



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Blast from the past

Competitive populism threatens to undo the gains of economic reforms



AMARTYA LAHIRI

BEIJING'S OUTREACH

China signals willingness to address criticism of BRI, India should take a fresh look at the initiative, nuance its approach

THE SECOND FORUM on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that concluded in Beijing over the weekend suggests a subtle shift in China's framing of the ambitious initiative outlined by President Xi Jinping in 2013. Beijing's earlier articulation of the gigantic plan to promote global connectivity through China's investments had a "take-it-or-leave-it" approach. Xi's conciliatory tone this time around underlined China's eagerness to respond to the widespread international criticism of the BRI. Many countries and institutions — including India, Japan, Europe and the United States — voiced concerns that the BRI is motivated by China's ambition to expand its geopolitical influence at the expense of other powers. There has also been widespread criticism that the BRI projects were pushing recipient states into a debt trap, unsustainable environmentally, not transparent enough, and violating international norms.

At the second forum, Xi sought to reassure the world that BRI is about partnership rather than the pursuit of unilateral advantage. A joint communique issued after the summit reflected China's effort to negotiate a new consensus behind an initiative in which Xi invested massive personal political capital. The communique pledged to pursue high-standard, people-centred and sustainable development "in line with our national legislation, regulatory frameworks, international obligations, applicable international norms and standards". The communique was signed by Xi and 37 heads of state/government. Fourteen new countries became new signatories to the initiative. The communique also extended support for "collaboration among national and international financial institutions to provide diversified and sustainable financial support for projects.". It also underlined the importance of "improving livelihoods" of the local population.

Delhi, which stayed out of the second iteration of the forum, in line with its explicit criticism when the first BRI forum was organised in 2017, has to take into account the new BRI dynamics. Many countries had indeed joined India in highlighting the problems with BRI. As China begins to address these issues, more nations are joining the initiative by paying greater attention to BRI's terms and conditions. While sceptics around the world insist that the change in Beijing is more about style rather than substance, the next government in Delhi should take a fresh look at BRI. If China is ready for a productive consultation with India, Delhi should start engaging with Beijing. A case by case evaluation of infrastructure projects might allow Delhi to construct a practical approach to BRI. Over the last few years, Delhi has announced plans to develop connectivity projects on its own as well as in collaboration with other powers, especially Japan and the US. The next government must turn some of this talk into concrete outcomes. Delhi must also come to terms with the expanding scope of BRI that is enveloping the digital and space domains and is bound to create challenges much larger than those presented by Beijing's current projects on physical connectivity over land and sea.

ELECTION SEASON IS underway in India. The Indian voter has been greeted with a slate of electoral promises. From promises of minimum income transfers to astronomically high spending on infrastructure to promises of sustained government job creation, the voter has heard it all, and from all. At some level none of this is new. It happens every election cycle. And therein lies the tragedy for the Indian voter.

In the late 1960s, the debate on the appropriate strategy for battling poverty in India had two opposing arguments. On the one side were those who believed that redistribution of resources to the neediest sections of society was key to unleashing economic growth. This group advocated an aggressive policy of redistribution through myriad social welfare schemes and an ever increasing collection of protectionist policies directed to help the small, the agrarian, the exporter, the import competitor, etc.

On the other side were those who argued that growth would lift all boats. Without growth there was not much to redistribute. Hence, a development model based on state-directed allocation of resources would not deliver any sustained deliverance from poverty and underdevelopment. This group believed that the way to unleashing growth was to free up the private sector and human enterprise.

The first group won the battle and India, under Indira Gandhi, dived into a state-led, redistribution heavy development model. The second group however won the war. As is well recognised now, the liberalisation of the early 1990s unleashed a phenomenal growth pick-up. From struggling to rise above two per cent a year, per capita income growth over the last two decades has routinely exceeded five per cent a year.

Even more impressive is the scale of the intellectual victory of the second view on achieving improvements in human welfare. This has happened on account of growth lifting all boats. In a sequence of papers with Viktoria Hnatkovska, we have found a sharp decrease in education gaps, wage gaps and

consumption gaps between scheduled castes and tribes (SC/STs) and non-SC/STs in India since 1983. Today, the wage gap between a typical African American or Hispanic worker and a white worker in the US is greater than the wage gap between a typical SC/ST and non-SC/ST worker in India.

Interestingly, occupation choices of SC/STs are becoming similar to those of non-SC/STs. Perhaps the most uplifting bit is that children of SC/ST parents are improving their outcomes relative to their parents at a faster rate than non-SC/ST children in education and wages. In other words, inter-generational mobility rates of SC/STs have surpassed non-SC/STs.

The same pattern of declining disparities in outcomes can also be found between the average rural and urban worker, as well as between the typical female and male worker. These are outcomes to be proud of for all Indians. They are also a loud testament to the correctness of the views of people like Jagdish Bhagwati in the 1960s as well as the political courage of the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao for ushering in liberalisation.

Before economic liberalisation, labour and capital would get stuck in relatively unproductive uses. By reforming the industrial licensing regime, opening up the country to trade, and encouraging foreign investment, the reforms released these resources to be allocated to their most productive use. The Indian growth pick-up can thus be viewed as a one-time reassignment of productive resources to their best use.

To sustain its growth story, India now desperately needs a next generation of reforms. Amongst the most important ones are land and labour reforms to encourage manufacturing to scale up. This will soak up the dramatic addition to the labour force that is happening every year and provide effective demand for the existing and on-going infrastructure investment.

Two decades though are a long time in the collective memories of both politicians

and the public. People appear to have forgotten the main lessons of the liberalisation experience. We are seeing a creeping return of the pre-reform mindset. The response to current account imbalances is to raise import duties. Import substitution policies are being openly spoken about. Redistribution schemes are being proposed to help the poor and the rural farmer fight sectoral distress. Indeed, there appears to be competitive populism in promoting these programmes across the political spectrum.

