

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

View from city's margins

Among urban poor, demonetisation has taken an untold toll. Government schemes are a mixed blessing



ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

QUESTION OF ANSWERS

Opposition alliance in-the-making cannot kick issues of post-poll leadership and agenda down the road

THE BATTLEFIELD FOR the upcoming general election is still being set, but an overarching theme appears to be taking shape. The Opposition is counting on a grand alliance to take on the ruling regime — a coming together of unlikely allies and longtime rivals, as was showcased in the Saturday press conference in Lucknow and then a week later, on a Kolkata stage, where an array of leaders was on eye-catching display. From the other side of the fence, the BJP has seized upon the same photo-up and is trying to turn it to its own advantage: It will be Modi against an “unviable and unworkable short-lived combination”, or “Modi vs chaos”, Minister Arun Jaitley has written in a blog. He has warned of one-too-many “desirable Prime Ministers” armed only with negative agendas, a “post-election leadership battle, no common programme, no policy and a disastrous memory of their administrative disabilities”. Shorn of the adjectives and stripped to its core, Jaitley has summed up the question that will be asked of the Opposition: What happens once the election is won?

For now, the parties that make up the Opposition alliance in-the-making have refused to answer that question, or dismissed its importance. The urgent imperative is to remove the Narendra Modi regime, they reason, and the rest can be left for later. The compelling task, goes their argument, is to ensure the defeat of a government that has presided over farmer distress, jobs crisis, oppression of the backward castes, persecution of minorities, undermining of institutions. The matter of who will be the prime minister, and what will be the agenda of the government he or she leads, can wait, they suggest. In 2019, however, those questions may not wait for later. This is because this parliamentary election will take place in a political moment that is substantively different from those that have gone before it. Coalition experiments in the 1990s unfolded in the context of a Congress in decline, and a BJP not yet dominant. Even in 1971, the battle Jaitley has invoked as a parallel to 2019 in his blog, Opposition parties had forged a grand alliance, unsuccessfully as it turned out, against Indira Gandhi in a moment when the Congress had just split into two.

Because it is ranged against an opponent like the Modi-Shah BJP — which, despite its recent electoral setbacks, has a strong will to power, an organised party machine and a honed political communication strategy — the Opposition must know that it may not have the room or option, anymore, to push certain post-poll questions to the poll aftermath. The time to find the answers, and to present them to the people, is now.

MISREADING NORTHEAST

BJP's framing of Citizenship (Amendment) Bill as the unfinished agenda of Partition is misconceived and dangerous

THE NORTHEAST HAS become restive ever since the Centre decided to amend the Citizenship Act. The BJP, which has piloted the amendment in Parliament, has disregarded the objections to the amendment in the Northeast, especially in the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam. It ignored the criticism of Opposition parties and got the Bill passed in the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session. The Bill is now pending in the Rajya Sabha, where the NDA is in a minority. The BJP has countered the protests against the Bill by claiming that “lies were being told and misinformation spread”. Senior leader and the party's point person for the Northeast, Ram Madhav, has sought to justify the amendment, which seeks to privilege the claims of non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan to Indian citizenship, in the context of the Subcontinent's Partition — as its unfinished agenda, as it were. This, clearly, is a misreading of history, especially of its several and complex trajectories in the Northeast which will not be subsumed by an imposed Hindu-Muslim binary.

The signs have been ominous from the beginning. Protests were held in the Brahmaputra Valley when the Joint Parliamentary Committee visited Assam against the Bill and mobilisations in the Barak Valley supported it. An old linguistic faultline in Assam had been reopened. When the BJP refused to back down despite the protests and shut-downs in Assam, the Asom Gana Parishad walked out of the NDA and the BJP-led government in Guwahati. After the Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha, almost the entire political spectrum in the Northeast spoke out against the legislation. The BJP's own chief minister in Manipur, N Biren Singh, has said that the state is opposed to the Bill in the present form. Now, at least five MLAs of the Assam BJP have said that they are opposed to the Bill. The BJP should, at the very least, listen to the dissenting voices within its own ranks since it has chosen to shut out the criticism from civil society, Opposition parties and even allies.

Ram Madhav and other BJP leaders seem confident that their (mis)reading of history and historical processes can prevail in the Northeast. In fact, a similar indifference to local sensitivities has already cost the BJP its alliance and government in J&K. The party appears to have embarked on the same journey in the Northeast. However, the BJP's pursuing of its ideological agendas in these states has troubling implications beyond the party's own electoral destiny — it could stoke disquiet on India's frontiers.

DIGITAL OFFERINGS

#10YearChallenge makes it clear that privacy concerns are no match for a well-timed hashtag

TEN YEARS AGO, it was 10 years ago. That's what logicians call a tautology and what everyone else calls nonsense — a long-winded way of saying nothing at all. But add a hashtag, and in the age of social media, you have a “viral phenomenon”. Over the last few weeks, digital daredevils have taken on the #10YearChallenge, and everyone from celebrities on Twitter to the aunt who just discovered Auntie from Pune's real name to “look how thin I grew!” — or the unending false praise whose gist is that those with the courage to dig up a photograph a few scrolls away are spared the ravages of time, it is easy to ask — where's the harm? After all, much of the time spent on social media is essentially wasted anyway, and if some people can receive some positive affirmation and a temporary sense of self-worth by posting a pair of photographs, all the better. And with or without the #10YearChallenge, people will while away their time on social media.

But the one big difference between 2009 and 2019 is that social media giants have lost their halo, and “building a community” is seen by many as an excuse to collect and monetise the data of users. The Algorithm towers above and spreads throughout with its omnipresence, logging every little share, message, post, tweet and even, in some cases, emails. Like all gods, though, it seems the digital deity needs offerings, despite its power. And, it appears there are enough believers or those that simply do not care. Millions of side-by-side photographs, taken a decade apart, are a most useful data point for the good people at Facebook Inc, and elsewhere, working towards developing facial recognition software. They could, of course, have written a program to crawl through all the photos the company already has access to. But why bother when all that was needed was a tautological hashtag.

THUS FAR, THIS column has analysed politics and the political economy. When it has departed from that self-imposed norm, it has experimented with two alternative formats: Conversations with leading specialists, who know more than I on a given topic; and travel reportage.

My travel reports have thus far been from China. This column debuts reportage on my India travels. There will be more in the upcoming election cycle, when I follow Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign, especially in Uttar Pradesh, a state I grew up in — in towns like Shahjahanpur, Faizabad, Rae Bareilly, Hamirpur, Agra, Aligarh, Allahabad. These were my habitats before I moved to Delhi and later to the US, from where I have routinely come to India for three months a year.

Over the last 12 months, my research project on urban governance — on determinants of urban public services (water, sanitation, electricity, roads, education, health, policing) — has taken me to Chennai, Kochi, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Bhavnagar, Mumbai and Hyderabad. Next year the project will move to the north and east. Before we commission large quantitative surveys on urban governance, we do qualitative work for a few days in each city. We talk to the elite (politicians, bureaucrats, police officers, NGOs) and the masses (primarily slum dwellers). We have now covered 21 slums in southern and western cities.

