performing the Grand Slam twice – a feat still unequalled in tennis history – were the stuff that dreams were made of.

The movie scene was another one that we youngsters enjoyed. Screens were getting bigger and wider and after cinemascope and Vistavision of the Fifties, it was time for 70mm, stereophonic sound and Cinerama in the Sixties and we in Madras loved to lap up the shows at Anand, Safire and Pilot theatres which boasted these facilities. Of course, we never missed the James Bond movies then starring Sean Connery as 007 as we never missed any film starring the greats of the day – Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, Marlon Brando, Gregory Peck, William Holden and so on.

The Hind movie scene was no less entertaining. Even as the reign of Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, and Dev Anand was coming to an end though all of them continued to have hits in the Sixties, the new stars headed by Rajendra Kumar and Shammi Kapoor were taking over and provided us with some memorable entertaining fare during the decade.

Rajendra Kumar was known as the ‘jubilee star’ for almost every one of his films was a hit, running for 25 weeks or more. Shammi Kapoor acquired the image of the ‘rebel star’ and regaled audiences with entertainment of the breezy kind and these two were clearly the big stars of the Sixties. There were the lovely heroines too, and even as the stars of the Fifties – Waheeda Rehman, Madhubala, Meena Kumari, Nutan and Vyjantimala – continued to be popular at the box office they slowly lost out to the new stars like Nanda, Sadhana, Asha Parekh and Sharmila Tagore.

Towards the end of the decade, Rajesh Khanna who was to become the first superstar of Hindi cinema made his bow.

As for the music what can one say about the Sixties except that
it was sheer sublimity? The greats of the Hindi music world who had enraptured listeners in the Fifties continued to produce lilting tunes through the decade. Naushad, Shankar Jaikishen, Madan Mohan, S.D. Burman, Salil Chowdhury, Ravi, Roshan and O.P. Nayyar continued to top the charts and, if this was not enough, the talents of Laxmikant Pyarelal and R.D. Burman unfolded, making the scene complete from classical tunes to foot-tapping numbers.

And if one’s interest was Western music, he or she had a ball. Just two words should suffice to catch the mood of the Sixties – The Beatles. The Fab Four from Liverpool not only revolutionised music but lifestyle itself as their influence was felt around the world. There were others like Jim Reeves, Cliff Richard, Elvis Presley, Herman’s Hermits, The Rolling Stones and Tom Jones who also commanded a large following simply because their songs were timeless classics. And for those who preferred instrumental numbers there were The Shadows, The Ventures, Billy Vaughn and his orchestra and so on.

Of course, the Sixties were not all roses and garlands. No ten-year period could be only sugar and spice and all that’s nice. The decade also saw the Cuban missile crisis, the Cold War between the USA and the USSR, the six-day war in West Asia (Middle East) and the escalation of the Vietnam War which led to turmoil in the USA. The decade also saw the assassinations of President John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, while in India we had the deaths of Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri, the India-China War of 1962 and the India-Pakistan War of 1965. Overall, however, compared to other decades before or after, the Sixties were much more peaceful and eventful. To cap it all, in July 1969 occurred one of the most memorable events of all time – man’s landing on the moon. The successful Apollo 11 mission just about summed up the decade and as Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon and spoke the famous lines. “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,” we all counted our blessings that we were around to be a witness to the epoch-making ethereal event.

(The writer is a veteran sports journalist who also has more than a passing interest in the movies. He is based in Chennai.)
2001-11 – greatest decade in Indian cricket?

Can there be any doubt that Decade 2001-11 is the greatest in the history of Indian Test cricket? There have been a couple of other phases during which the Indian team has performed admirably and even the present squad performed in exemplary fashion with a run of 19 Tests without defeat and rising to the No. 1 spot. But most of the victories have been notched up at home and, overall, it is the record abroad that makes the difference between a good team and a great one, says Partab Ramchand.

For the record, during the period 1988-94, India registered ten straight cricketing wins at home. But that is hardly remembered for it is the away record that is more important. It is in this significant achievement that the Indian teams during the decade 2001-11 really scored. India has a formidable record at home but they have generally travelled poorly. Indeed, during the period 1959-68, India lost 17 straight Tests in England, West Indies and Australia. And while there has been considerable improvement since those dark days Indian squads sometimes bring back bad memories of those times like when they lost eight successive Tests in England, West Indies and Australia. And while there has been considerable improvement since those dark days Indian squads sometimes bring back bad memories of those times like when they lost eight successive Tests in England, West Indies and Australia.

However, that was just after the greatest decade ended. For ten years with the most lustrous batting line-up in the game backed by bowlers who could pick up wickets anywhere, India were arguably the most feared opponents overall and in fact this was the time when they rose to the No. 1 spot in the ICC rankings for the first time. Sure there were a couple of really bad setbacks during the decade but the balance sheet showed that the positive entries far outweighed the negative even while there were other results that were par for the course.

It was in the aftermath of the match fixing scandal that broke in 2000 that the Indian team came together under a new captain, Sourav Ganguly. India lost to South Africa at home in early 2000 but then at the start of the following season came victories over Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. But the golden period starts with the series against Australia in 2001 – and more specifically Kolkata 2001 the mere mention of which makes every Indian cricket fan’s eyes sparkle with delight.

One unbelievable victory followed by another remarkable one at Chennai gave India the series against opponents who were the No. 1 side in the game and had come to the country in a bid to conquer The Final Frontier. Suddenly, India was the most talked about team in the cricketing world.

Under Ganguly’s aggressive, no-nonsense captaincy, the Indians meant business and with a batting line-up that included, besides Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and V.V.S. Laxman, there were never going to be shortage of runs. With Harbhajan Singh joining forces with Anil Kumble, the Indians had a spin duo to rank with the best even in a country that has produced the most fascinating array of tweakers. And just as the side was settling down, it became stronger with the inclusion of Virender Sehwag and Zaheer Khan.