A primary reason for rural distress is that there are too many people engaged in agriculture. Fifty per cent of workers are engaged in agriculture but they produce less than 15 per cent of Indian output. Handing these struggling farmers monthly or quarterly handouts of cash isn't going to solve their problem. Rather, it is akin to keeping the patient alive with oxygen.

The cure for rural distress is to provide agricultural workers with better options in large-scale, low-tech manufacturing. But that requires hard political choices to allow for labour, land and regulatory reforms. It is much easier instead to promise handouts since these don't even require a detailed accounting of where the money shall come from.

A key lesson of liberalisation was that growth lifts all boats. To unleash sustained growth, the private sector and private enterprise have to be encouraged. Crucially, the government has to retreat from people's lives. Indeed, its ubiquitous presence is often the source of the problem.

India today appears to be returning to an overarching focus on managing demand through myriad government schemes. The neglect of the supply side during the pre-reform years is gradually returning. It would be tragic if we fail to learn from our own history, especially given the country's huge potential.

The writer is director, Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning, Mumbai and professor of Economics at the University of British Columbia. Views are personal

ROUGH RIDE AHEAD

Rising oil prices could dampen market sentiment and domestic investment, trigger inflation

THE RALLY IN stocks over the past few weeks following the announcement of national elections was halted last week after the US announced that it was ending the significant reduction exceptions or the waiver on oil imports from Iran for eight countries including India, China and Japan. The loss of momentum is because of investor perceptions regarding a key macro risk that the country has encountered over decades — a surge in oil prices and its impact on India's balance of payments and economic growth.

Brent oil is now over \$75 a barrel as the oil markets have tightened, with Russia suspending exports to Europe, supply cuts by OPEC and with the US ending all exemptions as it pushes for zero oil exports from Iran. This in contrast to the scenario in November last year, when crude slipped to below \$58 after having surged to \$86 a barrel in October, reflecting the volatility and hazy outlook for the commodity; the rupee had then plunged to an all-time low of 74.39. The move by the US could put pressure on the rupee since India is one of the largest importers of crude: India sources over 20 million tonnes from Iran, which is the fourth-largest supplier to the country. The government has downplayed such concerns saying it has a robust plan in place to ensure adequate supply to refiners. Also, the US has indicated that there wouldn't be any significant disruptions in the oil markets. Further, Saudi Arabia has said it will work with other oil producers to ensure adequate supplies and balance in the global oil market. It does help that a slump in global demand could act as a dampener to a potential spike in oil prices. The other positive is the US Federal Reserve has signalled that it won't raise rates this year while the RBI has mopped up \$20 billion through two dollar-rupee swap auctions, which should help boost liquidity.

Few governments in India have had the good fortune as the Narendra Modi-led NDA government to enjoy a decent streak of relatively low oil prices, which helped keep the twin deficits under control. Soft crude prices have meant low inflation, easing the pressure on the RBI and paving the way for cutting interest rates. From a broader perspective, oil prices, if they remain at elevated levels, could dent the prospects of a further lowering of interest rates, dampening sentiment and domestic investment, precisely at a time when the economy badly needs a booster shot.

MAKINGS OF A MARD

The steel-strong ideal man and the redundancy of such masculinity



SHALINI LANGER

STILL IN THE first flush of my dreams for my kids, I had bought a green yoga mat for my son. In that dream, sweating it out in the neighbourhood park, he would somehow turn into a Bruce Lee. It took just one hollering from a rather harsh instructor, and a disapproving mother-in-law behind him whom my clever son quickly learnt to hide, for that dream to die. I hung on, at least to the yoga mat, first trying to use it as a rug and, as it slowly acquired grime, hiding it away — first under the bed, then in the closet, then in the upper shelves of the closet, finally only declaring it dead when its two sides stuck to each other and would not come apart. In some corner where our many dreams for our children turn out to be unwise ambitions, there is still a yellow belt as a reminder of that unfinished karate kid.

Now, after a long time, that yoga mat came into my dreams again. Every morning, I wake up with my back creaking more than my bed, my knees moaning, my glasses missing, my phone a monster gorging on unread messages by night, and all I can do is take a deep breath and mutter a deeper curse. Maybe yoga is the trick, for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to achieve what few have actually done in 60 years before his time — just "wake up in the morning and feel fresh (refer interview with Akshay Kumar)".

So is that what it means to be a 'mard' in Delhi — tea 'only directly under the sky', as the PM prefers it, in sun-dappled lawns from dainty tea and saucers, talking about mother and sacrifices; and, being able to transform in a minute into a squabbling schoolkid in the playground, threatening a prickly neighbour with nuclear fireworks? Or is it that we don't need a 'mard' at all?

It's not just that yoga mat which haunts my dreams now though. So do the PM's lawn, table, tea and leisurely conversation — between a man in starched kurta-pyjama and another in linen casuals — as I, first thing in the morning, ransack the fridge for leftovers to rustle up a school tiffin, praying my too-food smart daughter won't catch me at it. The morning routine over, the house for a little while to myself, some time yet for office, I even take a quick nap — who is watching, certainly not Barack Obama.

So really, it must require a "mard" in Delhi — as that PM biopic, which the Election Commission stopped, said we needed — to have just three-four hours of sleep and wake up with "junoon" in the eyes (again, the biopic's words).

It must also take a "mard" to dare greet visiting children by pinching their face parts. Having endured that in my childhood, and knowing my own kids' reaction, it's a risk I would not take. Plus, given the considerable size of my nose, I am rather sensitive to the idea. In childhood, many relatives suggested to my mother that she could consider pinching it a bit daily to render it into shape. Mom would look at me thoughtfully and then go back to doing what she was doing — I will forever be in her gratitude for that, even though she never fed me halwa with bare hands before my big days.

So is that what it means to be a "mard" in Delhi — tea "only directly under the sky", as the PM prefers it, in sun-dappled lawns from dainty tea and saucers, talking about mother and sacrifices; and, being able to transform in a minute into a squabbling schoolkid in the playground, threatening a prickly neighbour with nuclear fireworks?

