



GST shortfall

As the tax collections remain below target, it may be time to recalibrate expectations

Revenue collections from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) are going too far off the mark for comfort. Inflows declined for the second consecutive month in December to ₹94,726 crore from ₹97,637 crore in November and ₹1,00,710 crore in the month before. Between April and December, GST collections have averaged about ₹96,800 crore, and have not even once met the monthly target of ₹1,06,300 crore, going by the Union Budget math for 2018-19. Now in order to achieve the year-end target, GST collections over the next three months will have to reach an average of ₹1,34,900 crore. But given the spate of tax rate cuts announced by the GST Council in December that kick in this month and Prime Minister Narendra Modi hinting at further rationalisation of rates for construction materials soon, the pressure on revenues is likely to persist. Separately, as the government looks to woo traders and small businesses back to its electoral fold, the Council is considering a relaxation in the GST norms for micro, small and medium enterprises by raising the annual sales threshold for compulsory GST registration from ₹20 lakh to over ₹50 lakh. Such a relaxation, along with regulatory steps like greater forbearance for small business loans, will boost sentiment among such firms, but it will further dent the tax kitty. Other revenue heads, including direct tax or disinvestment receipts (even via innovatively structured intra-public-sector deals), are unlikely to be adequate to plug the GST shortfall.

This poses a challenge for the Centre at a time when it would have been hoping to announce some populist measures ahead of elections, while retaining its macro-economic management credentials. States' revenue collections under the GST regime have been uneven and a GST Council panel is examining inter-State variations. But the Centre is bound to compensate States for revenue shortfalls for the first five years of the GST regime. Unless the Centre decides to drop its fiscal deficit goals, a squeeze on spending, including planned capital expenditure, may be the only option. There is a more problematic aspect to the dip in GST collections, based on economic activity and compliance trends in November. The total number of returns filed that month hit a high of 72 lakh from 55 lakh at the beginning of the fiscal, yet revenues fell. November also marked the onset of India's festive season, with a late Deepavali. Yet, the higher compliance and the festive fervour translated into collections lower than the average monthly receipts for the year till date. Though India's growth fell to 7.1% in the second quarter of this fiscal, an uptick in private investment over the same period was considered a sign of revival. But if consumers are not confident enough to spend, a consumption-led investment revival to take the economy to an 8% growth path seems elusive again.

Caught in a crossfire?

Spats over detention of Canadians in China reflect the scale of the U.S.-China trade war

The diplomatic row between Beijing and Ottawa over the detention and treatment of Canadian nationals in China continues to escalate, to the detriment of bilateral relations. But more serious could be the implications of the standoff for the ongoing trade war between China and the U.S. The spat goes back to the detention on December 1 of a top Chinese telecom executive in Vancouver, who has since been released on bail, in response to a U.S. request. Washington wanted custody of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei and the daughter of the company's founder. Her arrest was part of the U.S. Justice Department's ongoing criminal probe into the company's sale of telecommunications equipment to Iran, a potential breach of sanctions against Tehran. But the arrest is also seen in the context of the caution in much of the West against Huawei's potentially winning bids as 5G communication networks are adopted, on grounds of a security threat. The military background of the Huawei founder has only raised speculation about the firm's connection to the Chinese defence and intelligence services. Conversely, the U.S. has invoked a rare national security provision under domestic law to impose punitive tariffs on global steel and aluminium imports. A similar investigation is under way specifically to determine the risk to domestic security from alleged Chinese intellectual property abuses. In addition, Beijing's "Made in China 2025" industrial policy has aroused deep suspicion in the U.S. about the persistence of state subsidies to prop up indigenous firms. It is therefore speculated that Washington has its lens trained on Huawei, which has emerged as the world's largest telecommunications equipment maker, surpassing Sweden's Ericsson.

Meanwhile, there is concern that Canadian residents in China may face retribution for Ms. Meng's detention. A Chinese court last week ruled as too lenient the 15-year sentence against a Canadian convicted of drug-related offences. A former diplomat who was arrested has apparently been denied legal representation, although Canadian embassy officials were permitted to visit him. Another Canadian was detained for alleged transgressions of national security. Given the climate of mistrust between the U.S. and China, it is hard to dispel the perception that Canada has got caught in the crossfire. In fact, the Canadian Foreign Minister has suggested that President Donald Trump should desist from using the episode as a bargaining chip in trade disputes with China. But it is conceivable that Chinese trade concessions to de-escalate tensions could pave the way for a resolution of the standoff over Huawei. That would likely satisfy the hawks in Washington who fear that the U.S. is ceding its technological dominance to China.

