



## Under pressure

Why police investigators should not jump to conclusions, influenced by public outrage

The poor quality of police investigation in the country has once again come under focus. The twist in the probe into the murder of a seven-year-old boy at a school in Gurugram, Haryana, in September exposes how unreliable the police can be when it comes to investigating grave crimes amidst a public outcry and close media scrutiny. The Central Bureau of Investigation now claims that it was a 16-year-old student who murdered Pradyuman Thakur at the Ryan International School, and not the bus conductor arrested earlier for the offence by the local police. If the latest account is true, the police must explain why it made the sensational claim that Ashok Kumar, the conductor of the school bus, had committed the murder in the school's washroom on September 8, and that he had "confessed" to it. The motive, the police had claimed, was that the child had resisted his attempt to sexually assault him. The CBI says that in fact a Class XI student had killed his junior school mate in a bid to get examinations postponed and a parent-teacher meeting called off. Closed-circuit television footage is cited as a crucial piece of evidence against the senior student, who is now under arrest, although the CBI says the role of Ashok Kumar remains under investigation. In their eagerness to show results and demonstrate their efficiency, the Gurugram police announced the bus conductor's arrest on the very night of the murder. Reports that the school's bus driver was under pressure to identify the knife allegedly used in the murder to be part of the bus toolkit add to the suspicion that the police were trying to frame the conductor.

Given the media glare that accompanies such tragedies, the police must learn not to succumb to the temptation to wrap up probes under public pressure. That the police had to extract a false confession is downright disgraceful, but it is not an isolated case in a country known for its primitive investigative methods. Studies on police reforms have highlighted the need to make the investigation process more scientific and more rooted in forensic analysis, but custodial torture and extracted confessions continue to be reported. The muddle in the Aarushi-Hemraj murder case probe is a telling example of how both the local police and the CBI can botch up the investigation and lead to unfair incarceration. When two narratives emerge from different police agencies for a heinous murder, a sense of disquiet among the public is inevitable. The onus is now on the CBI to avoid such pitfalls and show that the initial narrative was false and its subsequent account is closer to the truth. Another notable feature of the case is that there is a likelihood of the 16-year-old suspect being tried as an adult under provisions introduced in juvenile law in 2016. It would be unfortunate if these provisions were to be reflexively invoked.

## Zimbabwean stakes

Robert Mugabe chooses his wife over a long-time colleague

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's decision to fire his Vice-President Emmerson Mnangagwa, citing disloyalty and deceitfulness, has triggered another political crisis ahead of next year's presidential election. Mr. Mnangagwa was Mr. Mugabe's right-hand man in the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) and was widely tipped to be his successor. But there were murmurs in recent months that Mr. Mnangagwa and Grace Mugabe, the President's second wife, were involved in a shadow fight for influence. The Zanu-PF has announced that the 93-year-old Mr. Mugabe will be its presidential candidate for next year's election. But given his age and health, in the event of a victory the Vice-President's post would set up the incumbent for the big succession. By firing Mr. Mnangagwa, Mr. Mugabe appears to have turned the tide in favour of his wife. Ruling party factions have started promoting Ms. Mugabe's name as the next Vice-President and the party is expected to make an announcement next month. The Zanu-PF has also launched a crackdown on those who were linked to Mr. Mnangagwa, who has fled the country. Mr. Mnangagwa's exit could hurt the President politically. He has been a heavyweight in the faction-ridden Zanu-PF for a long time. He is being alienated at a time when a seven-party Opposition alliance was planning a joint candidate against Mr. Mugabe to capitalise on the widespread public discord over economic miseries.

Mr. Mugabe, a former Marxist guerrilla who came to power in 1980 riding on strong anti-colonial sentiments and promises to reshape the country's future, has instead overseen a rapid deterioration of the economy in recent years. Following unbridled hyperinflation, Zimbabwe had to scrap its dollar altogether in 2015 and adopt a multi-currency system, which has done little to ease cash shortages. The country's infrastructure is crumbling and government services are a shambles. But public resentment and opposition unity may not necessarily lead to Mr. Mugabe's electoral defeat. In the 37 years of his rule he has shown that he enjoys considerable support, particularly among the black working population, and is ready to go to any extreme to retain his grip on power. Barring a brief period when he was forced to reach a power-sharing agreement with the opposition, Mr. Mugabe has largely had his own way in governance. The stakes are high in the coming election, with Ms. Mugabe having publicly expressed her desire to succeed the President and the Zanu-PF facing a split after Mr. Mnangagwa's expulsion. All this points to more chaos, at a time when the government's focus should be on addressing the economic challenges. For his part, Mr. Mugabe should allow a free and fair election to take place next year and ensure a smooth transition of power, both within the party and in the government. It's time he finally acted like a statesman.