Or is it that we don't need a "mard" at all? It took Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, new mother, probably facing the same aches and pains as many of us, to just show the courage to don a scarf and hug whom it matters, to try heal a nation's wounds. It may not have been enough for New Zealand, but it was something.

And it took a Bilkis Bano to show us what "mards" in Delhi were incapable of. Coming right to the country's seat of power, that is more hostile to her than ever, bearing her inked finger as a voter after 17 years, wearing her hijab proudly, seating her daughter beside her, the gangraped woman who had to pretend to be dead to escape the fate of her infant daughter and 13 other members of her family, Bilkis held a press conference, taking on questions, refusing to be confined to shame, never raising her voice or lowering her gaze.

Maybe some of us did. Like the "mard" who won't be questioned.

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FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



APRIL 29, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

GOA PRESIDENT'S RULE
GOA WAS TODAY brought under President's rule and its assembly dissolved. Orders for taking over the administration of the Union Territory were signed by the president this afternoon. Fresh elections will be held there later this year. The administration of Goa has been taken over by the central government under the Union Territories Act. The Centre came to the conclusion that the local leaders were not likely to throw up a stable government after the fall of the Shashikala Kakodkar Government and the best way to provide Goa with a stable administration was to order fresh elections preceded by a spell of President's rule. This is the second time Goa has come under President's rule during the last 16 years.

SOVIET SPY SWAP
FIVE POLITICAL AND religious dissidents flew from being imprisoned by the Soviet Union to freedom in the United States yesterday in exchange for two Soviet spies, US President Jimmy Carter's spokesman announced. One official said the arrangement, under which Alexander Ginzburg, one of the best-known Soviet activists, was released, was perhaps the largest ever US-Soviet prisoner exchange ever negotiated. It was the first such swap involving citizens of the Soviet Union held by the United States and Soviet citizens held by Russian authorities. The five dissidents arrived at John F. Kennedy airport in New York city, were met by the White House, State Department and Justice Department officials, and, were hustled to an undisclosed location.

PUNJAB POWER SHARING
THE UNION GOVERNMENT will examine the legal and technical aspects of the issues raised by the states of the northern zone, excepting Punjab, with regards to their claim on the additional power to be generated by Punjab as a sequel to the larger discharges of water received in some of its dams under the Indus water treaty with Pakistan. This was agreed to by the Union minister for home affairs, H M Patel, at the Northern Zonal Council meeting in Jaipur today. Haryana has demanded participation and sharing of benefits in the Anandpur Sahib, Mukarian and Upper Bari Doab Canal hydroelectric projects. Punjab's contention is that since it will produce power without affecting the water supply of other states, it is not liable to share the power with them.

11 THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"BRI will never be talked down to, and those who choose to speak negatively about it will only harm their own reputation." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Women don't need saving

On the question of the veil or temple entry, what is essential is the right to choose for oneself



VRINDA SHUKLA

DO WOMEN REALLY need saving? In a compelling article on the subject, Lila Abulughod, an American anthropologist, expresses her outrage at the opinion that the veil is a form of oppression that Muslim women need liberation from. In India, the supporters of the entry ban on women of menstruating age at the Sabarimala temple and those defending triple talaq are similarly outraged. They assert that the respective practices are rooted in distinct religious or cultural contexts; they ought to be understood and accepted as products of different circumstances and histories or as expressions of "differently structured desires" than what appears right to their condemners. They resent cultural ethnocentrism and homogenisation, and exhort that disparate religio-cultural systems be viewed through the lens of cultural relativism.

Cultural relativism is a marvellous contribution of anthropology towards reconciling and protecting the staggering diversity of cultural systems that exists across the world. It explains that all cultural systems are inherently equal in value and, therefore, each cultural item must be understood on its own terms, without the judgement. However, this too does not provide a perfect solution. With the consensus on the pre-eminence of universal human rights, few would defend an absolute acceptance of cultural relativism, which precludes ethical judgement even of practices like slavery, genocide, female genital mutilation or cannibalism. There are certain ethical imperatives which all cultural practices must honour.

It may be reasonable to propose that for a religio-cultural practice to comprehensively withstand the test of being universally just, it must safeguard the right to life and safety, guarantee a dignified existence, encourage debate on its validity and, most crucially, provide the possibility of making choices to all in its purview. In reality, however, there exist too many practices obviously prejudiced against a section of their adherents, most typically women. The reverence for these practices is conditioned by the given society, but often peoples' submission to them may be a product of social conformity, in the absence of any freedom to question their justness. These are also amply leveraged for political mileage, compelling women to bear the cross of cultural prestige. Such practices need to be questioned and their validity reaffirmed.

A ready illustration can be drawn from British India. During British rule, the practice of self-immolation by Hindu widows on their husbands' funeral pyres was prevalent in many parts of the country, though considered ethically repugnant even at the time by Hindus like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The

British, though disturbed by the practice, initially tried to be ethically and culturally relativistic and decided not to condemn it. Eventually, they made it illegal unless it could be shown that the Hindu widow was participating "voluntarily", which was to be ascertained by a British official rushing to the site of a Sati. "For any violence, deception or compulsion in burning of a widow or because any other cause impeded her free will, the court was constrained to pronounce death penalty to the offender." Ironically, records show that this British attention, along with a sense that performing Sati might be a good way to resist the British, seemed to cause instances of Sati to increase for several years in Bengal in the early 1800s. This was a case where it was ingrained into the societal psyche that it was the proper thing for Hindu widows to do. However, it wasn't just that. It was exploited for political reasons without regard for the lives and free will of Hindu widows. The practice patently failed the test of universal justness.

Coming to a more recent cultural debate across the world about the necessity of wearing the veil, the generalisation that all forms of veiling are oppressive and forcibly imposed on women runs wholly contrary to the spirit of cultural relativism and is an in-temperate response to the matter. Lugodh perceptively argues in her article how the veil is actually a "portable seclusion," and, therefore, an emancipator, because women under the veil, particularly in closed and conservative societies, can freely move around. For others, it is simply a mark of religious and social assertion. This is indisputable. At the same time, however, it is equally undeniable that in several parts of the world the absence of a choice in the matter constrains women and can even subject them to abject injustice.