While statistical results based on representative samples will be analysed later, observations on some of the key programmes of the Modi government are worth registering. Election specialists believe that Modi was extremely popular among the urban poor in 2014. While that claim cannot be extended to Chennai and Kochi, where the BJP was a minor player, it applied to western and northern cities and even southern cities like Hyderabad and Bangalore. That is not true anymore. Modi critics far outmatch Modi supporters. I am not simply talking of Muslims living in slums, but also Dalits and OBCs. Scepticism and disappointment are widespread.

Why is that so?
First and foremost, demonetisation was extremely painful. Poor households ran out

The Swachh Bharat (Clean India) campaign also does not come out looking good in the slums we covered. It might have done well in rural India, as the available independent analyses clearly suggest. But in urban India, the results appear to be highly mixed. Whatever Swachh Bharat has done for garbage removal, its toilet scheme can't easily work in the slums of large cities like Mumbai and Hyderabad. If you live in a one-room dwelling, a family toilet simply cannot be built. Community toilets, not family toilets, are your only recourse, and as far as we could tell, Swachh Bharat funds were either not available for community toilets, or our slum communities did not know about them.

of money, the lines were too long, and at the end of the wait, banks would not have enough legal currency for exchange. Children went without enough food, and the older folk often did not have adequate medication. It remains an enduring mystery how the BJP won UP so decisively soon after demonetisation. But one must also quickly recall how close the Gujarat results were in December 2017 and how the BJP was defeated in its strongholds of Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh in December 2018. In the last three, the data show that the BJP's urban vote declined, not simply its rural vote. Urban middle classes might still want Modi, but the urban poor have almost certainly played a big role in Modi's declining performance. Demonetisation inflicted untold misery and suffering.

The Swachh Bharat (Clean India) campaign also does not come out looking good in the slums we covered. It might have done well in rural India, as the available independent analyses clearly suggest. But in urban India, the results appear to be highly mixed. Whatever Swachh Bharat has done for garbage removal, its toilet scheme can't easily work in the slums of large cities like Mumbai and Hyderabad. If you live in a one-room dwelling, a family toilet simply cannot be built. Community toilets, not family toilets, are your only recourse, and as far as we could tell, Swachh Bharat funds were either not available for community toilets, or our slum communities did not know about them. Can more community toilets be built, can they have more water, can they be cleaned more regularly? These are the basic challenges of high-intensity slums — Dharavi or Chatkopar, for example. We found only a few instances of toilets built with Swachh Bharat funds. Moreover, while open defecation is clearly waning in cities, the declining trend began before Swachh Bharat was launched. And depressingly, even after four years of Swachh Bharat, one can find enough slums without toilets.

The Jan Dhan Yojana, another signature scheme of the Modi regime, has not been an unmixing blessing either. It was acclaimed as a pathbreaking idea for financial inclusion. By forcing banks to open accounts for the poor, without a minimum balance require-

ment, it certainly had that promise in theory. In principle, the subsidies and the government's income support, if available, could directly be transferred to such accounts, and the welfare of the poor thereby enhanced. But in reality, neither believing the government nor the banks, nearly half of our slum-dwellers did not open such accounts. And of those who did, some received subsidies in those accounts, but most remained “zero balance”, a term almost all slum dwellers have heard of, even if they did not utilise the option. Far and away, the most troubling aspect of such accounts for our slum dwellers was that the government did not transfer any funds to them, let alone the Rs 15 lakh that PM Modi had announced as a near certainty, if black money could be recovered. Few believed Rs 15 lakh would come to their accounts, but “do teen hazaar bhi nahin aaye (even Rs 2,000-3,000 did not arrive)”. Analytically, the issue here is not that the idea was wrong. It is simply that the Modi government, according to our poor informants, made *jhoote vaade* (false promises).

Let us end on a happier note. It is generally believed that at low levels of income, cities can't be slum-free. Kerala defies this development dictum. To be in Kochi is such a relief. A little over 1 per cent of the city's population is officially classified as slum-dwelling (as opposed to nearly half in Mumbai and almost a third in Hyderabad), and the slums that do exist don't look like slums. The notion of the right to public services has gone deep and wide. Public service delivery — water, electricity, sanitation, roads — does not generally falter, and when it does, the municipal corporator, whose mobile phone number is known to everyone, is available for redressal. If Kochi did not leave so much plastic on its beaches, it could be called India's most remarkable city. It has won the battle against squalour and poverty. But that is Kerala's achievement, not Prime Minister Modi's.

The writer is director, Center for Contemporary South Asia, Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and social sciences professor of political science, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University



CHINTAN CHANDRACHUD

THE AFTERLIFE OF SECTION 377

Partial strike-down isn't enough. Prejudice still haunts the LGBT community

A SERIES of applications for refugee status were filed by members of India's LGBT community living abroad in the years leading up to the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment on Section 377 (Indian Penal Code). Courts in Britain and Australia took evidence on whether those from the community faced a real risk of persecution if they returned to India. Soon after the SC judgment in September, an immigration tribunal in New Zealand was tasked with deciding whether a gay man risked serious harm upon return to India. In granting his application for refugee status, the tribunal arrived at a sobering conclusion: “[w]hile no longer facing the threat of prosecution under Section 377... the social attitudes that have been underpinned by that legislation will not have evaporated.” According to the tribunal, Section 377 was the symptom rather than the cause of social prejudice against the community.

Dismissing this prognosis as uninformed commentary from a distant land will come at our own peril. The tribunal's decision draws attention to the fact that months after the SC's decision declaring Section 377 unconstitutional to the extent that it criminalises consensual sexual activity between adults in private, Section 377 — together with the social prejudices that silently accompany it — continues to live an afterlife.

First, there are reports that the police continues to harass members of the community (particularly transgender people) relying on Section 377 together with other criminal offences, including offences addressing prosti-

tution and public nuisance. This undercuts the letter and spirit of the SC decision, which required that all ongoing prosecutions under Section 377 be abandoned and no fresh prosecutions be commenced.

The aftermath of the SC decision striking down section 66A of the IT Act offers a cautionary tale of how statutory provisions that are struck down as unconstitutional may continue to be enforced. Close to four years after the Court's judgment, the police has continued registering FIRs as though section 66A remains constitutionally valid. A study by the Internet Freedom Foundation attributes this to a number of factors, not least the failure to adequately notify the police and the continuing presence of Section 66A on the statute book (since the Court's authority is restricted to striking down a statute, not removing it from the statute book altogether).

In some respects, Section 377 could present a wider range of enforcement challenges. This is because unlike Section 66A, the SC did not strike down Section 377 in its entirety. Instead, it chose to strike it down only to the extent that it applies to consensual sexual activity between adults in private. Non-consensual sexual activity as well as sexual activity involving children can continue to be prosecuted. Therefore, the briefing to the lowest levels of enforcement needs to convey the nuanced message that Section 377 may be enforced in some ways, but not others.