Religion vs religious nationalism

The starting point for anti-Hindutva politics must be the distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva. Else, it's doomed



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

Any rigid secular approach, unrestrained by considerations of electoral politics, could only lead to disapproval of Congress president Rahul Gandhi's demonstration of his religious faith and his characterisation of the Congress as a "party of Hinduism". His approach has been widely termed "soft Hindutva", and as an attempt to compete with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in its game. Those who deride Hindutva and those who swear by it both consider Mr. Gandhi a poor imitator of it. Centrist politics by definition is vulnerable to criticism from radical perspectives of different hues – for instance, Marxist M.N. Roy, Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar and Hindutva proponent, and later his assassin, Nathuram Godse, were all critical of Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of Hinduism. What is worth a closer analysis in the current context is the suggestion that the invocation of Hindu symbols for electoral gains is Hindutva, albeit a softer version.

A clear trajectory

Mainstream Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism shared a range of symbols and personalities during their formative decades, and distinguishing one from the other can appear a challenging task often. Consolidation of the Hindu society was a preoccupation of several reformists and leaders of the struggle for independence, who were not linked to

Hindutva. In a classic essay written in the 1990s, at the peak of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, historian Sumit Sarkar marked the stages of the evolution of Hindu nationalism in two distinct phases: first from the use of the word Hindu as a geographical marker to 'Hinduism', an attempt to codify the cultural and religious practices, and then to Hindutva. Swami Vivekananda was the seer of the first shift. "Of the Swami's address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was of the religious ideas of the Hindus but when he ended, Hinduism had been created," wrote Sister Nivedita, the Swami's closest disciple. Three decades later Veer Savarkar, who invented Hindutva, did not merely seek to unify Hindus, but tried to achieve it by imagining the other as those who do not consider India their sacred land. While secular nationalism's adversarial image was imperialism, the edge in Savarkar's Hindutva was against Muslims and Christians. Vivekananda's Hinduism had no enemy figure.

The political rise of Hindutva has been directly proportionate to the success of its proponents' attempts to equate itself with Hinduism.

The Gandhi-Nehru way

For Gandhi, Hinduism was the essence of his existence, but even the avowedly secular Jawaharlal Nehru was not dismissive of faith and tradition. *The Discovery of India* draws from sacred texts and beliefs; "though I have discarded much of past tradition and custom... yet I do not wish to cut myself off from that past completely," he wrote in his will, asking for some of his ashes to be immersed in the Ganga.



P.K. BADIGER

The vertical rise and the horizontal spread of Hindutva challenge its opponents to devise new political idioms. A puritan view is that Hindutva can be challenged only with an unyielding secular paradigm, devoid of Hindu symbols. Those leaders and parties that are directly involved in electoral politics are more conflicted on these questions than those who have the convenience of a quarantined approach. In the early 2000s, when critics began to use the neologism saffronisation to describe the A.B. Vajpayee government's policies that advanced Hindutva, within the Congress there was a debate on the wisdom of it. A.K. Antony and Digvijay Singh vehemently opposed the expression, arguing that it amounted to legitimising the Hindutva agenda given the cultural association of the colour saffron with sacrifice and renunciation. The Congress discontinued use of the word.

Other parties too have used Hindu symbolism and terminology. Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Lalu Prasad, whose mastery of electoral politics broke the Hindutva momentum in Bihar, connects his community to Lord Krishna. "Haathi nahin Ganesh hai, Brahma Vishnu Mahesh hai (this is not merely an elephant, but is Lord Ganesh; and Brahma Vishnu Ma-

hesh)" was the Bahujan Samaj Party's 2005 slogan referencing its election symbol, the elephant. Groups associated with the Communists Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala recently organised events around Ramayana month. "The Sangh has created a particulate image of Ram, that a majority of the faithful do not relate to," said V. Sivadasan, CPI(M) State committee member, who was closely associated with the programme. "Given this context, it is the duty of the secularists to come in support of the believers who understand Ram different from the way the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) tries to make him. All secular people have this responsibility to help protect the plurality of faith that exists among religious people."

Whether or not these attempts add up to a robust and credible challenge to Hindutva is an open question. However, the notion of 'soft Hindutva' is detrimental to anti-Hindutva polemics and mobilisation.

For one, it ignores the tactical components of electoral politics, which the moralist might dismiss as opportunism, for good reasons. What is more critical is that the notion of expressive faith as 'soft Hindutva' is an inadvertent endorsement of the Hindutva claim that it is equivalent to Hinduism. The proponents of Hindutva also acknowledge the existence of 'hard' and 'fringe' elements within its fold. Categories of soft and hard, being relative terms, trick moderates and offer an alibi to opportunists to side with the softer versions – Vajpayee against L.K. Advani, Mr. Advani against Narendra Modi, and who knows, perhaps Mr. Modi against Yogi Adityanath in the future?

Any equivalence between Hin-

duism and Hindutva, conversely, is taken to mean that any criticism of Hindutva is an attack on Hinduism. That one could be accused of being anti-Hinduism for questioning the logic of building a temple on the site of a destroyed mosque at Ayodhya draws from the logical premise of likening Hinduism to Hindutva. To take another example, the Hindu American Foundation claimed recently that even the questioning of 'Brahminical patriarchy' is an act of Hindu-phobia.

To Hindutva's advantage?