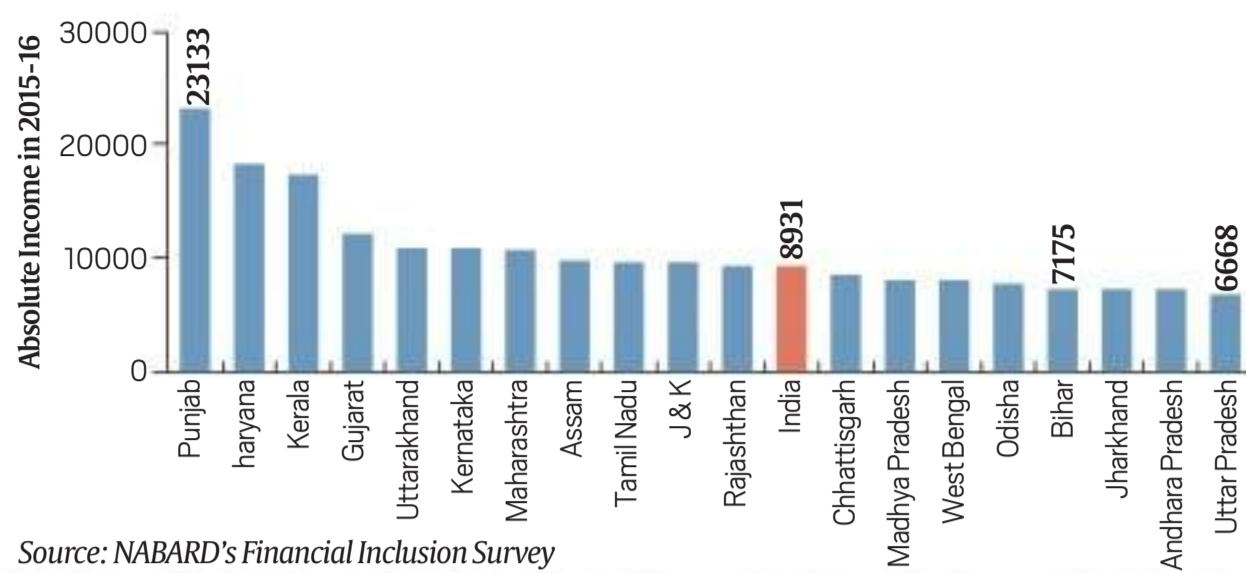
On March 11, human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced to 38 years of imprisonment and 148 lashes in Iran for defending women being prosecuted for removing their hijab in public. Having a choice in the matter would enable women to resolve the respective constraints experienced by them, if any. It would render the system universally just. Similar is the case with many other religio-cultural debates, both in India and abroad, like the Sabarimala temple entry or the right to abortion.

We may find it worth our while, as legislators, judges, journalists, activists, government functionaries, teachers, parents, community leaders, and engaged citizens, to get behind the cause of extending a choice to women everywhere, independent of our political, religious or cultural leanings. Women don't need saving; they need to be guaranteed their essential right to have a choice. The choice to pursue an unfettered education, to not be sold in marriage, to refuse unilateral divorce, to keep their bodies un-mutilated, to worship, to access sanitary napkins and make reproductive decisions... Only by rendering such choices possible, in their full measure, shall we find ourselves on the right side of history and fairness.

The writer, 29, is an IPS officer. Views are personal

INCOME OF AN AVERAGE FARMING HOUSEHOLD

(₹/month)-for major Indian states (2015-16 agriculture year)

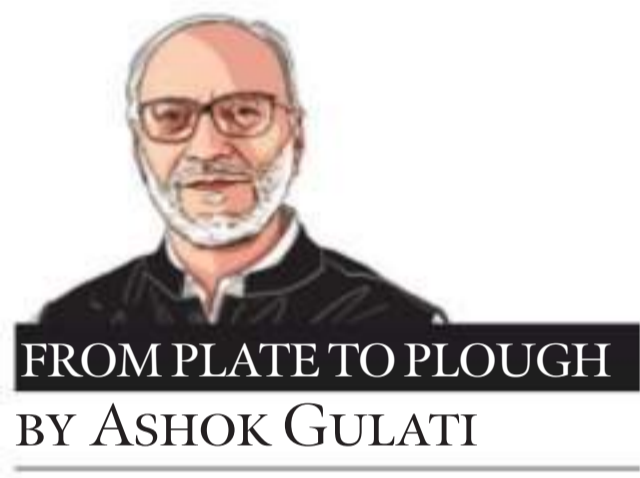


Source: NABARD's Financial Inclusion Survey

Suvajit Dey

Cow and cane

Farm distress, particularly the stray cattle menace and the crisis in livestock sector, and mounting sugarcane arrears could dampen the BJP's performance in UP



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

IF ONE WANTS to know the quality of our evolving democracy, one must watch the ongoing election campaign in India. It is great fun too. And nothing is more interesting than tracking it in Uttar Pradesh (UP), where the real political battle is being fought. As they say the road to Delhi's power goes through UP. It accounts for 80 of the 543 parliamentary seats. In the 2014 election, BJP and its allies swept UP with 73 out of 80 seats. Although Narendra Modi came from Gujarat, he contested from Varanasi and scored a thumping victory in 2014. Most agree that it was Modi wave in 2014!

But in 2019 election, is the Modi wave still surging or waning? The grand road show of PM Modi in Varanasi seemed to suggest that the mood of the voters is still upbeat. Modi's campaign speeches pitch national security and tackling terrorism as the highest priority of his government. He categorically says he will never hesitate to eliminate terrorists even if he has to bomb their safe havens in the neighbouring country. This brings lot of cheers and chants of "Modi, Modi" from the crowd. But how much of this will sustain till the voting day, and turn into votes for BJP, will have to be seen. In the meantime, the electioneering pitch has certainly turned hot, even tipping over to remarks that range from "Ali and Bajrang Bali" to as low as "khaki underwear" by certain political leaders. Many others have whipped up emotions to divide the people on religious and caste lines, forcing the Election Commission to ban them from campaigning for 48/72 hours.