Second, the SC judgment represented the

tip of the iceberg in terms of achieving equal citizenship for members of the LGBT community: Exemplified by the recent comments of the Indian Army chief noting that homosexuality would not be tolerated in the armed forces. Implicit in that comment are deep-seated prejudices, including that homosexuals are inherently “weaker” or more likely to be tempted or distracted during the performance of their duties than their heterosexual colleagues. Until these prejudices are dislodged, LGBT people will continue to suffer discrimination.

That the SC chose to restrict its decision to the question of decriminalisation without commenting on other rights that would extend equal citizenship to the community may have been the product of intelligent litigation strategy. It was widely accepted that the Court's observations in the right to privacy judgment would inevitably result in Section 377 being struck down. While the government left the constitutionality of Section 377 to the “wisdom of the court”, it argued that the Court should only go so far and no further.

The current government and its successor following the next election cycle must hold themselves to the other side of this argument. If they refuse to do so, Section 377 will continue to cast its shadow long after the Court's historic decision.

The writer is an associate at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, London. Views are personal

JANUARY 22, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



BANK STRIKE OVER
THE BANK PERSONNEL called off their agitation after two rounds of talks with Union Finance Minister H M Patel and Labour Minister Ravindra Varma. Y G Patel, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, and P P Gutta, chairman of the Indian Banks Association, were also present at the talks. An announcement said a basis for an agreement on the DA formula and for continuing the negotiations had been identified. The representatives of the bankmen had agreed to give up non-cooperation and restore normalcy in the functioning of the banks. About 4 lakh bank workers started their agitation — “work-to-rule and no overtime” — from December 15.

KHOMEINI TO RETURN
AYATULLAH KHOMEINI WILL return to Teheran next Friday, January 26, members of his staff in Paris said. They said he planned to deliver his first sermon shortly after arrival at the Behesht e Zahra cemetery, where many of the demonstrators killed in the worst shooting are buried. Khomeini was expelled from the country in 1964 and lived in near obscurity in Turkey and for some 13 years in Iraq, before the Iraqi authorities expelled him last October, and he went to France.

JNANPITH FOR AGEYA
EMINENT HINDI POET and novelist S H Vatsyayan “Ageya” has been selected for the

Rs 1 lakh Jnanpith award for 1978. He was won the award for his collection of poems, *Kitni Navon Men Kitni Bar* published in 1967.

CPI APPEAL TO CPM
C RAJESWARA RAO appealed to the CPM leadership to take immediate steps for the building up of a left and democratic alternative against the Janata Party and the Congress (I). Addressing a meeting in Calcutta organised by the West Bengal State Council of the CPI, Rao said the Janata Party was tottering following its internal squabbles and failure to solve any of the people's problems. Mrs Gandhi was trying to stage a comeback in the absence of a third alternative

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Middle class, redefined

It needs an enabling ecosystem. The present regime has attempted to provide just that



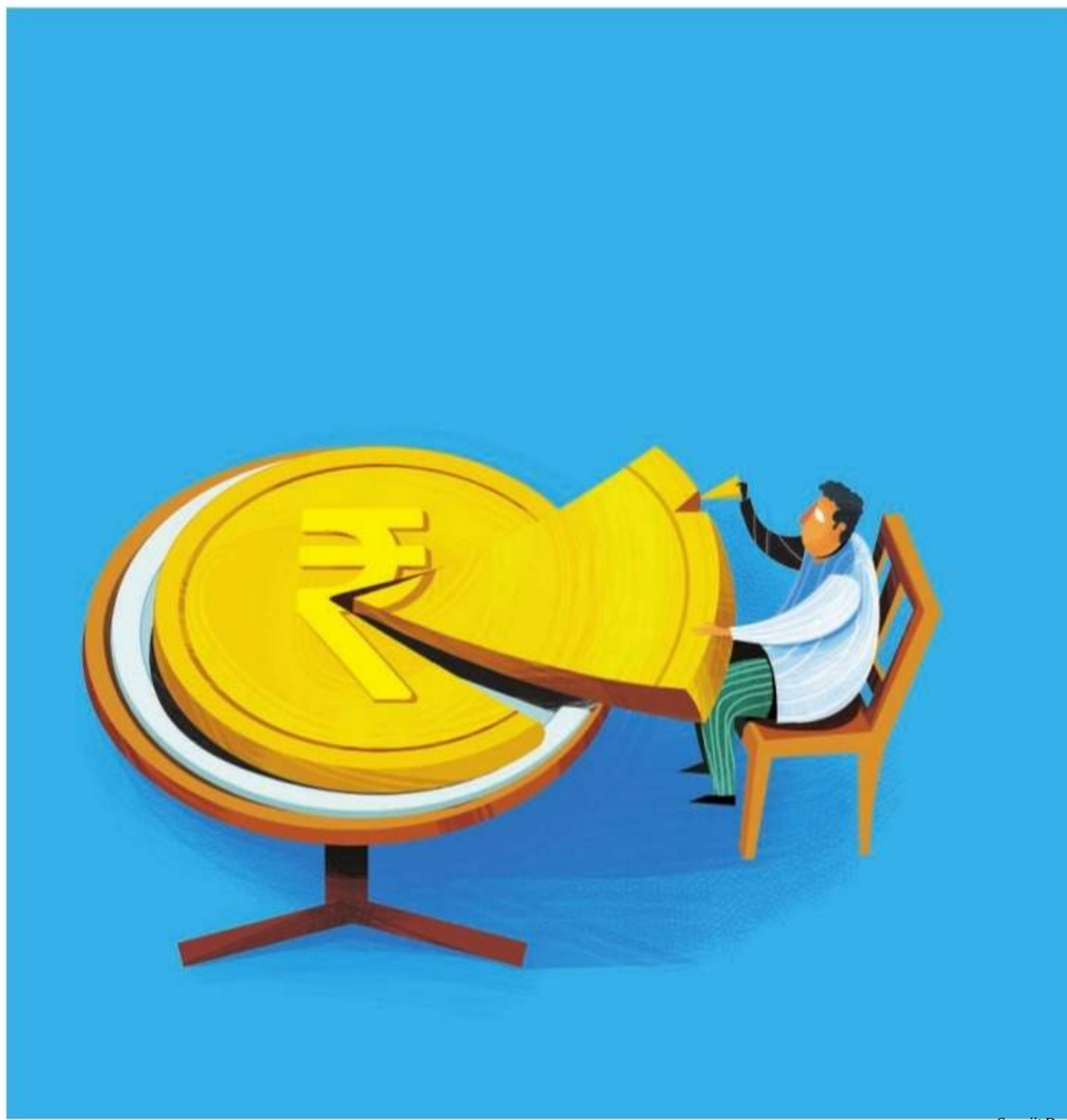
BIBEK DEBROY AND KISHORE DESAI

"O MONISHA, THIS is so middle class!" Mrs Sarabhai would disparagingly scoff at Monisha, her daughter-in-law in the popular television series *Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai*. Mrs Sarabhai, essentially "old money" and a self-proclaimed sophisticate, uses "middle class" to express her disdain of Monisha's love for bargaining and her penny pinching ways. Though the series is off-air now, the term "middle class" is in the news again, unfortunately for the wrong reasons. Some critics are questioning whether the government is doing enough for the middle class. Perhaps a more detailed analysis is needed to evaluate if this criticism has any merit.