How could such a side fail to achieve great things? The competition was strong – Australia, England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and South Africa along with India were all bunched together with very little separating them in the ICC rankings. But India more than held their own and while being particularly formidable as usual at home, what really attracted attention was that they were winning Tests – and even series – abroad. Many notable achievements were notched up and these included a shared series in England, Australia, South Africa and Sri Lanka, a triumph in England, New Zealand and Pakistan besides two in West Indies. At home there were repeated triumphs over all opponents, the exception being the loss to Australia in 2004.

There were a few setbacks and the most disastrous was losing both matches in New Zealand in 2002-03. Narrow series defeats in Australia, South Africa (twice) and Sri Lanka (twice) were par for the course, as also a loss in Pakistan. This most productive phase was illustrated by record feats by the batsmen and bowlers.

Tendulkar became the highest run scorer and century maker of all time, Dravid was not far behind and Kumble ended up as the third highest wicket taker in Tests. Sehwag became the first Indian to get a triple hundred and added one more for good measure while Laxman and Gautam Gambhir (briefly) added more than their mite. Harbhajan topped the 400-wicket mark and Zaheer 300. The Indian run machine crossed the 700 mark total more than once, emphasising the fact that the batting line-up was the best in the contemporary game.

The glorious run ended with the series win in the West Indies in 2011. The 4-0 rout at the hands
of England later the same year not only saw India lose the No. 1 ranking but also set the stage for a number of defeats over the next few years, including the first setback at home to England in 2012. But the years 2001-11 will always be fondly remembered by Indian cricket fans. Throw in the 2011 World Cup triumph, the inaugural World T20 triumph in 2007 and being joint champions in the 2002 Champions Trophy, and it can be said even more emphatically that the decade is the greatest in Indian cricket, the disastrous 2007 World Cup campaign notwithstanding.

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

Karthik Balakrishnan is CEO, Printers Mysore

The Printers Mysore, the family-owned publisher of Deccan Herald and Prajavani newspapers and Sudha and Mayura magazines, have announced the appointment of Karthik Balakrishnan as chief executive officer, with a mandate to transform the legacy publisher into a digital-era media group. Balakrishnan, 44, was employed at the Mahindra Group as VP – Marketing. K.N. Tilak Kumar, K.N. Shanth Kumar and Parul Shah, members of the promoter family and whole-time directors, will continue to mentor and guide the company in its transformation journey.

“We come from a rich legacy of journalism and excellence in English and Kannada newspapers. We have decided to take the company forward into the digital age of news and media, and this is one important step in that direction,” said Tilak Kumar, joint MD.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
A gem of a tourist destination

In March this year, Preethi Amaresh escaped from the scorching heat of Chennai and set out for Jammu City. After a long stopover at Delhi airport, she reached Jammu in the evening and settled in for a week-long stay. Notes from her travel diary

Travelling – it leaves you speechless. Then turns you into a storyteller: Ibn Batuta

Jammu is the winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir and the administrative headquarters moves from Srinagar to Jammu for half the year. Movies, poets and storytellers have all portrayed the splendour of Jammu and Kashmir. Snuggled against the backdrop of the snow-capped Pir Panjal Mountains, the Shivalik Hills stretch from the east to the west and Rivers Ravi, Tawi and Chenab run through the region. It was once part of the Harappan civilisation.

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Many scholars and historians believe that Jammu was founded by Raja Jambulochan, and was originally named Jambupur after him. Relics of kingdoms ruled by dynasties such as the Kushans, Mauryas and Guptas have been found in Jammu.

The region is home to the great Vaishno Devi temple. Raja Hari Singh’s palace, overlooking the Tawi River on one side with a view of the Trikuta hills on the other, is a breath-taking building in the art-deco style which originated in France before World War I. The adjacent building is the Amar Mahal Palace of Majaraja Hari Singh. It has now been converted into a heritage

Stunning views of the Bagh Garden (top and above).
hotel by the Raja’s descendants, some of whom are said to be living at one end of the palace. Heritage walks are conducted around the palace to give tourists insights into the history of Jammu and surrounding cities. I got to see the Maharani’s room at the Amar Mahal Palace, and some of the exquisite items she used, giving me a glimpse into her lifestyle. The elevator there is believed to be the first to be installed in the state, and I was happy to get into it though it is no longer in operation. Peer Khoh, a cave shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, located a little distance away from Jammu City, was on my itinerary. The Shiva lingam there is said to have been formed naturally. It is believed that this cave leads to other cave shrines in India and even on the other side of the border.

Bahu Fort built by King Gulab Singh in the 19th Century stands on a high plateau on the left bank of River Tawi. It is believed to be the oldest fort in Jammu. The fort is testimony to the lavishness and richness of the Dogra kings who once ruled the region. There is also a beautiful garden called Bagh-e-Bahu laid out around the fort.

I managed to shoe-horn a visit to the Manda Zoo on my last day in Jammu. Manda Zoo is famous for its flora and fauna. The Himalayan Black Bear is one of species endemic to the region which is housed at the zoo. I also saw peacocks, snakes, monkeys, nilgai (blue bull), porcupine, and exotic birds like the emu.

The unique flora and fauna of the region, the backdrop of snow-capped mountains, Kashmiri food and the wonderful culture of the place make Jammu and Kashmir a perfect tourist destination. You will want to come back again and again.

(The writer is a student of International Relations and a frequent traveller.)
Where power is the ultimate orgasm

He wants his paper to be the biggest English daily in Asia, and is ruthless in his pursuit of this goal – get rid of editors who don’t tow his line, co-opt the mafia to eliminate those who object to his tactics in fashioning the agenda for his paper, including reporters from rival papers engaged in investigating the shady dealings underlying the Sentinel’s rise to pre-eminence.

As someone who worked and written for the mainstream media, I became aware of the kind of ‘deals’ that shape editorial-managerial policy, in the pursuit of profits and rising sales graphs, that this story describes – the editorial agenda is almost always set by the proprietor (not the journalists) based on his or her political-commercial preferences (“We are going to be a business backing publication” – does that ring a bell?).

This also applies to today’s television and social media. Journalists who want to focus on the truth and report objectively sometimes get jettisoned, because the truth doesn’t fit in with the owner’s allegiances – and these allegiances, though reflecting political stances, do not even mean subscribing to those political ideals, it is just a means to push up circulation and readership. This story reflects the sad reality.