The moot question, however, remains: Will BJP's performance in UP be as good as it was in 2014? The BJP's supporters tend to believe that they will repeat 2014 performance in UP, if not better. But the SP and BSP alliance poses a formidable challenge, and most political analysts believe that the BJP will lose a significant number of seats. The best bet for BJP is between 25 to 40 seats. Analysts also predict that BJP cannot equal its 2014 performance even in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. One of the major factors behind this is the farm distress in this "Hindi heartland", especially in UP. Farmers in UP are bracing the menace of wandering cattle to protect their fields since the state government and vigilante groups came down heavily on cattle traders and slaughter houses. This has adversely impacted the economics of livestock rearing in UP. The state is the largest producer of milk in the country as well as largest exporter of buffalo meat. Traditionally, Yadavs have dominated the milk sector while Muslims and Dalits are engaged more in the meat sector. Their worsening economic condition and grievances will be fully tapped by the SP and BSP for votes.

Besides this challenge of cattle, there is a serious problem of sugarcane arrears, which had crossed Rs 10,000 crore. The last-minute effort to clear some part of this may help a bit, but farmers do not seem to be very happy in UP. Sugarcane is their most remunerative crop, and when cane arrears mount, their anger spills over to Delhi. Not long ago, many of these farmers from UP had marched and blocked highways to Delhi with their tractor-trolleys and even had skirmishes with the Delhi police at the border. UP government had been threatening sugar mills with dire consequences if they do not clear cane arrears as soon as possible. But given the mismatch between sugar prices and the state advised price of sugarcane, sugar mills can pay farmers only at their own peril. The situation of mounting cane arrears is not new in UP. It is repeated almost every fourth or fifth year, but this time the magni-

tude is high and it is going on for more than a year. Farmers, who were promised a much better deal in the BJP's 2014 manifesto, feel that they have been taken for a ride. The slogan of doubling farmers' real incomes has not cut much ice with them as they are finding it difficult to retain their existing income levels, which are already pretty low.

Hence the big question: Will cow and cane become PM Modi's pain?

The time to carry out any reforms that are needed to bring livestock and sugar sectors back on track, and help augment incomes of farmers, has run out. The hurried, last minute, announcement of PM-Kisan scheme to give farm families Rs 6,000 per year has not made much dent, even though UP is in the forefront to distribute that sum. But it is too little and too late. No wonder then, instead of talking about raising the economic conditions of masses in rural UP, and talk about "sabka saath, sabka vikas," which was the main slogan in 2014, the PM is now talking about successfully conducting the Kumbh mela and giving a befitting reply to those who harbour terrorists. Economics can wait.

UP with a population of 220 million people is like the fifth largest "nation" on this planet. More than three-fourths of its population lives in rural areas, with farming as their major occupation. More than 90 per cent holdings are small and marginal (less than 2 ha). As per NABARD's Financial Inclusion Survey for the 2015-16, average income of a farming household in UP was just Rs 6,668 per month as against Rs 8,931 per month for the country. Ironically, UP's farm household income is even below those in Bihar at Rs 7,175 and Odisha's Rs 7,731 per month. Punjab and Haryana are way above. (see graph)

What this indicates is that no matter which party win office at the Centre, UP's agriculture needs focused attention to augment farmers' incomes. Will that happen?

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A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



BJP'S BUNDER

Calling Kashmir — and its use in the elections by the BJP — "a natural hunting ground for the champions of Hindutva", the April 28 editorial in *Dawn* weighs in on the politics of religion in Indian elections. According to the editorial, the "BJP believes that its best shot at securing a victory in the general election in India is by driving a wedge between the majority Hindu community and the minorities, which by no means constitute 'small' sections of the population. Armed with Hindutva ideas that are blamed for pre-deciding the polls on the basis of religion, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has gone about employing tactics that are meant to intimidate and scare off opponents and force large-scale public surrender to the BJP doctrine."

The arrest of Hurriyat leader Yasin Malik, in particular, appears to be the cause of *Dawn's* chagrin: "Mr Malik's arrest and the banning of his Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front mark the continuation of a policy of division that had only recently seen a harsh crackdown on other Hurriyat parties. The clampdown against the Jamaat-i-Islami has been particularly severe. Sane analyses of the situation warn the BJP against the serious repercussions that new

measures of suppression can lead to."

BRI BENEFITS

TAKING OFF FROM the second BRI meeting in Beijing, Munir Akram calls the CPEC and BRI "a historic opportunity for Pakistan" in his column in *Dawn*. First, he dismisses the objections to BRI and the fear that it could lead to a "debt trap" as part of the US's "media campaign" to discredit China's massive infrastructure project: "The admonitions regarding the debt owed to China are particularly galling given that over 90 per cent of developing country debt is owed to Western countries and institutions. Servicing this debt consumes around 30 per cent of annual hard currency outflows from these developing countries. This debt is due to flawed Western development 'aid' which has contributed only marginally to the development of recipient countries. The US opposition has a strategic rationale. The initiative trumps the US aim of creating a ring of alliances around China's periphery and maintaining its domination of the 'India-Pacific'. The US has yet to acknowledge this is a losing battle."

Akram, a former Pakistan ambassador to the UN, then goes to great lengths to il-

lustrate how far China has gone to help Pakistan as well as the benefits of being a leader of the BRI process. He then adds: "The opportunity for Pakistan in China is more compelling. China is supporting Pakistan's infrastructure development and industrialisation. It can be a growing market for Pakistan's exports. Pakistan must aim not only to emulate the path of China's growth but to improve on it, by learning from its successes and failures. Pakistan's aim should be not so much to 'catch up' as to 'leapfrog' into the 21st-century economy. In its cooperation, Pakistan should not seek the technologies of the past or present but those of the future which China is now introducing and applying: high-speed rail (not old systems), AI, electric vehicles, environment-friendly energy, e-commerce, etc. Pakistan needs to be well organised. Islamabad must identify what it wants and needs from China and formulate a strategy of how to achieve it."