Before delving into this subject, one needs to define "middle class" in the first place. A formal definition of this term perhaps does not exist, though some efforts to provide an outline have been made. One view considers individuals earning US \$2 to \$13 a day as middle class. Considering an average exchange rate of Rs 70 per dollar, this translates to an income of roughly Rs 50,000 to Rs 3.2 lakh per annum. Another view takes into account consumption pattern to identify middle class. As per this, individuals/families who own basic lifestyle goods such as a fridge, two-wheeler, colour television, etc. can be called middle class. There's a third view that considers wealth but that's not relevant here. A plausible definition can have reference to the two views stated above. A middle class family can therefore be envisioned as one where one or more members is gainfully employed and they may own some basic lifestyle goods such as those stated above. Further, it is reasonable to consider that this class is liable to pay income taxes (that is, earns at least Rs 2.5 lakh per annum). The upper income threshold is not important here as most individuals who file taxes earn less than Rs 10 lakh per annum.

Keeping the above in mind, one can notice that the Union government has rolled out a clear development strategy targeting the middle class. This strategy has three broad components. The first involves implementing measures that put more money into the pockets of the middle class, helping them save more. The second relates to creating an environment that reduces their day-to-day hassles and stresses, thus simplifying their daily lives. And the last pertains to empowering them and creating suitable development opportunities.

Consider the first. The government has deftly brought down double-digit inflation (that persisted before May 2014) to around 3-5 per cent. This has not only reduced the day-to-day expenses incurred by the middle class, but has also reduced interest amounts paid by them for various loans. Cost of most loans such as home loans, auto loans, education loans is on an average 2-3 per cent less compared to that before May 2014. In addition, several changes were also made in the income tax structure, some of which include: a) increase in tax exemption limit from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh and from Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 3 lakhs for senior citizens; b) increase in deduction limit under Section 80C from Rs 1



Suvajit Dey

lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh; c) reduction in tax rate (from 10 per cent to 5 per cent) for individuals earning less than Rs 5 lakh per annum. These are just a few of the important steps taken. Together, these measures increased savings for the middle class to a substantial extent. More importantly, these measures have had a positive compounding effect as the additional savings accumulate year on year.

The second component essentially targets making day-to-day life simple for the middle class. Consider physical connectivity as an example. On a daily basis, a majority of the middle class ends up spending hours on personal/office-related commute. To reduce this daily stress, considerable efforts are on to de-bottleneck key traffic routes. Faster and more comfortable transit modes such as metros are being provided. Besides intra-city/town connectivity, inter-city/town connectivity is also being augmented by expanding roads and highways, railways, aviation and waterway networks. Now consider various services next. Here, the general push is to offer public services in a simple and cost-efficient manner. Today, it is considerably easier and faster to get a passport made or to get income tax issues resolved. Senior citizens can submit life certifications digitally. Earlier, one could not have got these things done without multiple visits to the respective departments and often after paying bribes. That

Most would agree that the middle class of today's India is hardly the Monisha of 'Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai'. Today's middle class is, in fact, aspirational. It is financially prudent but at the same time willing to take risks. What it needs is an enabling eco-system to realise its full potential. And this is precisely what the present government has attempted through its various initiatives.

said, one must note that key services such as electricity connection, water connection, driving licence, etc are part of the state list and hence are provided by state/local authorities, not by the Union.

The last component comprises steps to empower the middle class and create development opportunities. A host of initiatives are being taken to simplify the regulatory environment for businesses and entrepreneurs, increase credit flow for them (Stand-Up India, MUDRA, etc) and impart necessary technical skills to youth, most of whom may be from the middle class. Capacities of higher educational institutes have been increased considerably. Many more such measures have been taken to create sufficient opportunities for the middle class to fulfill their ambitions.

Most would agree that the middle class of today's India is hardly the Monisha of *Sarabhai vs Sarabhai*. Today's middle class is, in fact, aspirational. It is financially prudent but at the same time willing to take risks. What it needs is an enabling ecosystem to realise its full potential. And this is precisely what the present government has attempted through its various initiatives.

Debroy is chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. Desai is an Officer of Special Duty, EAC to the PM. All views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Russia is speaking with one voice around the world and seizing on social media's viral mechanics to distribute its message. The United States is divided." — THE WASHINGTON POST

Capital and digitalpolitik

As Delhi copes with the digital age, it will have to navigate between state and citizen, capital and consumer, public good and private gain



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

LAST WEEK AT the Vibrant Gujarat Summit, the chairman and the managing director of Reliance Industries, Mukesh Dhirubhai Ambani, urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to move India decisively towards "data localisation". Ambani's push to shape India's data governance is very much part of the efforts by private capital world-wide to define new rules for the digital age.

Arguing that "data is the new oil", Ambani said, "India's data must be controlled and owned by Indian people — and not by corporates, especially global corporations". Calling for a new national movement "against data colonisation", Ambani added that "for India to succeed in this data-driven revolution, we will have to migrate the control and ownership of Indian data back to India".

This is the second time in a month that Ambani has spoken up for "data nationalism". Ambani, who has disrupted the data and telecom market over the last two years, now has ambitious plans to take on the global retail giants like Amazon and Walmart.

If Ambani is poised to remake India's retail market, China's Jack Ma, the founder of the incredibly successful e-commerce and internet company, Alibaba, wants to win the world. If Ambani's "data nationalism" might be criticised for erecting barriers against cross-border data flows, Ma wants greater liberalisation to make it easier for small producers in one country to sell to consumers across the world.

Ma is building an Electronic World Platform (eWTP) to do just that. Ma hopes the government and businesses could work together to remove multiple obstacles to the flow of e-commerce across national borders. As a logical complement to the eWTP, Ma has plans to disrupt the international logistics market and shorten the global supply chains.

If Ambani is framing his policy preferences in nationalist terms, Ma is wrapping his and China's interests in universal terms. Sceptics might say the eWTP might actually consolidate Beijing's dominance of the global trading system, founded as it is on a tight domestic nexus between capital and the Chinese Communist Party. But countries as different as Belgium, Malaysia and Rwanda have already signed onto the eWTP.

Like so many other businesses, retail and logistics are increasingly about effective collection, analysis and effective utilisation of data. As digitisation transforms the global structures of production and distribution, what happens to the consumers, whose data is becoming the key?

In the United States, Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, has been railing against the "data industrial complex". In a major initiative late last year on protecting the consumer and

his data, Tim Cook argued that: "Our own information — from the everyday to the deeply personal — is being weaponised against us with military efficiency. Scraps of data, each one harmless enough on its own, are carefully assembled, synthesized, traded and sold."

Although he did not name them, there was no doubt who the targets of Cook's ire were — Google and Facebook. Gathering data and monetising is what Google and Facebook do. Apple's business model is less reliant on data and Cook can take on Google and Facebook.