And most consequentially, any polemical negation of the wall between Hinduism and Hindutva makes the transition from the first to the second easier. It could even encourage believers to consider Hindutva their natural political abode, if they sense hostility in the anti-Hindutva camp. If non-Hindutva platforms expect templegoers to explain their conduct, that is not an enticing recruitment pitch. The fact is that there are numerous people who visit temples and even believe in vastu, astrology, tantra, etc. while still being secular in a political and public context.

The only politics that benefits from associating Hinduism to Hindutva is Hindutva. The practice of Hinduism, even when it is exhibitionist and for political ends, is not Hindutva – soft or hard. Hindutva stands out for its conceptual clarity, leaving little scope for a spectrum within it. A manifesto for any durable anti-Hindutva politics is still a long way away, but its singular starting point is an assertion of the distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva. Anything else is doomed.

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Powering South Asian integration

The new electricity guidelines are a first step towards creating a true regional market



ADITYA VALIATHAN PILLAI

On December 18, the Union Ministry of Power issued a seemingly anodyne memo that set the rules for the flow of electricity across South Asian borders. Evaluated against the turbulent politics around the issue, the new guidelines are a startling departure from India's previous stance. In an atmosphere of regional intrigue and mistrust, it is a rare and recent example of political pragmatism. It is important not only because it leads South Asian electricity trade in progressive directions but is also a concession to India's neighbours in an area of political and economic importance.

A course correction

The revision is a response to two years of intense backroom pressure from neighbours, particularly Bhutan and Nepal, to drop trade barriers put up in 2016. The new guidelines meet most of their demands, that were timed to coincide with the recent visit of Bhutan's new Prime Minister. India has thus signalled that it is serious about working with neighbours on the issues that should undergird 21st century South Asian regionalism, such as electricity trade.

This course correction is a re-

turn to a trajectory of incremental, hard-earned progress developed over the decades. Ideas of tying South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries together with cross-border energy flows – that punctuated the early 2000s – began to gain steam with substantial power trade agreements between India and Bhutan (2006) and Bangladesh (2010). These were driven by India's need for affordable power to fuel quickened growth in a recently liberalised economy.

The apotheosis came in 2014 with the signing of the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation and the India-Nepal Power Trade Agreement in quick succession. The new government in New Delhi was keen on regional cooperation, and these agreements imposed few restrictions on trade. Instead, they laid the contours of an institutional structure that would allow private sector participation and facilitate market rationality in electricity commerce. At the Fifth SAARC Energy Ministers' meeting that year, Power Minister Piyush Goyal said he dreamt of 'a seamless SAARC power grid within the next few years' and offshore wind projects 'set up in Sri Lanka's coastal borders to power Pakistan or Nepal'. Yet, two years later, the Union Ministry of Power released guidelines that imposed a slew of major restrictions on who could engage in cross-border electricity trade.

There was a strong undercurrent of defensiveness in the guidelines of 2016. They seemed to be a



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reaction to perceptions of increased Chinese investment and influence in the energy sectors of South Asian neighbours.

Some irritants

The guidelines prevented anyone other than Indian generators in the neighbouring country, or generators owned by that country's government, from selling power to India. Excluded were scores of privately held companies, particularly in Nepal, that had hoped to trade with India. In restricting access to the vast Indian market, the economic rationale for Nepali hydropower built for export was lost. Bhutan was worried about a clause that required the exporting generation companies to be majority owned by an Indian entity. This created friction in joint ventures between India and Bhutan. Bhutan also fretted about limited access to India's main electricity spot markets, where it would have been well placed to profit from evening peaks in demand. Bangladesh had sensed an opportunity to partially address its power crisis with imports from Bhutan and Nepal routed through Indian territory but the guidelines complicated this by giving India disproportion-

ate control over such trade.

After two years of protests from neighbours, the new guidelines resolve all these issues and restore the governance of electricity trade to a less restrictive tone. Earlier concerns that India was enabling the incursion of foreign influence into neighbouring power sectors seem to have been replaced by an understanding that India's buyer's monopoly in the region actually give it ultimate leverage. More broadly, India seems to have acknowledged that the sinews of economic interdependency created by such arrangements have the political benefit of positioning India as a stable development partner rather than one inclined to defensive realpolitik.

Tool for a greener grid

A liberal trading regime is in India's national interest. As India transitions to a power grid dominated by renewables, regional trade could prove useful in maintaining grid stability. Major commitments to renewables, which could amount to half of India's installed power within a decade, have prompted justifiable concerns about stabilising the grid when the sun goes down or in seasons when renewables are less potent. Harnessing a wider pool of generation sources, particularly hydropower from the Himalayas that ramps up instantly as India turns on its lights and appliances after sunset, could be an important instrument in achieving a greener grid. Nepal and Bhutan have long recognised that their

prosperity is tied to the sustainable use of vast hydropower reserves.