Open the day’s paper, and you have to get past two or even three full-page ads before you get to the day’s headlines. Supplements for the day are given over to cars, motoring, travel, real estate or ‘education’ (with plenty of ‘advertorial’ copy on coaching classes or ‘academies’ – the word ‘advertorial’ didn’t exist fifty years ago when I began my journey as a journalist). Every supplement means increased revenue in lakhs – so who’s complaining?

Over 70 per cent of space in each supplement is bought by advertisements. As an exultant Harry observes, “We must have more supplements “and also expand beyond print, to other media, like television, radio, music and entertainment” – which is exactly what has been happening in real life.

Power is the ultimate orgasm, and power translates into sales and profits. If someone believes that power brings with it responsibility, sorry, he/ she has to go. In this ‘corporatised’ media world, the place for ethics keeps shrinking. It is marketing professionals, not editors (however competent) who run the show. The more gory the event reported (riots or Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination) and the more graphic the ‘exclusive’ pictures of tragedy and inhuman violence, the better it is, to “entice readers” as Harry puts it. The Sentinel’s circulation keeps growing – and that’s what counts, for the owner.
There is even a nun in the book who, in the novel’s denouement, turns out to be... but no, I can’t reveal the secret, that would spoil the readers’ excitement. Woven in through the tale are real incidents including the Bofors saga, invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, Indira Gandhi’s Emergency, notorious bandit Veerappan’s kidnapping of matinee idol Raj Kumar, and black money stashed away in Swiss bank accounts.

Some readers could be put off by the extra flowery phrases woven in just for effect (especially at the beginning) but the plot picks up speed in the second half. Here is a smorgasbord that can cater to a variety of readers’ tastes.

(Reviewed by Sakuntala Narasimhan.)

New Media, and India

India experienced its dotcom moment in the early 1990s in the wake of the economic liberalisation policy. Since then, the country has seen an exponential rise in technology, specially the Internet. The Internet has been the fastest growing communication medium in urban areas of the country. By the late Nineties, the personal computer (PC) had come into many homes. The new millennium opened new horizons. There were several phenomenal developments in the telecommunication sector. These had some social ramifications as well.

The recently released book, India Connected – Mapping the Impact of New Media, published by Sage Publications, deals with these key issues. Edited by Sunetra Sen Narayan and Shalini Narayanan, it takes up many pertinent issues related to new media with special emphasis on India. The book is divided into three parts. The theme of Part I is Theoretical Perspectives, Part II is about Politics, Government and the Market and Part III deals with Historical Exclusions.

In the first part, digital divide, diffusion and the influence of ownership patterns in the new media environment are discussed. The first two issues are foundational ones and influence most other aspects of the new media environment while the latter relates to the specific contexts of public participation and influence in production and dissemination of news content. The section also focuses on development and working of government bodies pertaining to information technology and telecommunication, government programmes and project implementation through various projects in India.

In Part II, the effect of social media on politics, how social media has created a new context for political activism, social movements that took place in India, etc are analysed. The practices in e-governance though new media in India and how new media has been regulated by the government as well as Information Communication Technology (ICT) and how it can be used to impart education in schools are also covered here. Current practices of online advertising are explored, too.

The last part of the book deals mostly with injustices meted out to those who do not have access to the Internet, especially women and the disabled. Various projects and forums that have been formed to bring more women into the new media environment are considered. The section also takes up the serious issue of how physically challenged persons are using the Internet and their constraints in accessing certain forms of information. It also discusses the regulations the Government is bringing in to provide inclusivity for the physically challenged and the socially marginalised.

India has been travelling on the information highway for over 25 years now. Though there have been many books in the West on this issue, a comprehensive volume on new media in India was hitherto lacking. From history to regulations to impact, this book covers many areas of the topic. It is invaluable in understanding the current new media milieu in India and where it is heading.

(Reviewed by Sarita Bose.)
An icon, whose ‘fluid brilliance’ sets him apart

The Jnanpeeth Award bestowed recently on poet, essayist and author Sankho Ghosh breaks the 20-year jinx faced by Bengali litterateurs as far as the award goes. Mahasweta Devi was the previous Bengali recipient of the coveted prize. Shoma A. Chatterji says Ghosh is not only a globally acknowledged icon of Bengali literature but is also the greatest living authority on Rabindranath Tagore and his works.

If well-read Bengalis were given adjectives like ‘low-key’, ‘unassuming’, ‘grounded’ and ‘modest’ and told to identify the author they most suited, the answer would certainly be Sankho Ghosh. Despite his failing health, 85-year-old Ghosh attends every function he is invited to, because of his involvement in social, moral and political issues that dog the man in the street. He has never balked at voicing his opinions on critical socio-political issues and is considered by many as the conscience-keeper of Bengal. His lyrics and love poems are always infused with strong social comment.

This writer was introduced to Ghosh at a small function organised in a school hall for a social welfare organisation that spreads awareness about body donation. He came without any accompanying entourage and sat quietly in the seat allotted to him.

Ghosh was among the intellectuals who, a decade ago, led a massive protest against the then ruling party, the CPI-M, going ahead with the 13th Kolkata International Film Festival despite the hundreds of deaths in Nandigram over a land acquisition initiative by the Government.

 Asked for his reaction to being honoured with the Jnanpeeth Award, Ghosh said: “I wouldn’t like to comment on this subject now.” The reticence was not unexpected. At that level, artistes and authors exist in a state of ‘detached attachment and, hence, awards don’t trigger immediate reactions. Many have compared Ghosh’s reserve to Bob Dylan’s initial reaction (or lack of it) to his being awarded the Nobel Prize.

Ghosh’s close friend and author Debesh Roy says Ghosh is greater than any award bestowed on him. “Each of his works is eligible to be read in the highest literary platforms in the world. It is indeed rare to find such synergy between creativity and intellectual depth.”

Ghosh is lyrical and inward-looking in some of his poems. Other poems reflect a sense of anguish towards the superficiality of our society and existence. His commitment as a poet is evident in many of his unforgettable works such as *Murkho baro, samajika naya, chapa srihi karuna*, etc. *Babarera prathana* won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977. He was conferred the title of Desikottam by Vishwabharati in 1999. His poems have been translated into a number of Indian and foreign languages, including English, Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, Assamese and Malayalam.