Cook is mobilising support for a comprehensive privacy law in the US that will protect the consumer from the companies that collect personal data. One of Cook's key proposals is the establishment of a "data-broker clearinghouse" that will register all data brokers, enable consumers to track the transactions that have bundled and sold their data from place to place, and give users the power to delete their data if they chose.

If most of the world's industry and commerce becomes digitised and hyperlinked, what happens to the security and integrity of the system as a whole? Here again, the private sector is taking the initiative. The leadership has come from Brad Smith, the president of Microsoft. Nearly 80 companies from around the world are now part of the so-called Cyber Technology Accord.

The accord's objective is to empower individuals online and promote stability, security and resilience of the cyberspace. It is modelled after the Geneva Conventions — negotiated at the turn of the 20th century — that sought to protect civilians during armed conflict. The initiative has had some impact, for example on the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace that was unveiled by the French President Emmanuel Macron last November. The call has already been endorsed by a large number of governments and corporations.

The efforts of Ambani, Ma, Cook and Smith underline the growing role of capital in governing the digital era. After all the nature of these new rules will have a big impact on their respective businesses. In the 20th century, the policy implications of new technologies like nuclear, space and electronics were largely framed by the governments. Even more important, many of these breakthroughs came out of state-funded big-science projects.

In the 21st century, however, much of the innovation that is driving the digital revolution has come from the private sector. States are now hard-pressed to catchup with capital. As Delhi copes with the new imperatives of governing the digital age, any sensible policy will have to navigate the tensions between state and the citizen, capital and the consumer, public good and private gain and between competing interests within capital — both domestic and foreign.

Equally challenging are the complex demands of national security when the technological sources of economic and military power are in an unprecedented chum, and the old international structures for trade and security cooperation are breaking down.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express



ATUL MISHRA

The lessons from Brexit

From virtues of parliamentary system to fate of liberal democracy, much is on test

THE EVENTS THAT took place in the UK parliament on January 15 and 16 were the latest in the Brexit chaos that nears its end as the hard deadline for exiting the European Union — March 29 — approaches. If a formal deal with the EU were to be reached, which seems difficult given the odds, the divorce will be an orderly one. If no deal takes place, the separation will happen regardless, but it would be followed by a mass of confusion and considerable headache for the UK government.

After the British people voted on June 23, 2016 by a slim majority to exit the EU, then Prime Minister David Cameron of the Conservative Party resigned his office as well as party leadership. The Conservatives elected Theresa May as their new leader and she became prime minister. On May then fell the arduous task of initiating the Brexit process and negotiating a deal with the EU. As negotiations proceeded, in April 2017, May called for a snap general election believing that she will get a fresh mandate, which would strengthen her position in EU negotiations.

The move was a disaster. She lost majority in parliament, the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn made considerable gains and May had to find a coalition partner, the Democratic Unionist Party, to run her minority government. The election outcome weakened her hand rather than strengthening it.

This also gave advantage to the EU leader-

ship, who have naturally wanted to punish the UK, not least because it helps them undercut doubts regarding the strength and desirability of their supranational project. But it also opened fissiparous tendencies within the Conservative Party, with MPs rebelling, challenging May's leadership and publicly dissociating themselves from the May-led Brexit process. Besieged, May negotiated a 585-page withdrawal agreement — the Brexit Deal — and sought its parliamentary ratification.

On voting day, January 15, May volunteered to face a no-confidence motion against her government if the deal was rejected. It was. By an epic margin of 230, the biggest defeat of a government policy since 1924. Many Conservative MPs voted against their own prime minister's plan. Next, Corbyn introduced the no-confidence motion, which was voted down on January 16. This time, the Conservatives voted to save their government. The outcome: A much humiliated and weakened May left to ensure an exit that will not be disgraceful.

So what are the lessons of this drama? First, and facetiously, Britain can't seem to get its exits right. On the morning after the deal was voted down, a strategist friend said it also messed up its exit from the Subcontinent in the 1940s. Add Palestine to the list. Second, but seriously, May's success in overseeing Brexit under some kind of a deal is crucial to

the ongoing struggle for acceptance of women in high politics. Only the second woman PM of Britain, May has been lampooned and abused in the media, called a "Maybot" and a "supplicant". Her male detractors in the Tory party, such as Boris Johnson, have sought to undermine her leadership, suggesting dissatisfaction with her leadership but also betraying misogyny. She may have made political blunders, but May's singular feature has been her grit amidst all the abuse. It is imperative, therefore, that she sees Brexit through.

Third, the drama has foregrounded the quirks and strengths of parliamentary democracy. The popular decision to exit the EU is a product of Cameron's misjudgement. He agreed to hold the referendum hoping that the Remainners will win. It has cost two prime ministers their political careers, but each has respected the instruction in letter and spirit. MPs of the governing party have voted against their prime minister's policy but voted for their government. They have foregrounded the fact that in a parliamentary system, legislators are supreme as they represent popular sovereignty. We would be hard-pressed to find such independence amongst Indian legislators.

Fourth, formal and informal coalition building among the ruling party, its allies and the opposition has ensured that every political group has played a role in this crucial

process. This has produced delay and chaos, but it has also deepened the legitimacy of the political system. For detractors of the parliamentary system in India, this provides an opportunity to ask themselves what matters more: An executive-heavy system that could turn from stable to brittle as it loses its legitimacy; or an inclusive, though lumbering, system that keeps everyone together?

Fifth, the consequences of Britain's exit for world politics remain unclear. Its integration into the EU project hid the process of its decline in international affairs, but it would soon be exposed again. In a different era, Britain could count on its transatlantic partner and invoke the "special friendship" they shared to gradually return to international high politics. But President Trump's America is unpredictable, which makes the UK Foreign Office's job more challenging.

Britain's presence within the EU added to Europe's heft as a liberal democratic powerhouse. Its absence will weaken the EU as an international ideological force. But Brexit will add to the strength of the inter-state relations of liberal democracies. There may be a silver lining here for the partisans of the "Indo-Pacific" democracies that seem to be ranged against an undemocratic Asian great power.

The writer teaches world politics at Shiv Nadar University. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HELPING HAND

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'What the farmer is owed' (IE, January 21). Measures like MSPs and loan waivers have proved to be inadequate. The government should consider the formation of a dedicated cadre for marketing of agricultural produce. Co-operatives and SHGs could be involved in procurement, marketing and sale. To augment farmers' income, we must realise that they are producers and not marketeers.

Ketan Kishan, Gurgaon

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'What the farmer is owed' (IE, January 21). Farmers need long-term, sustainable incomes which are possible only by focussing on increasing agricultural productivity, ensuring incomes, credible farm credit functioning and creating ease of agriculture. The temporary measures of increasing MSPs or loan waivers are merely tools and cannot be transformational.

Divya Singla, Patiala

LESSONS NOT LEARNT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Angels and demons' (IE, January 21). It called upon policymakers in India to assess what has made a country like Israel a favoured nation for investment. Apart from what was stated, there is a need to compare the countries at a fundamental level. In terms of per capita in-

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

come, Israel is ranked 31, whereas India is ranked 135 in the world. It is a fact that in mid-2011, public protests arose in Israel around income inequality and rising housing-commodity prices. The government in Israel formed committees to address some of the grievances. In our country, the ruling party and the opposition compete with each other to resort to populist measures.