# Night of the long knives in Riyadh

Saudi palace politics has entered a destabilising phase, and its impact is already being felt across West Asia



STANLY JOHNY

When the King of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdulaziz, removed Mohammed bin Nayef as Crown Prince in June and appointed his favourite son, Mohammed bin Salman, as the next in the line to the throne, many had warned of brewing instability in the House of Saud. Prince Mohammed bin Nayef has hardly been seen since then, with some reports claiming he's under house arrest. The early morning developments on Sunday when 11 princes and senior government ministers and officials were arrested on orders from Crown Prince Mohammed suggest those warnings were realistic. Two of the princes arrested were Mutaib bin Abdullah, son of the late King Abdullah, King Salman's half-brother, and Alwaleed bin Talal, one of the richest men in the Arab world.

The official explanation is that the arrests were carried out as part of an anti-corruption campaign spearheaded by MBS, as Crown Prince Mohammed is widely known. Some others see MBS as "a risk-taking reformer" who is challenging both the establishment royals as well as the Wahhabi-Salafi clergy of the Kingdom to reshape the country.

It is too early to reach any such conclusions. Beyond the reform and anti-corruption banners which the pro-MBS factions are propagating, what is actually unfolding in the House of Saud is an unprecedented power struggle in which the 32-year-old Crown Prince is trying to amass as much



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power as possible in his hands before his 81-year-old father leaves the throne.

The anti-corruption campaign looks more like another weapon for MBS to consolidate his position. The committee chaired by him that ordered the arrests was announced only hours before the purge was carried out. The reform promises he's made will be tested in the days to come. The Vision 2030 plan, which MBS unveiled earlier to reduce Saudi dependence on oil, has been a non-starter. Even in his promise to allow women to drive, he has simply given in to long-standing demands from within and abroad, and hasn't signalled if he would go beyond it to usher in other reforms that would provide more freedoms.

### Pattern in the purges

On the other hand, there's a pattern in the purges. When King Salman ascended the throne in January 2015, initially he was careful not to disrupt the balance within the palace even as he made MBS, his favourite son, the Defence Minister. He first appointed Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, the Deputy Crown Prince and a loyalist of King Abdullah, as the Crown Prince and al-

lowed Mutaib bin Abdullah, King Abdullah's son, to continue as the chief of the National Guard. But in a few months, King Salman replaced Prince Muqrin with Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, and thereby ensured that the leadership of the three branches of the Saudi armed forces was distributed among the three powerful branches of the family - MBS to control the regular army as the Defence Minister, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef to oversee the interior ministry and intelligence, and Prince Mutaib to head the National Guards, whose job is to protect the royal family.

MBS first targeted Prince Nayef in the June surprise. He got the King to remove his cousin as the Crown Prince. By removing Prince Nayef, he has also brought the Interior Ministry and Saudi intelligence under his control. The arrest of Prince Mutaib on Sunday fits into the pattern. Prince Mutaib was removed as the National Guard Minister hours before his arrest. Now, MBS is practically in charge of all branches of the Saudi armed forces. He already controlled the Royal Court and had taken over economic policies. The latest arrests also allow him to tighten his grip over the country's media.

Saleh Abdullah Kamel, Waleed Albrahim and Prince Alwaleed, the respective owners of Arab Media Company, Middle East Broadcasting Corporation and Rotana media groups, are now behind bars. Of these, Prince Alwaleed has formidable financial resources and enjoys warm ties with several Western governments and corporations. He was also reportedly close to deposed Crown Prince Nayef.

The way MBS has consolidated power in less than three years in a country that's run on patronage, tribal loyalty, tradition and royal consensus is unprecedented. No Crown Prince in years, if not decades, has enjoyed the kind of authority he now wields. But the repeated purges indicate not only MBS's growing clout but also turbulent politics within the palace. The kind of instability Saudi Arabia sees now where even a powerful former Crown Prince is not seen in public for months and the chief of the National Guards is put under arrest is uncharted terrain.

In his rise, MBS has already upset tradition, broken consensus and turned against the sheikhs. Dealing with the crisis his actions have generated will be his first post-purge challenge. As of now, all the arrested princes are housed in Riyadh's Ritz Carlton (in picture). Is MBS going to prosecute them, transfer them to a prison, force them to flee or buy their loyalty in return for their freedom? He has already confiscated some of their assets. Former Crown Prince Muqrin's son died in a helicopter crash near the Saudi-Yemeni border while reportedly fleeing the country. Will the wounded princes and the sheikhs who back them accept MBS as their future King?