The new guidelines are a tentative first step towards the creation of a true regional market in which generators across the subcontinent compete to deliver low-cost, green energy to consumers. Since this would soften the hard borders of South Asia, it is essentially a political vision. The new guidelines are a significant step in this direction because, for the first time, they allow tripartite trading arrangements, where power generated in a country is routed over the territory of a neighbour to be consumed in a third. This is a crucial move towards the evolution of complex, multi-country market arrangements. Such markets require the construction of regional institutions that absorb the politics and manage the technicalities of electricity trade.

At present, this function is managed by the Indian state because of its geographic centrality and the ready availability of institutions that manage its domestic power sector. As volumes increase and experience in regional trade grows, South Asian nations might feel the need to build joint, independent regional institutions that proffer clear and stable rules of the road. The political vision to create this – felt in the new guidelines – must be maintained.

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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.

Peace overture

Amid escalating India-Pakistan hostilities, it comes as a whiff of fresh air that as a follow-up to the release of India's Hamid Ansari and Pakistan's Imran Warsi, in December 2018, the estranged South Asian neighbours have decided to herald in 2019 with a goodwill gesture of exchanging lists of prisoners (Page 1, "India, Pak. move towards release of civilian prisoners", January 2). However small or fragile the olive branch extended to each other by India and Pakistan might be, the thaw in bilateral relations, that have been mutually destructive, needs to be welcomed. The relentless efforts of peace activists to usher in some peace between the warring

neighbours seems to have paid off to some extent. It cannot be refuted that many of the prisoners are innocent fishermen who have unwittingly strayed into enemy territory.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN, Thiruvananthapuram

India's long-forgotten "Neighbourhood first" policy now gets a push when seen together with positive developments in India-Maldives and India-Bangladesh ties as well. We need to keep the spirits high and not just solely focus on larger and distant nations.

ANJALI BHAVANA, Thiruvananthapuram

Now that there is significant development on the exchange of information on prisoners, India must

make an earnest effort to find out the fate, in Pakistan, of Indian prisoners of war of 1971 – nearly 60 personnel. Much has been written about them but little is known about their well-being. Their families need to know what happened.

DARIUS KHAMBATA, Mumbai

Modi interview

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's clarification that any decision on an ordinance on the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya will be after the judicial process is completed must have answered concerns and queries (Page 1, "Modi rules out ordinance on Ram temple for now", January 2). He is right in saying that farm loan waivers do not benefit farmers; hence making

available institutional credit to farmers and educating them on this aspect is the way forward. The Congress's reaction to the interview is on expected lines as the party always speaks in negative terms against Mr. Modi ("Full of 'I's and lies": Congress, January 2).

C.G. KURIKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

The entire discussion, with easy and non-controversial questions, enabled the Prime Minister to field replies with absolute ease. The interviewer very carefully avoided controversial questions. It sounds reasonable that spokespersons of the Congress party have reason to be critical.

THARICUS S. FERNANDO, Chennai

Ever since the results of the five State elections, there has been a palpable change in the attitude of Mr. Modi. Many of his answers, such as going soft on the temple issue, the poll pitch that it will be people versus a coalition, the stance on triple talaq and Sabarimala and on RBI Governor Urjit Patel's resignation, all point towards only one objective – to somehow retain power.

G.B. SIVANANDAM, Coimbatore

The Indian XI

The report, "Cheteshwar Pujara – the man for all

reasons and seasons" ("Sport" page, January 2), is a re-affirmation of the reality that the managers of the Indian team need to think carefully whenever they pick and choose the playing eleven. Virat Kohli is definitely realising that Pujara is the most consistent Test player in the team and needs to be there for the long haul. Too much tinkering with the team composition could play havoc with the careers of talented players.

SAURABH SINHA, Bhillai, Chhattisgarh

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

>> A story titled "Parliamentary committee irked by States' insensitivity to Western Ghats" (Jan. 2, 2019) inadvertently referred to over 56,000 kilometres of ecologically sensitive areas in the Western Ghats. It should have been over 56,000 square kilometres.

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Deterrence or danger?

India does not gain anything by escalating the nuclear arms race in the region with INS Arihant