Born on February 6, 1932 in Chandpur in present-day Bangladesh, Ghosh got his BA degree in Bengali from Presidency College, Calcutta, and his master’s from Calcutta University. He taught at various colleges before retiring in 1992. He also spent time at the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, USA (1967-68), Delhi University, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies at Simla, and Vishwa-bharati, and was principal of Rabindra-Bhavan in Shantiniketan.

In 1994, Papyrus, a noted publishing house in Kolkata, published an English translation of the poet’s work by Nityapriya Ghosh. The book is aptly titled *The Poet’s Intention - The Writer - The Writing - The Reader*. It is a compilation of a three-part talk delivered by Ghosh as Kananbihari Mukhopadhyay Lectures under the auspices of the Tagore Studies Centre of the Rabindrabharati University in 1994. The Bengali transcription of the same lectures was later published by the university, titled *Kabir Abhipray* (The Poet’s Intention).

“Prof Sankho Ghosh represents the fluid brilliance... It is indeed an example of his brilliant fluidity that an author who strove to master Bengali academically, expressed himself in perhaps the most difficult literary genre of poetry,” said former President Pranab Mukherjee handing over the 52nd Jnanpeeth Award to Ghosh.

Photo: SC
On grounds of sheer longevity, Roger Moore scored as James Bond. He not only appeared in seven Bond pictures – the same as Connery – but did the role over 12 years. He was the oldest Bond to make his debut – he was 46 when he starred in Live and Let Die in 1973. By the time he had had enough of the character, he was 58 when he appeared in A View to a Kill. On screen though, he showed remarkable agility while doing the action sequences and retained his boyish charm while romancing the heroine.

It helped that Moore was able to retain his handsome visage over an extended period. With his rugged good looks, impish smile and the natural way he uttered the smart one-liners – so much a part of the Bond persona – he was a natural successor to Connery who made such a success of the role.

In fact, when Moore took over cinema-goers doubted his ability to measure up to the high standards set by the Scotsman. “He is stepping into really big shoes,” was the general refrain. But Moore fit the role so perfectly that he quickly had his own legion of admirers, as Connery had. Also, Moore added a lighter touch to the character made famous by Ian Fleming and this struck a chord with the audience.

Moore will always be associated with James Bond but Moore’s CV included many more credits both on film and the small screen. The London-born Moore studied acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts but got his first breaks in Hollywood playing small but important roles in films such as the Elizabeth Taylor – Van Johnson starrer, The Last Time I Saw Paris and Interrupted Melody, which starred Eleanor Parker and Glenn Ford, both in the mid-1950s before returning to England for a television series, Ivanhoe. He made a few more films and then did another series, The Alaskans. During 1960-61, he replaced the departing James Garner in the fourth season of the western hit, Maverick.

From 1962 to 1969, Moore was Simon Templar, the title character of The Saint, a popular British series about an adventurous, smooth-talking thief. It made him a household name in the entertainment world. Two years later, Moore and Tony Curtis starred in ABC’s one-season series, The Persuaders, as playboy partners solving glamorous European crimes.

Who is the best James Bond of all? There are many who swear by Sean Connery while there are others who love Roger Moore. Moore played Bond in seven films after taking over the role from Connery in 1972. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 2003 for his ‘services to charity’. He passed away in May this year. Partab Ramchand on the virility and charm Moore brought in ample measure while essaying the role of Agent 007.
And then came Moore’s big break when he was offered the role of James Bond. It speaks volumes for Moore’s assuredness that he was always confident of bagging the role despite there being several contenders. There was never really any chance of him going the way of George Lazenby who in fact succeeded Connery but lasted only one film, On Her Majesty’s Secret Service. Connery returned for one final stab at the role in Diamonds are Forever in 1971 but, thereafter, the role was Moore’s to call his own.

And Moore did remarkably well. All his seven films were box-office hits. A Bond film was not really made; it was packaged, and Moore was an integral part of the package.

As the intrepid 007 he blazed his way through the films obliterating sinister enemies with ultra sophisticated violence, all the while enjoying extraordinary success with the pretty women through the 1970s and 80s – in The Man with the Golden Gun, The Spy Who Loved Me, Moonraker, For Your Eyes Only, and Octopussy.

But like Connery before him, Moore was also keen to get away from the Bond image. So it was that even as he playing Bond he appeared in lead roles in movies like Gold, Shout at the Devil, The Wild Geese, North Sea Hijack and the all-star cast, Sea Wolves, with Gregory Peck, Trevor Howard and David Niven.

After surrendering the Bond role to Timothy Dalton, Moore appeared in a half a dozen largely unexceptional movies, made a few television appearances and did voice work in animated films. Mostly, however, he turned his attention elsewhere, becoming a UNICEF goodwill ambassador in 1991. He was made a Commander of the British Empire in 1999 and was knighted in 2003.

Beyond his acting career Moore was an accomplished speaker and a witty raconteur. Asked about his acting technique, Moore replied, “You just have to look at the lines, say them and don’t bump into the furniture.” And queried about his glamorous Bond roles he shot back, “I enjoy being a highly overpaid actor.”
Born on 29th July in 1931, Cingireddy Narayana Reddy, popularly known as CiNaRe, who passed away in June this year, was a remarkable Telugu writer, critic, poet, actor and lyricist, as well as an educationist and an expert on Telugu literature. Pulugurta Chandra Sekhar pays a tribute to the first poet from South India to be nominated to the Upper House of Parliament. He was a recipient of the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan.

CiNaRe also wrote poetry in Hindi and Urdu and his works have been translated into English, French, Sanskrit, Hindi, Malayalam, Urdu and Kannada. His death is an irreparable loss to Telugu culture.