### New theatre of conflict

Answers to these questions will seal Saudi Arabia's future. But the

regional repercussions of the crisis at home are already visible. It need not be a coincidence that hours before the purge was carried out, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who was leading a unity government in which Hezbollah, the Shia party, was a part, announced his resignation while in Riyadh, blaming Iranian influence in Lebanese politics. It's quite an unusual way for a country's Prime Minister to announce his resignation from another country, blaming it on a third nation. But Saudi Arabia wasted no time in stepping up its anti-Iran, anti-Hezbollah rhetoric citing Mr. Hariri's resignation, while Lebanon sank into another spell of uncertainty. This could be MBS's plan to open another front against Tehran, which fits into his disruptive, anti-Iran regional approach. It's evident from his policy adventures over the past three years - be it the bombing of Yemen, the proxy war in Syria, the blockade of Qatar or the formation of a Sunni coalition - that he's using the anti-Iran plank for support at home and dominance in the region. Unsurprisingly, he is playing the same card again when palace politics boils over.

However, MBS's track record is dismal. At best, he is a disruptive force, but a bad manager of the outcomes. Three years since it started bombing Yemen, Saudi Arabia is now groping in the dark for a solution. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad won the civil war. Qatar refused to toe the Saudi line despite the pressure, threats and blockade. But failures clearly do not stop him from moving on to Lebanon. And if the instability at home worsens, which is the likely scenario, Riyadh will turn up the heat on Hezbollah, drawing Iran closer into a larger conflict.

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## For a wider cover

India needs to design its tree-based programmes better to meet climate goals



ROHINI CHATURVEDI

In 2015, India made a Bonn Challenge commitment to place into restoration 13 million hectares (Mha) of degraded land by 2020 and an additional 8 Mha by 2030. India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) have also pledged to sequester 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent additionally by 2030 through enhanced tree cover. Initial government estimates suggest that to achieve this, India will need to extend tree cover on at least 28-34 million hectares, outside of the existing forest cover.

As different States work to achieve these commitments, it appears that there is an over-reliance on plantations. In July this year, Madhya Pradesh planted 66 million trees in 12 hours to enter the record books, overtaking Uttar Pradesh's record of planting 49.3 million trees in a day, in 2016. Other States are also expected to follow suit.

### Improving ecology

Notably, neither the Bonn Challenge nor the NDCs are about large-scale plantations alone. The Bonn

Challenge, for instance, lays emphasis on landscape approaches - a model aimed at improving the ecology of a landscape as a whole in order to benefit local livelihoods and conserve biodiversity. The NDC lays emphasis not only on carbon sequestration but also adaptation to climate change through a strengthened flow of benefits to local communities that are dependent on forests and agriculture for sustenance.

This also reflects the spirit of India's policy framework on forests which lays emphasis on a landscape approach to manage forest and tree cover, so that the flow of multiple ecosystem services - including food security, climate mitigation and adaptation, conservation of biological diversity and water supplies - is secured.

In this context, large-scale plantation drives, which often do not lay stress on species selection, the quality of planting materials or survival rates, nor recognise tenure and resource rights to ensure that the benefit flows to communities, do not really achieve the goals. Plantations do have their space, but as one among a larger suite of interventions. However, to operationalise a landscape approach, we must protect healthy forest areas from deforestation, degradation and fragmentation. We must also creatively integrate trees into different land uses.



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India has numerous models that are suited for different regions and farm household sizes to draw upon, and must not rely on plantation drives alone to secure environmental and developmental outcomes.

### Tree-based interventions

The nation practises at least 35 types of agroforestry models that combine different trees that provide timber, fruits, fodder, fuel and fertilizers with food crops. This diversifies income from farming, and improves land productivity. Farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR) systems where farmers protect and manage the growth of trees and shrubs that regenerate naturally in their fields from root stock or from seeds dispersed through animal manure can also deliver several economic and ecosystem benefits.

In Niger, West Africa, farmers operating on 5 Mha of land added

roughly 200 million on-farm trees using FMNR in the past 30 years. This has sequestered 25-30 million tonnes of carbon and increased annual agricultural production by about 500,000 tonnes.

In India, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development's (NABARD's) 'Wadi' model and the Foundation for Ecological Security's re-greening of village commons projects are good examples of tree-based interventions which are proving to have great value in terms of cost-effectiveness as well as the range of benefits they deliver to communities.

An important success factor in large-scale tree-based programmes is security of tenure and land rights. In several parts of the world, securing tenure over forests has been established as a cost-effective way of achieving climate sequestration. In Brazil, for instance, the average annual costs of providing communities with secure rights to their forest is \$1.57 (₹103) per hectare (ha) while the resulting carbon-mitigation benefits range from \$38/ha to \$230/ha per year. That's a net value of \$1,454-1,743/ha for a period of 20 years.

It is also important to have in place a performance monitoring system to quantify tree survival rates and the benefits to communities. This can be achieved through a combination of remote sensing, crowd sourced, ground-

level monitoring with support from communities and civil society organisations.