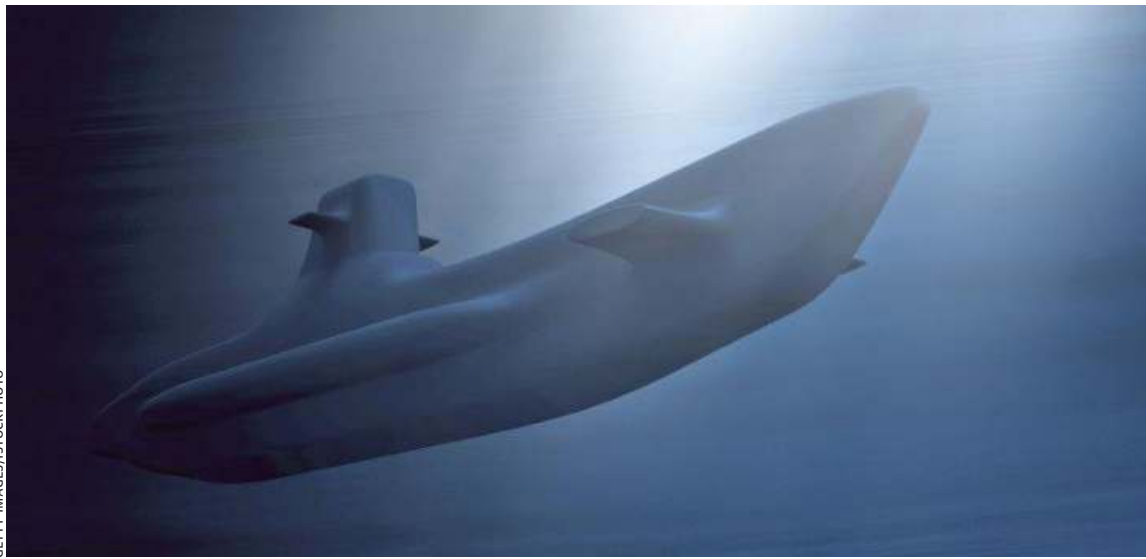
CHINMAYA R. GHAREKHAN

The indigenous nuclear submarine, INS Arihant, is a great achievement for India. The Indian Navy, its engineers and scientists have done us immensely proud. But it might not be inappropriate to ask: Will Arihant make us more secure, and if so, in what way?

It has been universally recognised that the sole justification for having nuclear weapons is their deterrence value. If ever a nuclear bomb has to be used, it has destroyed its raison d'être. The initiation of a nuclear attack would mean utter destruction, not just for the two parties involved but also for regions far beyond. The Americans got away with their bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, however controversial it was, because they had a monopoly of nukes at the time. Today, the situation is vastly different and far more dangerous. If nuclear weapons fail to deter the outbreak of war involving use of such weapons, they have disastrously failed in their deterrence mission.

A nuclear triad

The major nuclear weapon powers, principally the U.S., have developed the myth of a nuclear triad, that consists of land-based, air-based and sea-based nuclear delivery systems. The theory is that if country A initiates a nuclear attack on country B in a first strike, country B must be in a position, even after absorbing the nuclear strike, to retaliate with a massive nuclear attack on the enemy country. This is called second strike capability. In the event that country A manages to destroy the land and air-based nukes of country B, country B will still have its third leg in the shape of sea-based nuclear-tipped missiles, called SLBMs or submarine-launched ballistic missiles, for use against country A because the sea-based missiles, launched from nuclear-powered submarines, would have remained undetected and hence safe from enemy attack. Thus, the rationale for the naval leg of the triad is its survivability. Essentially, the argument in favour of the naval



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leg is not that it makes the deterrent more credible, but that, as mentioned above, it will survive for retaliation.

In the event that an enemy initiates a nuclear strike, it will never be able to destroy all the land and air-based nuclear weapons of the target country. Again, the enemy might attack population centres and not nuclear weapon sites; in that case, all the nukes of the target country would be available for retaliation. In either case, the deterrence capability of the target would remain intact. If the possession of the naval leg were to deter the enemy, ab initio, from initiating a nuclear launch, it would add to the deterrence value. Survivability by itself does not appear to make deterrence more credible.

If the hostilities reach the threshold where a country may consider using nuclear weapons, it would be preceded by a period of conventional warfare. The enemy would also have to reach the conclusion that unless he uses his nuclear weapons, he would suffer a defeat that he simply cannot afford to let happen. A conventional conflict itself will not start before several days of negotiations, including possible mediation by external powers and the UN Security Council. Even a small incident involving India and Pakistan would immediately invite big powers to rush in and mediate pull-back of forces, etc. Whether the external interventions succeed or not in preventing a major war, the target country would have ample time to disperse its land and

air-based nuclear assets. The naval leg does not seem indispensable.

The case of Pakistan

Let us take Pakistan. One does not know if it has a nuclear doctrine, but even if it does not have one, that by itself does not make it an irresponsible nuclear power. Pakistan has rejected the no-first-use policy and has in fact said that it would not rule out using nukes if it felt compelled to do so in a war. It claims to have so-called tactical nuclear weapons which can presumably be used in a battle field. Pakistan, in other words, keeps the option of using nuclear weapons first as a deterrent against a conventional attack by India. India's stand is clear. Any use of nuclear weapon, tactical or otherwise, will invite massive retaliation by India which would have disastrous consequences for Pakistan. (Will India remain unaffected by radiation, etc? Can we guarantee that the winds will not blow in our direction? The radiation, debris, heat, blast, etc will be carried well beyond the belligerents' borders.) So, even assuming that we will have the political and moral will to unleash the full force of our nukes, how does acquiring SSBNs or a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine make our deterrent more credible?