Krishan Kumar Chug, New Delhi

TELLING NUMBERS

World's 26 richest own as much as poorest 3.8 billion, 9 Indians own as much as half the country

THE WORLD'S richest 26 billionaires own as much wealth as the 3.8 billion people in the bottom half of humanity, while India's top 9 billionaires own as much as the country's poorest half, according to an annual report by anti-poverty campaigner Oxfam, which looked at inequalities in 2018.

Globally, billionaires' fortunes rose by 12% to \$900 billion, or \$2.5 billion a day in 2018, whereas the poorest half of the world's population saw their wealth decline by 11%, Oxfam said in its study, released before the start of the five-day World Economic Forum

annual meeting in Davos. In India, the wealth of billionaires rose by over one-third from \$325 billion to \$440 billion, which translates to Rs 2,200 crore a day, Oxfam said.

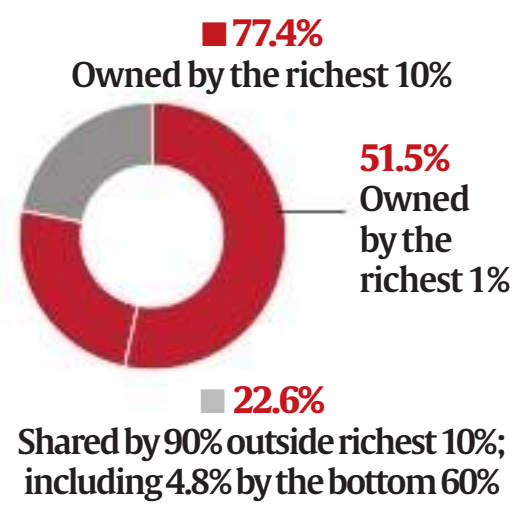
The world has over 2,200 billionaires, which is more than twice as many as in 2008. India has 119 billionaires, after adding 18 in 2018. While billionaires' wealth grew by 12%, the wealth of the 3.8 billion in the poorest half of the world population dropped by 11%. In India, the richest 1% added 39% to their wealth, while the poorest half added just 3%.

THE BILLIONS WITH THE BILLIONAIRES

	WORLD	INDIA
Total wealth in 2017	\$7,500 bn	\$325 bn
Total wealth in 2018	\$8,400 bn	\$440 bn
Increase in 2017-18	\$900 bn	\$115 bn
Increase per day	\$2.5 bn	\$0.31 bn*

*Rs 2,200 crore

HOW INDIA'S WEALTH IS SHARED



WEALTH CHANGE SINCE 2017

INDIA		WORLD	
Top 1%	+39%	All billionaires	+12%
Poorest 50%	+3%	Poorest 50%	-11%

Between 2017 and 2018, the world created a new billionaire every two days. Between 2018 & 2022, India will add an estimated 70 new dollar millionaires per day.

RICHEST OF THE RICH



MUKESH AMBANI

The Oxfam report states that his wealth, at Rs 2.8 lakh crore, is more than the combined revenue and capital expenditure of the Centre and states for medical, public health, sanitation and water supply.



JEFF BEZOS

The world's richest man, owner of Amazon, saw his fortune increase to \$112bn. Just 1% of his fortune is the equivalent to the whole health budget for Ethiopia, a country of 105 million people, Oxfam states.

Source: Oxfam report & PTI

THIS WORD MEANS

(GOA'S) OPINION POLL DAY

Last week saw the anniversary of an unusual event in Indian democracy — a plebiscite to ascertain the people's views



ON JANUARY 16, Goa celebrated its 52nd *Asmitai Dis* (Identity Day) or Opinion Poll Day. It was on this date in 1967 that Goans voted against merging with Maharashtra, and chose to remain a Union Territory. Though referred to as an 'opinion poll', the vote was in effect a plebiscite.

Soon after Goa's liberation from Portuguese rule in 1961, a divide emerged on the question of merger with Maharashtra, which was premised on claims of cultural similarity and the argument that Konkani was a dialect of Marathi, and not an independent language. The push for a merger by Dayanand Bhandarkar, the first Chief Minister of Goa, Daman and Diu, faced strong opposition from sections of the press, artists, and general public.

In December 1966, Parliament passed the Goa, Daman and Diu (Opinion Poll Act), 1966, "to provide for the taking of an opinion poll to ascertain the wishes of the electors of Goa, Daman and Diu with regard to the future status thereof and for matters connected therewith".

In the poll, held on January 16, 1967, ballots from the Salcette *taluka* swung the result in favour of the anti-mergerists — the people of Goa rejected merger with Maharashtra and chose to remain a Union Territory by 1,72,191 votes to 1,38,170.

In 1987, Goa became India's 25th state. Konkani was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in 1992. Daman and Diu continues to be a Union Territory.

AARON PEREIRA

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

The story and the optics of choosing India's Republic Day Chief Guest

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa will be the Chief Guest at the 70th Republic Day. Why is this choice so important? What preparations follow?



MANBIR SINGH

THE VISIT of the Chief Guest at the Republic Day parade is similar to a State visit, but given the ceremony involved, it is the highest honour that we can accord to our guest in protocol terms. The Chief Guest is given the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan, he attends the reception in the evening hosted by the President of India, he lays a wreath at Rajghat, there is a banquet in his honour, a lunch hosted by the Prime Minister, and calls by the Vice-President and the External Affairs Minister.

The centrepiece of the visit is that he accompanies the President, flanked by the horse-mounted President's Bodyguards, to the saluting base on Rajpath from where

the President reviews the Republic Day parade. The visit is full of symbolism — it portrays the Chief Guest as participating in India's pride and happiness, and reflects the friendship between the two peoples represented by the President of India and the Chief Guest.

The government extends its invitation to a Head of State or Government after careful consideration. This process commences almost six months ahead of Republic Day. There is a range of issues that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) considers, the foremost among which is the nature of India's relationship with the country concerned. Among other factors are political, economic, and commercial relations, the neighbourhood, military cooperation, prominence in regional groupings, or past association in the Non Aligned Movement, in which newly independent countries united in a common struggle against colonialism, apartheid, and the domination of the developed countries. India's emotional attachment with the NAM countries remains strong, while developmental imperatives such as trade, technical knowhow

and financial cooperation have opened up new vistas and opportunities for closer relations with other countries. All these considerations often point in different directions. Choosing a Chief Guest, therefore, poses a challenge.

The MEA, after deliberations, seeks the Prime Minister's approval, after which Rashtrapati Bhavan's clearance is sought. India's ambassadors in the concerned countries then try to ascertain discreetly the potential Chief Guests' programme and availability for Republic Day. It may well be that the high dignitary has an unavoidable engagement at that time, such as a session of Parliament or an incoming State visit.

After this laborious process, the territorial divisions in the MEA work towards meaningful talks and agreements, while the Chief of Protocol works on the details of the programme and logistics. The CoP explains to his counterpart from the visitor's side the detailed programme which, for the Republic Day ceremonies, has to be followed minute-by-minute with military precision. Some discussions on timings and the meetings may take place, but there is

no flexibility with regard to the Republic Day ceremonies and their schedules.