FIGHTING EXTREMISTS

IN THE WAKE of the horrific attack in Sri Lanka on Easter, the April 27 editorial in *The Daily Star* welcomes Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's words to the effect that constant vigilance is needed to

safeguard South Asia against terrorism and fundamentalism.

First, "she has rightly pointed out that everyone must play their part in the fight against this scourge including religious leaders. She has asked the imams of mosques to deliver sermons against terrorism and militancy at the Friday congregations where they should highlight Islam as a religion of peace... She has mentioned that guardians, teachers, public representatives, imams of mosques and clerics of all religions can stand together against suspected militant activity in their respective localities."

Second, the editorial points out that "the reality is that terror attacks can occur anytime anywhere and the profiles of terrorists are becoming increasingly difficult to categorise. But if we can effectively address the roots of militancy it will become more and more difficult for terror groups to recruit agents and carry out attacks. While the government has initiated deradicalisation programmes, we, as a people, have a responsibility to make sure our young people especially, do not fall prey to the indoctrination of distorted ideologies."

In essence, the political and ideological pre-conditions that allow terrorism to take root must be addressed.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A PRAGYA PROBLEM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Pragya Bailout' (IE, April 26). It seems that the BJP, in fielding Pragya — accused in the Malegaon blast case, apart from cursing an honest police officer — as a party candidate from Bhopal, has already played its part in gaining political mileage. Repeatedly, she has made derogatory remarks, and flouted the Model Code of Conduct. The party should not encourage such disputable candidates, as they are a threat to democratic principles.

Vijay Singh Adhikari, Tallital, Nainital

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Pragya Bailout' (IE, April 26). The fielding of terror-accused Pragya Thakur as a BJP candidate for the general election is a brazen attempt to wipe her slate clean, seems designed to prove PM Modi's claim that there can be no such thing as "Hindu terrorism". Electoral reforms seem imperative to debar tainted politicians from contesting elections.

SS Paul, Chakdaha, Nadia

FEAR LOSES FIZZ

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Logic of diminishing fear' (IE, April 26). Ordinary, educated and logical Indians, irrespective of religion, have long surpassed the feeling of fear and hate towards fellow countrymen of diverse faiths.

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

Politicians can no longer woo such Indians on the basis of religion. We need an all-inclusive approach to usher in change rather than the politics of hate or fear. However, rather than focusing on just the last five years, the development of Indian Muslims since independence must be considered.

Amarnath Deshmukh, Maharashtra



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@expressindia.com

TELLING NUMBERS

Dead will outnumber living on Facebook in 50 years, analysis finds; highest count in India

NEW ANALYSIS has predicted that the dead may outnumber the living on Facebook within 50 years. India will account for the highest number of dead profiles, around 15% of the world totals, according to the analysis, done by academics from the Oxford Internet Institute (OII).

The analysis predicts that based on 2018 user levels, at least 1.4 billion members will die before 2100. In this scenario, the dead could outnumber the living by 2070. If Facebook continues to expand at current rates, however, the number of deceased users could reach as high as 4.9 billion before the end of the century.

The analysis sets up two potential extreme scenarios, arguing the future trend will fall somewhere in between:

■ The first scenario assumes that no new users join as of 2018. Under these conditions, Asia's share of dead users increases rapidly to account for nearly 44% of the total by the end of the century. Nearly half of those profiles come from India and Indonesia, which together account for just under 279 million Facebook mortalities by 2100.

■ The second scenario assumes that Facebook continues to grow by its current rate of 13% globally, every year, until each market reaches saturation. Under these conditions, Africa will make up a growing share of dead users. Nigeria, in particular, becomes a major hub in this scenario, accounting for over 6% of the total. Western users will account for only a minority of users, with only the US making the top 10.

The study is published in the journal *Big Data & Society*.

Source: University of Oxford & PTI

SCENARIO-A: NO MORE NEW FACEBOOK USERS AFTER 2018

Country	Dead profiles by year 2100*	Share in world
India	207.65	14.85%
US	115.75	8.28%
Indonesia	71.15	5.09%
Brazil	3.32	4.68%
Mexico	42.94	3.07%
Philippines	34.68	2.48%
UK	31.79	2.27%
France	29.72	2.13%
Thailand	28.95	2.07%
Vietnam	28.57	2.04%
Rest of World	741.51	53.04%

SCENARIO-B: FACEBOOK USERS GROW @ 13% PER YEAR

Country	Dead profiles by year 2100*	Share in world
India	783.70	15.99%
Nigeria	315.53	6.43%
Indonesia	221.04	4.51%
Pakistan	177.00	3.61%
Brazil	144.79	2.95%
Niger	126.75	2.59%
US	112.44	2.29%
Philippines	102.48	2.09%
Mali	100.01	2.04%
Burkina Faso	93.55	1.91%
Rest of World	2725.34	55.59%

Source: Ohman et al, *Big Data & Society*
*Figures in million

THIS WORD MEANS

SHOEBOX SATELLITE

Named for size. Why is demand for these set to boom?

ENGINEERS FROM a Chinese start-up called LinkSpace tested a reusable rocket last week, Reuters reported. The rocket hovered 40 m above the ground before descending back to its launch pad after 30 seconds. The Reuters report said LinkSpace sees these short hops as the first steps towards a new business model — sending tiny, inexpensive satellites into orbit. These are called shoebox satellites, because of their size — they weigh less than 10 kg — and are expected to see an explosion in demand in the next few years. Apart from the Chinese, American scientists have been developing such satellites. One of these, called RainCube (Radar in a CubeSat), sponsored by NASA, was launched into low-Earth orbit from the International Space Station in July 2018. It is an experiment for weather forecast using very small instruments to capture and send back images. The small satellite is a prototype for a possible fleet of RainCubes that could one day help monitor severe storms, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory says on its website.