Since Pakistan is still a long way away from having the naval leg of the triad, would not our land and air-based nukes be enough of a deterrent? Is it conceivable that after destroying each other's land and air-based nuclear platforms, either country will have even the need to

bring into play its naval leg? And, if and when Pakistan does acquire the third leg, which it is bound to sooner or later, even if it has to 'eat grass', will it then make the nuclear equation more stable and make each country's deterrent more credible? We may not admit it, but we are engaged in a nuclear, and conventional, arms race, exactly the same way the superpowers were during the Cold War era.

China is far ahead of India in many respects. It has more warheads and more nuclear-powered submarines. Both India and China have repeatedly declared adherence to the no-first-use doctrine. So where is the justification for acquiring the naval leg of the triad? We have a territorial dispute with China, but both countries have acquired enough experience to manage and contain the conflict. It is reasonably safe to say that there will not be an all-out war involving the use of nuclear weapons between India and China.

One of the arguments in the 1960s and 1970s in favour of atom bombs was that they would be cheaper in the long run. That has not happened. The acquisition of expensive conventional platforms as well as the ever expanding nuclear programme has destroyed that argument. India has been in the forefront in campaign for nuclear disarmament. Let us not at least escalate a nuclear arms race in our region.

Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, a former Indian Ambassador to the United Nations, was Special Envoy for West Asia in the Manmohan Singh government

Lessons from Kerala

Its experience could help achieve the objectives of the Astana Declaration on primary care



RAJEEV SADANANDAN

Last year, in October at Astana, Kazakhstan, world leaders declared their commitment to 'Primary Care'. They were reaffirming what their predecessors had done in Alma Ata in 1978. The Alma Ata Declaration, as it was called, had been criticised as wishful thinking without a clear road map on strategies and financing – an allegation that could be levelled against the present declaration too.

In 2016, Kerala had, as part of the Aardram mission to transform health care, attempted to re-design its primary care to address the current and future epidemiological situation. Lessons learnt from Kerala's experience could provide insights into what needs to be done to ensure the objectives of the Astana Declaration do not remain a statement of pious intentions in India.

The Astana Declaration would "aim to meet all people's health needs across the life course through comprehensive preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative services and palliative care". A representative list of primary care services are provided: "including but not limited to vaccination; screenings; prevention, control and management of non-communicable and communicable diseases; care and services that promote, maintain and improve maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health; and mental health and sexual and reproductive health".

The Kerala experience

In the revamped primary care, Kerala tried to provide these services and more with mixed results. These services cannot be provided without adequate human resources. It is nearly impossible to provide them with the current Indian norm of one primary care team for a population of 30,000. Kerala tried to reduce the target population to 10,000. Even the reduced target turned out to be too high to be effective. Kerala's experience suggests that providing comprehensive primary care would require at least one team for 5,000 populations. This would mean a six-fold increase in cost of manpower alone. Since supply of more human resources would generate demand for services, there would be a corresponding increase in the cost of drugs, consumables, equipment and space. So a commitment to provide comprehensive primary care – even in the limited sense in which it is understood in India – would be meaningful only if there is also a

commitment to substantially increase the allocation of funds. It is sobering to remember that most successful primary care interventions allocate not more than 2,500 beneficiaries per team.

Providing the entire set of services, even if limited to diagnosis and referral, is beyond the capacity of medical and nursing graduates without specialised training. Practitioners in most good primary care systems are specialists, often with postgraduate training. The Post Graduate Course in Family Medicine, which is the nearest India has to such a course, is available in very few institutions. If the services are to be provided by mid-level service providers, as is planned in many States, building their capacity will be even more of a challenge. It would be a long time for this to be built. Kerala has tried to get over this through short courses in specific areas such as management of diabetes mellitus, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and depression.

The primary care system will be effective only when the providers assume responsibility for the health of the population assigned to them and the population trusts them for their health needs. Both are linked to capacity, attitude and support from referral networks and the systemic framework. It will not be possible unless the numbers assigned are within manageable proportions. Access to longitudinal data on individuals through dynamic electronic health records and decision support through analysis of data will be helpful in achieving the link.

Discussion on primary care in India focuses only on the public sector while more than 60% of care is provided by the private sector. The private sector provides primary care in most countries though it is paid for from the budget or insurance. The private sector can provide good quality primary care if there are systems to finance care and if the private sector is prepared to invest in developing the needed capacities. Devising and operating such a system (more fund management than insurance though it can be linked to insurance) will be a major challenge but a necessary one if good quality primary care is to be available to the entire population. Negotiations to set up such systems in Kerala are only at the initial stage.

Achieving Universal Health Coverage – one of the Sustainable Development Goals to which India is committed – is not possible without universal primary health care. The experience of Kerala in transforming primary care reveals the steepness of the path India will have to cover to reach the goals committed to in the Astana Declaration.

Rajeev Sadanandan is Health Secretary, Kerala. The views expressed are personal

SINGLE FILE

Breaking the stranglehold

There is scant focus on India's secret shame: bonded labour

MOHIT M. RAO



Last year, on December 22, an incident of bonded labour reached the national headlines, even if only for a fleeting moment. BJP president Amit Shah tweeted on the subject. A week earlier, 52 trafficked labourers had been rescued from a ginger farm in Karnataka where they had been made to work inhuman hours

with little pay. Yet, for the most part, both the mainstream discourse and social media commentary miss the underlying phenomenon: bonded labour, India's secret shame.