Bucking the worldwide trend, the print media in India has grown by 61 per cent in the last 10 years, figures released by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) show. Average sale of copies per day increased from 3.91 crore in 2006 to 6.28 crore in 2016. ABC, which certifies the circulation figures of publications every six months, reported that the print industry in India has been growing at an “incredible” CAGR of 4.87 per cent over the 10-year period, with 251 publishing centres added to the 659 back in 2006. Growth has been strongest in north India, where print grew by 7.83 per cent CAGR during the period, followed by the south with 4.95 per cent. Much of the growth of the industry is due to the robust growth of regional titles, with Hindi publications topping the list.

The Moghul of Telugu poetry

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REMEMBERING VINOD KHANNA (1946-2017)

A handsome hulk, a star and a versatile actor

It is difficult to identify Vinod Khanna with any particular image. He was tall, dashing and handsome, the kind in whose presence women would swoon. And he was versatile, too. In an age which had stars as well as superstars, he held his own against the likes of Dharmendra, Rajesh Khanna, Jeetendra and Amitabh Bachchan. Partab Ramchand recalls a chance meeting and pays a tribute

It happened nearly 30 years ago and lasted for just a few seconds but the memory has remained intact ever since. I was standing with a friend of mine who was waiting for his car at Park Sheraton (now Crowne Plaza) in Madras. Suddenly, a man came and stood close by. He was also waiting for his car. I looked askance at him for a moment, turned away and then did a double-take as I veered to look at him again disbelieving what I was seeing. “Hey! That’s Vinod Khanna!” I exclaimed excitedly to my friend and for the next few seconds I could not take my eyes off him.

By the time I could recover and run to him to ask for an appointment for an interview for the newspaper I then represented, The Telegraph, he was gone. He was even more handsome than he appeared in films and this was well past his peak period of the 1970s when he was tall, young, gorgeously good-looking with a perfect body, a winsome smile and the inimitable swagger. I understood then why women wanted to be with him and men wanted to be him.

Since Khanna’s death, I have been trying unsuccessfully to find a definitive image of one of the most durable of Bollywood’s leading men. Of course, his rugged good looks will always be the first thing to come to mind but as a star he really had no definitive image. He could be the angry young man, could display his villainous, comic and emotional talents in abundant measure, was an action star par excellence and excelled in straight dramatic roles. As he aged, he tackled patriarch roles with panache. He starred in masala (spicy) films as well as in meaningful movies, being in the comfort zone with both.

So, you see it is difficult to identity Khanna with any particular image or brand. And that in itself is enough to prove his versatility. In an age which had stars and superstars, he held his own against the likes of Rajesh Khanna, Dharmendra, Jeetendra and Amitabh Bachchan. When he was paired with other stars – and he appeared in a number of multi starrers – he still commanded compulsive viewing from cinemagoers. That was because of his magnetic personality that emerged on the big screen complete with good looks, unmistakable talent and a dialogue delivery that was all his own. And there was always that swagger as he walked.

It is a tribute to Khanna that many of his films during a four-decade-long career (excluding the years when he turned his back on stardom and went over to join Rajneesh’s ashram seeking spiritual fulfilment) are still remembered fondly today. Re-runs of his films on the various television channels still draw moviegoers of a new generation.

In his first very first film, playing the villain, he outshone the hero. That speaks volumes of his star quality and acting prowess. Man Ka Meet (1968) was meant to launch Sunil Dutt’s brother Som Dutt but while the film and the new hero sank together, Khanna caught the eye. For the first few years, he continued to play villainous roles with aplomb. Who can forget the menacing dacoit Jabbar Singh in Raj Khosla’s Mera Gaon, Mera Desh (1971) where he proved to be a match for Dharmendra, or as the leader of the rival youth gang along with Shatrughan Sinha in Mere Apne’ released the same year?

In due course, Khanna got the meaty roles he was always marked for and a major turning point was Gulzar’s Achanak (1973), which underlined the fact that he had matured enough to carry a film. Khanna’s controlled performance along with Gulzar’s direction turned the film into a classic. He was initially dismissed by film scribes as a macho man and the handsome star who needed to gear up his acting skills but there was no such criticism after Achanak.

From here on, there was no looking back and in the 1970s and early 80s, Khanna emerged as among the most bankable stars of the industry appearing in one
blockbuster after another, one multi starrer after another. Mannmohan Desai’s Amar Akbar Anthony is easily the most popular but during this prolific period he also did Kache Dhage, Khoon Pasina, Hera Pheri, Parvarish, Haath ki Safai, Lahu ke Do Rang, Muqaddar ka Sikander, The Burning Train, Inkar, Aap ki Khattar and Qurbani.

As is well known, most were box-office hits but Khanna also acted in socially significant films like Intini, loosely based on the Sidney Poitier film, To Sir with Love. Intini had that unforgettable number, Ruk ja na nahi tu kabhi har ke. Here he was enacting a sort of credo, and he carried off the performance with great panache.

Khanna appeared in more than 100 films and he was careful about his roles. He returned from Rajneesh’s ashram deciding that it would be wiser to let his spiritual self coexist with the material world and it is a tribute to Khanna’s star status and acting skills that he remained in demand despite the five-year hiatus. He was wise enough to take up elderly roles but roles with substance – romantic or histrionic roles in Chandni, Jurm, Dayavan, Insaf and Satyamev Jayate – all of which proved to be super hits. His final films as a senior character included Dabangg, Players, Dabangg 2 and Dilwale.

Khanna’s long film career overshadowed his political career but it must not be forgotten that he, unlike other stars whose forays into the political world have been far from notable or downright disastrous, won the Lok Sabha seat from Gurdaspur in Punjab four times on a BJP ticket. He was appointed Tourism minister and minister of state for Foreign Affairs in the Vajpayee Government.

Celluloid mothers in mainstream Hindi cinema have been legends in their own right, carving a niche for themselves. So, whether it is a wicked Lalita Pawar or a dignified Durga Khote, the soppy and sentimental Leela Chitnis or the wronged Mridula, the strong and courageous Nirupa Roy, the warm Farida Jalal or the rough-edged and realistic Rohini Hattangadi, we cannot really forget them. Shoma A. Chatterji says it is truly difficult to even accept that Reema Lagoo, one of the best screen mothers in contemporary Indian cinema, will never ‘mother’ Salman Khan ever again.