The Reuters report said US company



Engineers test a 10kg satellite in Hunan province, China. Reuters

Rocket Lab has already put 25 such satellites in orbit, while none from China has been sent up yet. The expected demand is for services ranging from high-speed internet for aircraft to universities conducting experiments. LinkSpace hopes to charge just 30 million yuan (\$4.48 million) per launch, Reuters reported, comparing that with the \$25 million-\$30 million needed for a launch on a Northrop Grumman Innovation Systems Pegasus, a commonly used small rocket.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

The problem with diesel

Why has Maruti decided to stop making diesel cars? How is the move linked to BS-VI emission norms that kick in next year? What difficulties would continuance with diesel present? What is the mood globally?

ANIL SASI

NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

THE ANNOUNCEMENT by Maruti Suzuki — the country's largest vehicle manufacturer — that it will stop manufacturing diesel vehicles from April 1, 2020 pretty much marks the end of the road for the diesel mill in India. Mahindra & Mahindra, which too has a strong exposure to the diesel platform, is working on plans to start offering petrol engine options across its entire range, except the Bolero. Tata Motors, another manufacturer hedged heavily in favour of diesel currently, is learnt to have decided against offering the diesel option in its flagship Tiago hatchback and Tigor sedan after April 2020.

What is prompting the move away from diesel?

The Indian carbuyer's romance with diesel powertrains lasted nearly a decade. In 2012-13, diesel cars accounted for 48% of passenger vehicle sales in the country. The main reason was the sharply lower price of diesel as compared to petrol — a yawning Rs 25 per litre at its peak. This changed when the decontrol of fuel prices started in late 2014. The price difference has since come down to under Rs 6.5 per litre — the closest the two fuels have been in price since 1991. Consequently, diesel cars accounted for just about 22% of overall passenger vehicle sales in 2018-19, less than half the share they had five years ago.

The main reason behind Maruti Suzuki's announcement, however, is not the fuel price differential, but the new emission norms that will come into effect on April 1, 2020 — less than a year from now. The prohibitively high cost of upgrading diesel engines to meet the new BS-VI emission norms is why leading carmakers have pulled the plug on their diesel options. The economics of the conversion does not make it worthwhile to continue with the diesel option after the transition to BS-VI. The difference in the price of a petrol and a diesel car, now around Rs 1 lakh on average, could go up to Rs 2.5 lakh. Also, the sentiment for diesel is not good in the wake of the Volkswagen emissions scandal, making it extra uncertain if customers would want to pay the big premium.

What changes do the BS norms entail?

The BS — Bharat Stage — emission standards are norms instituted by the government to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles. India has been following European (Euro) emission norms, although with a time lag of five years.

India introduced emission norms first in 1991, and tightened them in 1996, when most vehicle manufacturers had to incorporate technology upgrades such as catalytic converters to cut exhaust emissions. Fuel specifications based on environmental considerations were notified first in April 1996, to be implemented by 2000, and incorporated in BIS 2000 standards. Following the landmark Supreme Court order of April 1999, the Centre notified Bharat Stage-I (BIS 2000) and Bharat Stage-II norms, broadly equivalent to Euro I and Euro II respectively. BS-II was for the National Capital Region and other metros; BS-I for the rest of India.

From April 2005, in line with the Auto Fuel Policy of 2003, BS-III and BS-II fuel quality norms came into existence for 13 major cities, and for the rest of the country respectively. From April 2010, BS-IV and BS-III norms were put in place in 13 major cities and the rest of India respectively.

As per the Policy roadmap, BS-V and BS-VI norms were to be implemented from April 1, 2022, and April 1, 2024 respectively. But in November 2015, the Road Transport Ministry issued a draft notification advancing the im-



Manesar plant of Maruti, which has announced it will stop manufacturing diesel vehicles from April 2020. Amit Mehra/Archive

GLOBALLY, THE MOOD HAS CHANGED

Diesel is increasingly going out of fashion in the West, especially in Europe, the world's biggest market for diesel cars. The demonisation of diesel was already well under way before the VW scandal broke; the VW scandal has led to greater scrutiny from regulators and tougher emissions tests, making it more expensive to produce "clean" diesel cars.

The sale market share of diesel cars in the European Union fell to 36.5% in the first half of 2018 from 42.5% in the first half of 2017, according to the International Energy Agency. In Germany, home to some of the world's biggest diesel car producers such as VW and BMW, diesel car sales dropped to 31.1% of the total in the first half of 2018 from 41.3% a year earlier. Major European cities including Berlin, London, and Paris have launched diesel car ban programmes to fight pollution.

In September 2018, the German carmaker Porsche said it would stop making diesel cars and concentrate on petrol, electric and hybrid engines instead. Porsche was the first German manufacturer to announce a stop on

implementation of BS-V norms for new four-wheel vehicle models to April 1, 2019, and for existing models to April 1, 2020. The corresponding dates for BS-VI norms were brought forward to April 1, 2021, and April 1, 2022, respectively. Soon afterward, however, Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari announced that the government had decided to leapfrog to BS-VI from April 1, 2020, skipping BS-V all together.

What did this change in the schedule entail?