The practice was abolished under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 after the issue found a place in the Emergency-era's 20-point programme. Four decades on, independent surveys and State government-led committees still point to its myriad forms. The Global Slavery Index 2016 estimated there to be 1.8 crore Indians in modern slavery, including bondedness, while the International Labour Organisation said there were 1.17 crore bonded labourers in 2014.

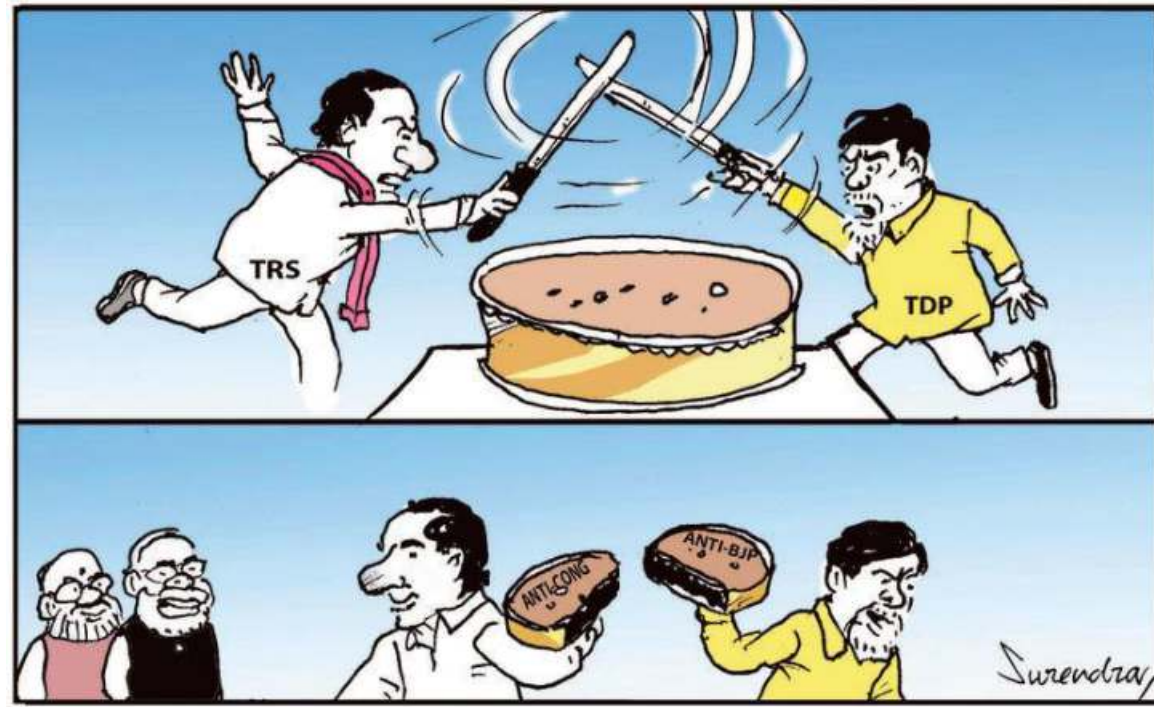
However, there has been no government-led nationwide survey since 1978, despite each district having been given ₹4.5 lakh for such surveys. Instead, the government relies on rescue and rehabilitation numbers: Since 1976, over 3.13 lakh people have been rescued, with Karnataka topping the list (nearly 66,300 people). This does not reflect the extent of the prevalence of bonded labour, as most labourers are not aware of the Act and turn to the authorities only when it becomes overtly violent.

Moreover, National Crime Records Bureau data show that not all cases are reported by the police. Between 2014 and 2016, they recorded just 1,338 victims, with 290 police cases filed – a stark difference from 5,676 rescues reported by six States in this period.

This becomes important given the structure of the disbursement of rehabilitation funds: ₹20,000 is given as immediate relief while the rest (which depends on the case) is given only after conviction of the accused. In these three years, only 28 cases (of the 334 in trial) saw judicial resolution, resulting in a conviction rate of just 32%. It is no surprise that the Centre has had to spend just ₹7.65 crore on rehabilitation in this period. Some patterns emerge. Traffickers continue to source labour in socio-economically backward districts, an example being Bolangir in Odisha. Tribals and Dalits remain vulnerable. Advances and small loans accompanied by promises of steady pay are tools of entrapment. Brick kilns, quarries, horticulture farms, shoe and plastic factories in metropolises are venues for this practice.

The Ministry of Labour says, "The root of the problem lies in the social customs and economic compulsions," before listing a "multi-pronged" strategy which focusses solely on rescue and rehabilitation processes. However, a preventive measure, which must start with a survey, is missing. Creating financial access for vulnerable communities/vulnerable districts could help. Further, regulatory attention must focus on trafficking rings and sectors.