RememBerING reemA LAGoo (1958-2017)

A screen mother people loved and could easily relate to

Reema Lagoo came basically from Marathi theatre and stayed on in Bollywood to portray over her long career screen mothers of every hue, ranging from the traditional to the modern. Though she was much in demand in mother’s roles, she was never stereotyped. So, when she passed away suddenly in May this year, at the relatively young age of 59, many heroes who portrayed her sons but were only a few years younger, were shocked. She had no health issues at all and the sudden cardiac arrest which took her away when she had so much more to give to the industry was particularly hard to accept. Lagoo played the mother at a very young age in films like Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, Maine Pyar Kiya, Saajan, Gumrah and Jai Kishen. She debuted in 1979 with the Marathi film, Simhasan, which was an out-of-the-box film filled with political intrigue directed by Jabbar Patel and based on two novels by writer and freelance journalist Arun Sadhu and scripted by Vijay Tendulkar. She had a small role and was practically lost among giant performers ranging from Shreeram Lagoo to a very young Nana Patekar, Arun Joglekar, Mohan Agashe and many others. However, it is also true that she was limited to playing mother’s roles when she could easily have played younger parts, even that of the leading lady.

In what way has the mother’s characterisation metamorphosed over the years? In an interview some time before she passed away, Lagoo said, “While the basic emotions of love and tenderness continue, modern-day mothers are different in the sense that they come across more as a friend to the children. In Hum Aapke Ke Hain Kaun or Maine Pyar Kiya, I was seen as someone with whom children could share their problems. In Aashique, playing a single working mother, I advise the heroine to pursue her dreams
of becoming successful instead of surrendering to the demand of marriage. These mirror the changes in women in the present society. In Naamkarann, I operate the laptop and surf the Net.”

Among the box office hits in which she performed are Gumrah (1993), a crime thriller that became the seventh highest grosser of the year. Other notable films where she left her indelible mark are Rangeela (1995) as Urmila Matondkar’s mother, Yeh Dilli (1994) in which she played a cold-hearted businesswoman, Dilwale (1994), Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998), Kal Ho Na Ho (2003) and, of course, the best performance of her career in Vaastav in which she portrayed the helpless mother of Sanjay Dutt. She also did a controversial role in Rihaee, an off-mainstream film, and the role of a dancer in Aakrosh (1980).

Lagoo was awarded the Maharashtra State Film Award for Best Actress for her performance in the 2002 film, Reshamagaath, which was the celluloid adaptation of a famous Marathi play. Her role in in Janma (2011), which she referred to as “one of the best roles in her career”, received praise. Recognising her contribution to Marathi cinema, she was honoured with the V. Shantaram Award by the Government of Maharashtra.

Lagoo made a success of her career on television also, each of her serials turning out to fetch high TRPs and running for a long time. She did wonderful comic roles in Tu Tu Main Main and Shriman Shrimati and then took a break, returning recently in Naamkaran, telecast on Star Plus, said to be inspired by Mahesh Bhatt’s 1990 film Zakhm. When asked what made her accept the role in Naamkaran after she had withdrawn from television, Lagoo said, “I accepted Naamkaran because of Mahesh Bhatt. I knew that there will be substance in the show and the role offered to me because I had already worked with Mr Bhatt. I was also pulled by the huge canvas and the character, Dayavanti, a grandmother who is a stern, strong, affectionate and humble person, having faced many adverse circumstances. It has many shades that makes it different from most of the roles I have played over my career. Dayavanti is not buttery and flowery but reflects toughness so I am expecting many in the audience to perceive a slant of negativity in it.”

Lagoo leaves behind 40 years in cinema for us to remember her by. She is survived by her daughter Mrunmayee who is a noted stage actress and director in Marathi theatre.
Rammohan Rao passes away

I. Rammohan Rao, former Principal Information officer (PIO) who had served as a media adviser to four prime ministers, passed away at the age of 83. He breathed his last at the Medanta Hospital in Gurgaon where he was admitted for renal ailments, according to his family friends.

Hailing from Karnataka’s South Canara District, Rao started his career with the Information Service in the 1950s. He rose to become the Principal Information officer, the top post in the Central Information Department. Known for his humility and efficient communication skills, Rao had served as media adviser to four former prime ministers — Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh, Chandrashekhar and P.V. Narasimha Rao. He also served as media adviser to the governor of militancy-hit Jammu and Kashmir from 1994 to 1996 when the state was under the governor’s rule.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

T.S.V. Hari is no more

T. S. V Hari, a senior journalist and part of the famed Giri Trading business of Mylapore in Chennai passed away on June 1. He suffered a cardiac arrest.

Hari began his career as a journalist while in his 20s; he worked for Indian Express. He made his name in reportage and field work on bonded labour which was widespread in Andhra Pradesh in the 1980s. He not only reported on the issue but personally led campaigns to rescue bonded labourers and bring them back to their homes amidst heavy opposition and high drama. Hari also reported extensively on other issues and ruffled many people in position. He also chose to be a political activist.

Hari was an associate of writer-political commentator, Cho Ramaswamy and wrote for Cho’s Thuglak magazine under the pseudonym Venkat, and also reported for BBC Radio. His brother, T. S. Ranganathan says Hari was the man behind the Tamil-dubbed version of B. R. Chopra’s Mahabharata, a big hit of the 1990s.

(Courtesy: Mylapore Times)

S. Nandakumar is dead

S. Nandakumar, former controller of Printing of The Hindu Group, passed away recently. He was 75. He served the organisation at different printing centres during a phase in which the technology and techniques of printing were changing rapidly and inexorably.

Nandakumar, a qualified mechanical engineer who joined group in 1965, was involved in the operation in Coimbatore in 1969 when The Hindu, for the first time, started a printing unit outside Madras. A facsimile edition, receiving page images from Madras by means of co-axial cables was set up. In this technical feat of the times, Nandakumar worked under the guidance of G. Kasturi, The Hindu’s editor who had a keen eye for matters of production as well.