All aspects of the visit are gone through, such as security, logistics, medical requirements, if necessary, with the active cooperation of the concerned Departments of the Government of India and the governments of the states which the Chief Guest may visit before coming to New Delhi, or after Republic Day. In my experience, there has been no Chief Guest who did not — for whatever reason — adhere to our protocol requirements or programme timings. Immediately after Pokharan II, there was a lull in state visits to and from India, but this period did not last long thanks to some astute and quiet diplomacy by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. Soon, the floodgates opened, and we had visits numbering almost double the previous such high.

During state visits, it has happened that the VIP, due to health reasons, has been late for engagements, or has been unable to walk through the Tri-Services Guard of Honour. During the monsoon, there is a constant threat of rain, and every contin-

gency needs to be thought of, alternative arrangements made, and rehearsed to perfection. But in spite of all precautions, on rare occasions, some errors do occur.

For example, the Americans, as is their tradition, brought their own cars for the movement of President Bill Clinton. The American drivers were shown and familiarised with the routes, and they did several dry runs. On the day itself, after the ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan, we saw that the turning radius of the cars was big, and our horse cavalry was in the way. The commander of the President's Bodyguards was, however, very alert and commanded the formation to fall back five steps. They did this complicated manoeuvre with such precision that instead of looking discordant, it all seemed a part of a natural sequence.

On one Republic Day, the ADC of the Chief Guest attempted to accompany him for the inspection of the guard of honour. But in our practice, only the commander of the Tri-Services Guard accompanies the visitor, and the insistent ADC had to be physically restrained by officials present

at the spot.

The Chief Guest for Republic Day is decided on the basis of other countries' interest and the Guest's availability. A natural corollary is that the visitor should be happy and satisfied with the visit, and that it is comfortable. The media party accompanying him would be reporting in their country on every aspect of the visit. For good relations between the two countries and their further development, it is necessary that the guest's nation perceives the visit as having been successful, and that their Head of State has been shown all courtesies and given due honour. In the modern world, visual coverage is of great importance, and the programmes and protocol keep this in view. The various Chief Guests and their ambassadors in New Delhi have been profuse in their praise for our ceremonies and the protocol we accord. Our hospitality reflects our traditions, culture, and history.

Ambassador Manbir Singh, a former Indian Foreign Service officer, was Chief of Protocol from 1999-2002

SIMPLY PUT

ITRs, pre-filled with trust

The government is working on pre-filled Income-Tax returns using TDS data available with it. When did this idea originate? What are its advantages, and what are some of the concerns articulated by critics?

SHAJI VIKRAMAN

CHENNAI, JANUARY 21

IN LATE 2002, when the then Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, signalled the beginning of a radically new approach to taxation, marked by simplification and rationalisation, the Finance Ministry undertook a review of the format of tax returns. Tax return forms in those days used to be lengthy — running into perhaps 10 pages. The story goes that when senior Revenue Department officials showed a sample of the proposed new 'Saraal' form for individual taxpayers to Singh, the Minister was upset enough to demand to know what exactly was *saraal* (simple) about the new form, forcing the officials to scramble to make the form simpler.

A few months later, in his Budget for 2003-04, Singh unveiled several measures to create what he said was a modern, forward-looking, revenue-beneficial taxation system. They included the introduction of a one-page return form for individual taxpayers, abolition of the discretionary system for selection of tax returns for scrutiny and its replacement by a computer-generated random selection of only 2% of returns annually, and the direct crediting of refunds to the taxpayer's bank account.

Beginning of the idea

Around this same time, the government, based on the recommendation of a group headed by Vijay Kelkar, the Adviser to the Finance Minister, and in line with the broader aim of building an impersonal tax system free of individual discretion, decided to use technology to develop a Tax Information Network (TIN). Over 15 years later, the results are clearly visible.

The government now plans to offer pre-filled Income-Tax returns using the data available with the Income-Tax Department from firms who deduct tax at source from their employees, and banks and other agencies. This was a recommendation made by the Tax Administration Reforms Commission appointed during the UPA government's term under Dr Parthasarathi Shome, who had worked with the Revenue Department of the government of the United Kingdom.