### Better to ROAM?

As we regenerate trees through different interventions, it is critical to ensure that owners have the right to manage and use these trees. It is also critical to use scientific evidence-based methodology with a participatory approach to determine the right type of tree-based interventions most suitable to a certain land use. A tool called the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM) is being used in 40 countries to find the best methods for landscape restoration. The tool includes rigorous analysis of spatial, legal and socio-economic data and draws on consultations with key stakeholders to determine the right type of interventions. In India, this tool is being piloted in Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh.

India has the policy framework, the political will and financing to endorse landscape restoration. What we really need now is innovation and imagination to build replicable and scalable models with a participatory approach to achieve the country's climate goals through landscape restoration.

Dr. Rohini Chaturvedi is Director, Landscape Restoration Program, WRI India

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### An economic reset

In his article, "The great reset, a year later" (November 9), the writer has attempted to prove that demonetisation is not a Kafkaesque nightmare that is largely an attempt to spruce up the Indian economy by eliminating corruption and black money. He gracefully accepts it has been an ill-executed exercise. Therefore, the unanswered question is whether the government has been successful in eliminating corruption and black money. Why is the government still struggling to bring back black money "stashed in foreign banks"? Will the government ensure that the digital money transactions are foolproof? Is it a fact that only a fraction of society is ready to travel on the cashless highway? Finally, will there be an economic recovery? C. RAJASEKARAN, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu

Contra to all assertions, it is accepted even by the government that

demonetisation did not ensure what was hoped. That the economy took a knock has been conceded. The whole exercise behind demonetising high denomination currency was ill-planned and poorly executed. What happened on the ground was radically different. The poor and the elderly like me were left stranded and compelled to wait in long queues. This trauma was all the more tragic as they only wished to withdraw their money which surely was not illegal. During this period we never saw the influential and the well-heeled standing in any queue anywhere as they were well taken care for. The sudden withdrawal of ₹500 and ₹1,000 notes not only battered India's currency-reliant poor and middle classes but also left the adept tax evaders unscathed. Paul Krugman, economist and Nobel laureate, said, in a newspaper interview, that the gains from demonetisation were "uncertain" and that the

government move was "highly disruptive". This was amply proved with frequent tweaking of the terms of demonetisation by as many as 60 notifications. The claim that stone throwing in Kashmir has come down due to demonetisation is beside the point. H.N. RAMAKRISHNA, Bengaluru

No expertise in economics is required to assess the impact of demonetisation, and now the GST, on the Indian economy. Demonetisation helped to wipe out black money to a large extent and the GST helped not only to reduce trade barriers across the country but also to put an end to bureaucratic corruption along State borders. Now, whatever tax is collected will go directly to the State exchequer. When a hard decision is taken, there will be temporary setbacks. Wiping out black money and measures against an economy built on speculation are steps in the

right direction. GDP growth is not the real measure to assess the health of an economy. How far the country is able to build an economy in real terms is more important. The great achievements of the present government are a scam-free three years of governance and also the fight against the parallel economy. SURESH RANGARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram

The assumption that the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) formula has not been fulfilled is unacceptable. The fact is that the MUDRA scheme has made a substantial difference on the ground. Small women entrepreneurs and business units run by women are the largest beneficiaries. The scheme is also the world's largest financial inclusion campaign. Moreover, banks have been asked to give reasons for rejection of applications. This being the case, jumping to make a wrong

conclusion is unexplainable. Another fact is that those who run small businesses having to run from pillar to post to avail of loans from banks cannot be discounted. SHEFA RAJI, Coimbatore

### Customer and bank

The "bail-in" clause of the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance (FRDI) Bill, 2017, can be disastrous as it could foster feelings of insecurity about one's money in the bank ("Banking on legislation", November 9). The agenda of financial inclusion must not suffer from such ill-perceived schemes. Non-performing asset-ridden public sector banks must be bailed out by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India, the Public Asset Rehabilitation Agency Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets, Strategic Debt Restructuring and Mission Intradhanush, thereby tackling bad debts while keeping customer

confidence intact. This becomes more essential as savings growth is pertinent in boosting the investment climate of the nation. ANJALI B., Thiruvananthapuram

### Air most foul

Delhi: A gas chamber The footage of Delhi engulfed in smoke is worrying (Editorial - "Capital crisis", November 9). The capital city is like a gas chamber which should set off emergency measures such as sprinkling water, banning construction and stopping the entry of trucks carrying non-essential goods to check pollution. We claim that we are poised to be a superpower, but are nowhere near adopting a method to dispose of crop waste after the harvest without causing pollution. An alternative to stubble burning is said to be possible for a 'measly' ₹300 crore! G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

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