Nandakumar was part of the team when the second facsimile edition was launched in Bangalore in 1970. He later served in Madurai when The Hindu launched its first offset printing facility in that city, and then in Hyderabad. Indeed, his forte was high-quality offset printing. From 1985, he headed the overall printing operations from Chennai. Nandakumar led the team that oversaw the introduction of colour in the daily broadsheet editions in 2001. He was associated with the organisation as a consultant until his passing away.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

Press freedom hits lowest point in 13 years, says report


A survey by Freedom House, a US-based human rights organisation, highlighted growing concerns over efforts by governments around the world to clamp down on media and dissent.

“Political leaders and other partisan forces in many democracies -- including the United States, Poland, the Philippines, and South Africa -- attacked the credibility of independent media and fact-based journalism, rejecting the traditional watchdog role of the press in free societies,” said Jennifer Dunham, who headed the research.

In the 2016 study of 199 countries, the group concluded that just 13 per cent of the world’s population enjoys a “free press” where coverage of political news is robust, the safety of journalists guaranteed, state intrusion in media affairs minimal, and the press is not subject to onerous legal or economic pressures. Another 42 per cent of the world’s population has a “partly free” press and 45 per cent live in countries where the media environment is “not free”, the group said.

The report echoed a similar survey released by France-based Reporters without Borders, which said press freedom is facing serious threats in 72 countries, downgrading the rankings of the United States, Britain and others. The Freedom House report said press rights are being eroded by the efforts
of politicians in democratic states to shape news coverage and delegitimise media outlets. “When politicians lambaste the media, it encourages their counterparts abroad to do the same,” Freedom House president Michael Abramowitz said.

Press freedom was on a modest decline in the United States even before Trump took office because of the industry’s financial woes and news organisations’ increasingly partisan positions, the report said. The worst scores for press freedom went to North Korea, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and the top to Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden. The global average fell to new lows.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

Investigative journalism a challenge today

Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age is a new global study produced by WAN-IFRA for UNESCO that examines the growing risks confronting forms of journalism dependent upon confidential sources and whistleblowers. It finds that the legal frameworks that support protection of journalistic sources, at international, regional and country levels, are under significant strain – a development that is seen to represent a direct challenge to the established universal human rights of freedom of expression and privacy, and one that especially constitutes a threat to the sustainability of investigative journalism.

The study, authored by former World Editors Forum/ WAN-IFRA Research fellow Julie Posetti, covers 121 UNESCO Member States and represents a global benchmarking of journalistic source protection in the Digital Age. It was launched on World Press Freedom Day (May 3rd) during celebrations in Jakarta.

In many of the countries examined in this study, it was found that legal source protection frameworks are being actually or potentially:

- Overridden by national security and anti-terrorism legislation
- Undercut by surveillance – both mass and targeted
- Jeopardised by mandatory data retention policies and pressure applied to third party intermediaries - like ISPs, telcos, search engines, social media platforms - to release data which risks exposing sources
- Outdated when it comes to regulating the collection and use of digital data, such as whether information recorded without consent is admissible in a court case against either a journalist or a source, and whether digitally stored material gathered by journalistic actors is covered by existing source protection laws.
- Challenged by questions about entitlement to claim protection - as underscored by the questions: “Who is a journalist?” and “What is journalism?”

The study identifies 13 key findings:

- The issue of source protection has come to intersect with the issues of mass surveillance, targeted surveillance, data retention, the spillover effects of anti-terrorism/national security legislation, and the role of third party Internet companies known as “intermediaries.
- Legal and regulatory protections for journalists’ sources are increasingly at risk of erosion, restriction and compromise.
- 84 UNESCO Member States out of 121 studied (69 per cent) for this report demonstrated developments relevant to the protection of confidentiality of journalistic sources, mainly with actual or potential impact, between 2007 and mid-2015.
- Individual states face a need to introduce or update source protection laws.
- Source protection laws need to cover journalistic processes and communications with confidential sources – including telephone calls, social media, messaging apps, and emails – along with published journalism that depends on confidential sources.
- Transparency and accountability regarding both mass and targeted surveillance, and data retention, are critically important if confidential sources are to be able to continue to confidently make contact with journalists.
- Without substantial strengthening of legal protections and limitations on surveillance and data retention, investigative journalism that relies on confidential sources will be difficult to sustain in the digital era, and reporting in many other cases will encounter inhibitions on the part of potential sources.
- It is recommended to define ‘acts of journalism’, as distinct from the role of ‘journalist’, in determining who can benefit from source protection laws.
- To optimise benefits, source protection laws should be strengthened in tandem with legal protections extended to whistleblowers, who constitute a significant set of confidential journalistic sources.
- Journalists are increasingly adapting their practice in an effort to partially shield their sources from exposure, but steps to limit anonymity and encryption undermine these adaptations.
- The financial cost of the digital era source protection threat is significant (in terms of digital security tools, training, and legal advice), as is its impact on the production and scope of investigative journalism based on confidential sources.
• There is a need to educate both journalists and citizens in digital safety.
• Journalists and others who rely on confidential sources to report in the public interest may need to train their sources in secure methods of contact and information-sharing.
• While traditional legal frameworks for source protection remain strong in some states, and are progressing in others, they are under significant risk from a combination of developments. These are caused, for the most part, by digital disruption, and by overreach in measures that are introduced in the name of national security or combating crime.

The findings are based on an examination of the legal source protection frameworks in each country, drawing on academic research, online repositories, reportage by news and human rights organisations, more than 130 survey respondents and qualitative interviews with nearly 50 international experts and practitioners globally. Seventeen international researchers and research assistants contributed to the research.

Free press under threat in country: Justice A.P. Shah

Underscoring the need for journalists not to allow news to become a market-driven product, former judge Ajit Prakash Shah said there has been an increase in instances of the commodification of the country’s news media. Speaking in Chennai at the 17th convocation of the Asian College of Journalism, Justice Shah said this “commodification” of journalism “compromises information that is being relayed” to people. “This, in turn, directly affects the decisions that people make on a daily basis.”