The writer is a Principal Correspondent at The Hindu's Bengaluru bureau



FAQ

All along the coastline

Breaking down the new Coastal Regulation Zone Notification

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

What changes will the notification bring?

The Cabinet has approved a significant relaxation of development controls along the coastline through the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification 2018, as part of a plan to encourage construction of buildings and launch tourism activities in areas that are closer to the high tide line. State governments and others had made representations, calling for a review of coastal management policies. Recommendations for changes were then made by the Shailesh Nayak Committee.

The Centre has taken the view that both affordable housing availability and tourism will grow if restrictions on coastal zones are relaxed. With this objective, a decision has been taken to permit current Floor Space Index

(FSI) or Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in urban areas coming under CRZ-II – which governs the size of buildings – as on the date of the new notification. This does away with the restrictions on construction which date back to the Development Control Rules of 1991. The CRZ-II urban category, as per the CRZ notification of 2011, pertains to areas "that have been developed up to or close to the shoreline", and are legally designated municipal limits already provided with roads, water supply, sewerage connections and so on.

What about rural areas?

For rural areas, the newly approved notification adds a sub-category to CRZ-III. The new provision, CRZ-III A, applies development restrictions to a much smaller area of 50 metres from the high tide line, compared to the 200 metres that was earmarked as the no development

zone (NDZ) earlier for densely populated areas. These are defined as places with a population of 2,161 per sq km as per the 2011 Census. Areas with a population density below that will continue to have 200 metres as the NDZ.

However, for tourism expansion, the new scheme will allow temporary facilities such as shacks, toilet blocks and changing rooms, maintaining only a slim margin of 10 metres from the high tide line.

The system of granting clearances has also been changed. States will have the authority to approve proposals for urban (CRZ-II) and rural (CRZ-III) areas. The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change will grant clearances for ecologically sensitive areas (CRZ-I), and areas falling between the low tide line and 12 nautical miles seaward. The modifications also include demarcation of a 20-metre

no development zone for all islands and guidelines to deal with sensitive areas.

What will be the likely impact?

When the draft of the new CRZ notification was published in 2018, concerns were raised that it ignored two major issues: maintaining a well demarcated hazard line and factoring in the effects of climate change on sea levels. The disastrous impacts of periodic cyclones show that coastlines will become even more vulnerable.

Protection of fishers poses a challenge, since the relaxation of development controls could subject them to severe commercial pressures. The decision to allow construction and tourist facilities closer to the coast may boost employment and grow local business, but without strong environmental safeguards, these could damage fragile ecosystems.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 3, 1969

Scope for India-Iran cooperation

The Shah of Iran said to-night [January 2] there were tremendous possibilities of co-operation between Iran and India and "we must seek to develop it to the maximum possible extent." Responding to the toast at the State banquet here [New Delhi], he stressed the importance of regional co-operation. "Those who need assistance must be helped." The Shah traced the historical and cultural ties between the two countries which, he said, "are one of the most ancient of their kind in the world." Referring to the present relations between the two countries, he said the approach of Iran and India to almost all the problems was very similar. "We attach importance to the dignity of the human being and the freedom of man. It is but natural that, bound by ties of the past and the present, we are seeking closer friendship." The President, Dr. Zakir Husain, described the visit of the Shah to this country as "a milestone" in Indo-Iranian relations and expressed the "confident hope" that it would renew not only the ancient ties between the two countries but "will also beckon towards a common exercise in the practice of modern ideals of Government."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 3, 1919.

Tea Trade in England.

The Indian Tea Association announces [in London] that the Food Ministry has arranged that licences shall be freely issued for private import of tea provided that no portion of the tea is sold for home consumption and at least fifty percent of importations are offered to Food Ministry. Subject to grades, FOB prices will be as follows: India and Ceylon will be equivalent to present contract prices. Java Sumatra and Nyassa land will be analogous to Indian contract prices. China and Formosa prices will be determined by Food Ministry in consultation with the trade within the limits of eight pence for fair common leaf to two shillings for the finest tea at the present rate of exchange on the basis that FOB costs and prices will be paid by Food Ministry for their purchases of three million pounds. Tea not taken by the Ministry will be free for re-export without limitation of price subject to export restrictions. Quantities of tea which are at present available for re-export to blockaded countries are very small.

CONCEPTUAL

Sexual dimorphism

BIOLOGY

This refers to the various prominent differences in the physical characteristics of males and females of the same species apart from just their primary reproductive characteristics. These differences may include size, colour, shape, cognitive abilities, and various other distinct characteristics. Sexual dimorphism, which is prevalent across various species, has been attributed by scientists to the process of sexual selection. It is believed that males or females with certain characteristics may have been favoured by the opposite sex. This might have caused genes responsible for these characteristics to be passed on to future generations, thus magnifying differences between the sexes.

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<http://bit.ly/Sabarimalawomenentry>