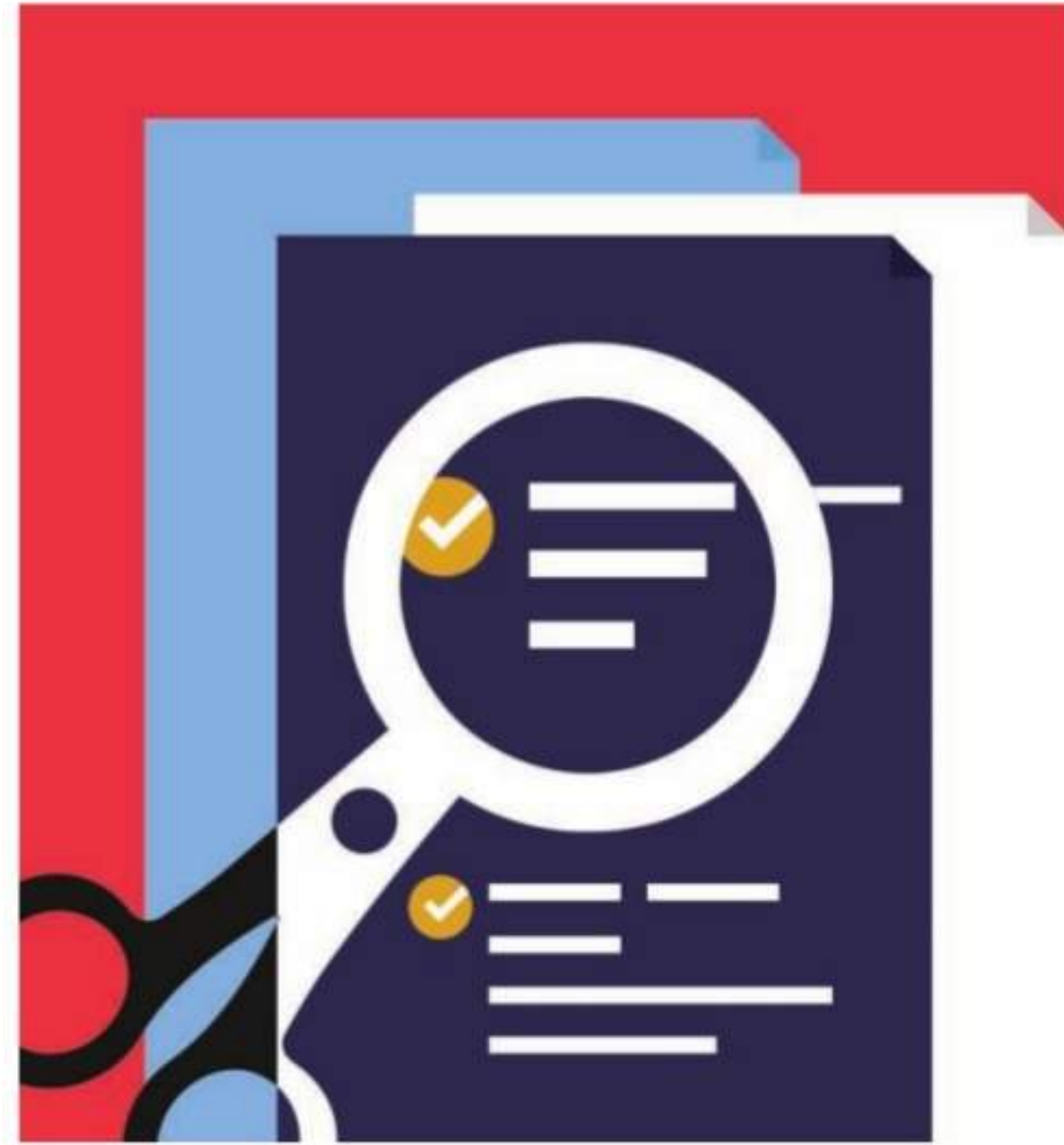


Illustration: Mithun Chakraborty

The Commission suggested that pre-filled tax returns be provided to all individuals with the option of accepting the return or modifying it suitably. This was in line with global best practices, and had its focus on the delivery of taxpayer services.

Arguments for, against

Tax compliance, or the voluntary filing of tax returns, has improved over the past decade. Of the 6.84 crore I-T returns filed in 2017-18, e-filings were 6.75 crore. With over 98% e-filings, India is ahead of the United States, where this number is reckoned to be below 90%. And as the country has moved to a Naya Saraal, scrutiny of tax returns is now less than 0.5% of all returns filed.

Besides representing a move towards global best practices, pre-filled forms could be a potentially enabling measure to foster a tax regime based on trust. There is, however, a view in the Tax Department that it may be too early to migrate to this simplified system because of information asymmetry — unlike in countries like the United States or United Kingdom, the Department may not have access to full information on all the sources of an individual's income. And if the taxpayer is made aware of this asymmetry, the chances of evasion of tax or non-compliance are bound to rise higher.

Simply put, revealing all the cards through a pre-filled tax form without commensurate improvement in compliance

could be counterproductive for the Department, argue the sceptics. Thanks to the TIN, a lot of gaps in data quality have been addressed, but the incomplete task makes a case for postponing the introduction of the pre-filled form, according to this view.

Choosing the right path

In the UK, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs offers an automated assistant to help taxpayers. The UK Revenue Department's tax delivery services are reflected in its charter of rights and obligations. The Department says that it respects the taxpayer and treats her as honest, and promises to provide helpful, efficient, and effective service. In return, it expects from taxpayers reciprocal honesty and respect for tax officials, and an effort to work with them to get things right.

The Integrated E-filing and Centralised Processing Centre 2.0 project cleared by the Cabinet at an estimated cost of Rs 4,242 crore may be aimed at realising similar goals in India. Like in the case of the I-T Department's project one and a half decades ago, Infosys will again anchor it. According to the government, the project will cut the time for processing I-T returns to one day from 63, lead to faster refunds, and promote voluntary compliance.

On compliance, the Shome Committee had this to say: "In the ultimate analysis, under no circumstances should a taxpayer be allowed to hide for his entire productive life as a non-filer or in the comforting embrace of an unduly favourable presumptive taxation system. Progressive assimilation should be not only through education, but also through increased risk perception regarding the likelihood of penalties being imposed."

In his Budget speech delivered on February 28, 2003, Jaswant Singh said: "Mr Speaker, Sir, this will be a move away from a suspicion-ridden, harassment generating, coercion-inclined regime to a trust-based 'green channel' system. I do this entirely on the basis of my faith in my countrymen and women."

Few Ministers have articulated the need for a revamp as strongly as Singh did then. There has been considerable progress in the years that followed, but the depth of the commitment to the "trust" and "faith" that Singh spoke of, remains to be fully tested.

Yellow fever vaccine: necessity and risk

ABANTIKA GHOSH

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 21

THE DEATH of Prof Martin Gore, 67, former medical director of the Royal Marsden Hospital in the UK and a renowned cancer specialist, on January 10 has shocked the medical fraternity because it came after a routine yellow fever vaccination. It re-ignited a controversy over vaccines around the world.

What is controversial about vaccines, and the yellow fever vaccine in particular?

Why is a yellow fever vaccine necessary?

Yellow fever spreads through mosquitoes. It is often associated with jaundice, hence the name yellow. It leads to death in a significant proportion of patients, which is why the vaccine is often compulsory before travelling to any of the yellow fever-endemic countries in parts of Africa, and Central and South America.

How safe is the vaccine?

Known as 17D, the vaccine is generally con-

sidered safe. The World Health Organization (WHO) says: "Yellow fever is prevented by an extremely effective vaccine, which is safe and affordable. A single dose... is sufficient to confer sustained immunity and life-long protection against yellow fever disease."

There are, however, reports in medical literature about multisystem organ failure following vaccination. In 2001, doctors from Glan Clwyd District General Hospital reported such a case in *The Lancet*. There are many other reports available of individual patients who died of complications after yellow fever vaccination, or of even yellow fever after vaccination.

What are the risks?

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), Atlanta says that while the risk of the vaccine causing serious harm or death is "extremely low", there are complications that may arise. Among mild problems associated with the vaccine are fever with aches, soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given. These occur in up to 1 person out of 4. They usually begin soon after the shot,

and can last up to a week, CDC says. A severe allergic reaction can occur in 1 person in 55,000. A severe nervous system reaction in 1 in 125,000 and a life-threatening illness with organ failure can happen in 1 person in 250,000. More than half in the last group die.

With such risks, why go for vaccination?

There is evidence available in public health that vaccines provide return for investment — the resources spent on vaccines are more than recovered in the resources saved by the mortality and morbidity that is prevented throughout the lifetime of an individual. Nevertheless, vaccine hesitancy is on the rise.

Many vaccines introduce a pathogen inside the body. For example, the yellow fever vaccine is a live, weakened yellow fever virus. Because it is live, the body responds to it the same way as in a full-blown infection. This ensures that the body knows the vulnerabilities of that virus for the rest of the person's life. Thus, whenever an invasion happens, blood cells that retain the memory of that virus immediately work towards defeating the nas-

cent invasion much before it can go on to become a full-blown infection.

Is there resistance to vaccines in India?

Yes, it surfaces periodically. Last week, Delhi High Court underlined the importance of parental consent in vaccines given to children in school. Although the diphtheria vaccine is among the oldest in the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), the disease caused the death of 24 children in Delhi in September 2018, and 27 in Nuh district (Haryana) in December. The Health Ministry has commissioned a study on vaccine hesitancy, to be conducted by its Immunisation Technical Support Unit in association with GAVI, an international organisation supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Vaccine hesitancy is a growing problem the world over. In the US, states like Minnesota have seen rising vaccine hesitancy, especially among immigrant populations, after a visit by Andrew Wakefield, a British doctor who was stripped of his licence to practice and became one of the leading voices against vaccines.