The former Chief Justice of the Delhi and Madras High courts, delivering the Lawrence Dana Pinkham Memorial Lecture on World Press Freedom Day and speaking on the theme ‘Free Press and the Laws of Contempt, Defamation and Sedition’, said ‘free press’ “as we know it is under threat”. The recent ranking of India at 136th among 180 countries in the world press freedom ratings is a reflection of this trend, Justice Shah said. He also warned, if only implicitly, against against fear of libel impinging on journalism’s quest to tell the truth and how this suppresses the press.

In view of the many defamation suits that complainants have filed against journalists across the country, Justice Shah said, journalists should be more aware of the laws that govern them and the rights that they are entitled to before they act in fear of possible cases of defamation. “Whether it is the laws of defamation or the laws of contempt or laws of sedition — all of these are routinely and worryingly used against the press in India,” he said. Students from the four media departments — print, new media, television and radio — of Asian College of Journalism received their diplomas.

(Courtesy: The Times of India/ The Hindu)

WAN-IFRA joins Audience Measurement Coalition

WAN-IFRA, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, has joined forces with a group of leading associations representing the audience measurement ecosystem to support the European Union in its efforts to reform the ePrivacy Directive. The Coalition for Audience Measurement is composed of global and European associations representing the interests of stakeholders that use audience measurement to help finance news media offers to the public.

“In the digital age, our business models require the transparent and secure use of data. An independent press that serves Europe’s public interest must be able to compete effectively with its global competitors. Audience measurement is an essential tool for the industry,” says Gerald Grünberger, chair of WAN-IFRA’s Member Associations Directors Committee.

Audience measurement is a vital tool for media companies to analyse traffic flows and content performance. The coalition sets out to inform lawmakers about the functions of audience measurement and the value it brings to society. Specifically, without those measurements, media organisations would not be able to prove their comparative value to their partners, and advertisers would be prevented from measuring the effectiveness of their ad placements. If news media companies cannot reliably track the performance of their websites, their capacity to secure revenues to finance their online operations will be seriously hampered.

The audience-focused era has arrived

The results of WAN-IFRA’s annual survey depict an industry that is increasingly building loyal audiences around its high-quality journalism, as the shift to reader-based revenue continues. The World Press Trends survey includes data from more than 70 countries, accounting for more than 90 per cent of the global industry’s value. The data is provided by dozens of national newspaper and news media associations, with additional information coming from global suppliers: Zenith, IPSOS, PwC and Chartbeat.

In its 2017 World Press Trends study, WAN-IFRA estimates that 56 per cent of newspapers’ overall revenue came from circulation sales (print and digital) in 2016. “The shift from advertising to reader-based revenue is reshaping the fundamentals of our industry,” says WAN-IFRA CEO Vincent Peyrène,
who presented the key findings from the global study at the 69th World News Media Congress and 24th World Editors Forum in Durban, South Africa. “We have entered a pivotal moment,” he continued, “and more than ever our focus needs to be on our audience and producing high-quality, engaging journalism.”

Interestingly, the trend continues to emerge at a time when survey after survey reveals that people around the world are not only losing their trust in media, but societal institutions in general. “The decline in trust is the biggest risk we face as an industry, and all our efforts must be with the aim of getting it back,” Peyrègne says. “We used to trade in attention. But trust is our new currency. Any decline in trust erodes the foundation of our business: credible, first-rate journalism.”

A fundamental shift in the newspaper business model took place two years ago, when reader revenue became the biggest source of revenue for news publishers. Global digital circulation revenues grew by 28 per cent from 2015 to 2016, and a full 300 per cent from 2012 to 2016, with the trend expected to continue. Despite that, total global newspaper revenues fell 2.1 percent in 2016 from a year earlier, and are down 7.8 percent over the last five years. Advertising revenues continue to decline in most markets, although there are notable exceptions in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Michael Golden elected president of WAN-IFRA

During the 69th WAN-IFRA’s annual congress in Durban, South Africa, Michael Golden, vice chairman of the Board of New York Times, was elected president of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers. The association also appointed a new treasurer and a new president of the World Editors Forum. Sixteen executives from leading news media companies were also elected to new terms on the Boards of WAN-IFRA and the World Editors Forum.

Michael Golden was elected by WAN-IFRA members at the World News Media Congress, World Editors Forum and Women in News Summit in Durban, South Africa. About 700 publishers, editors, journalists, and other senior news executives from around the world attended the events, which continue through Friday. Golden succeeds Tomas Brunegard, who was elected president of WAN-IFRA in 2013.

No GST on books, but prices set to rise

Book lovers and students will now have to pay more as books will become costlier by 10-20 per cent under the Goods and Services Tax regime. Though books continue to remain exempt under GST, but inputs such as printing, binding and royalties to authors now attract tax at 12 per cent. Since the publishers don’t get input tax credit, they now propose to pass it on to customers.

“Books are not taxable under GST, but we are at a disadvantage as we lose out on input tax credit. Prices of books will increase by 15 per cent to 20 per cent,” says Amit Bhargava, director of Taxmann. The company publishes legal books on topics such as direct and indirect tax laws, banking and company laws that are also used by University students. Starting July 1, it has already hiked prices of books to reflect the changes with GST. But on the ground, it is unlikely that prices of your favourite bestseller would have increased immediately, although retailers expect a hike in the coming months.

Nabhi Kumar Jain, owner of Jain Book Depot, the iconic landmark located in Connaught Place, believes consumers are bound to see the impact of GST on books in the next one or two months. Jain who also run Nabhi Publications, said, “We have not changed the MRP of books currently but we believe books will see an upward revision in prices in the next 1-2 months.” Publishers of school textbooks are also planning to hike prices, but it is expected from the next academic session.

Subash Goel, treasurer, Federation of Educational Publishers in India, said, “We believe that MRP of books could go up by 12-15 per cent as costs of publishers have gone up under the GST regime.” He added the 12 per cent GST being imposed on author royalties will be through reverse charges so publishers will not be able to avail themselves of any input tax credit on this cost. The GST on royalties is being seen as the biggest challenge by the industry, which will neither help the publisher, the reader or the author.

As a special concession for young children, the GST Council had decided to lower the rate on exercise books to 12 per cent from the earlier proposal of 18 per cent and had altogether exempted colouring books used by small children from the tax.

(Courtesy: BusinessLine)
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