With the BS-VI norms scheduled to be implemented from April 1, 2020, three years after BS-IV was implemented in 2017, a practical problem is that while it took as many as seven years for the entire country to shift from BS-III to BS-IV, the attempt this time is to entirely bypass one stage — BS-V — in less than half that time. This makes the switch to BS-VI that much more difficult for both oil

diesel following the 2015 scandal in which its parent company, Volkswagen, admitted it had cheated emissions tests for diesel engines. Other major carmakers too, have announced plans to ditch the diesel option. According to Greenpeace:

TOYOTA stopped the sale of diesel cars in Europe last year, KIA has halted the development of new diesel engines, PSA (Peugeot, Citroen, Vauxhall) has stopped developing new diesel engines, RENAULT has said diesel cars would slowly disappear from its lineup, NISSAN is gradually stopping the sale of diesel vehicles in Europe, FIAT CHRYSLER will stop selling diesel cars by 2022, SUBARU stopped selling diesel cars in the United Kingdom last year, VOLVO is stopping the sale of diesel cars, CADILLAC has halted the development of new diesel engines, SUZUKI is stopping the sale of diesel cars in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, BENTLEY has stopped selling diesels in Europe, MITSUBISHI has stopped selling diesel cars in the UK and Germany.

companies and automobile makers.

The decision to leapfrog directly from BS-IV to BS-VI is what carmakers cite as the reason for the unviability of diesel. While petrol vehicles would also need upgrades to transition, these are limited to catalysts and electronic control upgrades. For diesel vehicles, the upgrades are more complicated and entail higher costs, apart from the technical difficulties in managing the changes. Carmakers would have to put three pieces of equipment — a DPF (diesel particulate filter), an SCR (selective catalytic reduction) system, and an LNT (Lean NOx trap) — to meet stringent BS-VI norms, all at the same time. This is vital to curb both PM (particulate matter) and NOx (nitrogen oxides) emissions as mandated under the BS-VI norms. Ideally, the technologies should be introduced in series, and then synergised. A step-by-step transition would have been easier; now, the entire cost will have to be borne in one go, alongside the operational

difficulties of managing the transition.

What kind of complications can arise?

Carmakers say there are technical constraints in carrying out design changes that will include adapting the three critical components — DPF, SCR and LNT — to conditions specific to Indian driving, where running speeds are much lower than in Europe or the United States. The auto industry argues that the huge improvements in vehicular technology since 2000 have had little impact in India due to driving, road and ambient conditions. The technology that will be used in future BS-VI vehicles, though, will have considerable impact, they claim. So, technically, if the BS-V and BS-VI stages were to be implemented one after the other, diesel cars would have to be fitted with a DPF in the BS-V stage, and with the SCR in the BS-VI state. Now both of these have to be incorporated simultaneously, alongside the LNT.

DPFs have specific problems in the Indian context, and would have to be optimised for these conditions. Low driving speeds would make it difficult to achieve temperatures of 600 degrees Celsius required to burn the soot in DPF, but equipment manufacturers would have to work at temperatures of around 400 degrees C. Usually, diesel is injected to increase temperatures, but excess fuel in the compartment can cause a fire. The integrity of the vehicle too, has to be considered — this would require validation tests over 6-7 lakh km, which may take up to four years.

The optimisation and fitment of the DPFs and the SCR module, carmakers say, could take an estimated three-four years. At every stage, the technology is increasingly more complex. To attain the specified super low emissions, all reactions have to be precise, and controlled by microprocessors. Since BS-V is to be skipped entirely, both DPF and SCR would need to be fitted together for testing, which, auto firms say, would make it extremely difficult to detect which of the technologies is at fault in case of errors in the system. Even if these were to be managed, a heavy cost would be involved, which would push up the price of diesel vehicles, and widen the price gap with the petrols.

So, for carmakers, skipping the diesel value chain at this point makes more sense.

Alongside the constraints faced by carmakers, there are also question marks regarding the ability of the oil companies to manage the transition, given that the full transition to BS-IV took from 2010 to April 2017 because refiners were unable to produce the superior fuel in required quantities.

Are spoilers Endgame for enjoyment? How viewers feel, what studies found

KABIR FIRAQUE

NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

SPOILERS ARE in season for film and TV viewers, whether they want them or not. With *Avengers: Endgame* just released, and the eighth and final season of *Game of Thrones* having settled into viewers' drawing rooms, many long-time fans of either or both series are making a conscious effort to avoid being presented with spoilers, or revelations about key plot points. On the other hand, some series fans have been actually searching and asking for spoilers. This may seem a contradiction when a spoiler by definition "spoils" a film or an episode, but the fact is that a divide exists.

Do spoilers ruin one's viewing experience, or do they, in fact, enhance it? There is no clear answer, given that viewers themselves disagree. Neither do the findings of research, it appears. The impact of spoilers on enjoyment, if any, has been the subject of a number of studies over the years, and these

have come up with contradictory findings.

The context

Spoilers have been a subject of discussion immediately before and after the screening last month of the first episode of the final *GoT* season last month, and particularly before and after the release last week of *Avengers: Endgame*, the final film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe series.

GoT Season 08 Episode 01 premiered in New York City a week ahead of the screening, but those viewers avoided outing spoilers, *Harper's Bazaar* reported then. Cast members have been credited with holding on to secrets, as well as reported to have released fake spoilers. On the other hand, a website called *spoiled.io* has come up with the offer of sending *GoT* spoilers (for a payment) to any mobile number that it is provided with.

The *Endgame* plot was allegedly leaked in the middle of last month, leading to a flood of supposed spoilers on social media. Ahead of the release, the film's directors



One study has suggested that spoilers before viewing fantasy thriller — a genre that includes *Avengers: Endgame* — may enhance enjoyment.

@Russo_Brothers tweeted to viewers: "#Don't Spoil The Endgame." After the release, Google searches for "how to avoid spoilers" reached a record high, *The Guardian* reported. Yet the contradiction has continued, with a number of social media

users posting requests for spoilers. And when some of the earliest viewers have obliged by revealing which characters will die and which will live — many others have done so without being asked — they have upset several viewers who were next in queue. In Hong Kong, a man was reportedly assaulted outside a theatre for yelling out spoilers on *Endgame*.

Enjoyment spoiled, unspoiled

With studies frequently contradicting one another, two researchers sought to make sense of these contradictions by analysing together the results of several previous studies, including their own, along with the results of three new experiments. "Taken as whole," researchers Benjamin Johnson of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Judith Rosenbaum of the University of Maine wrote in their paper, published in the journal *Media Psychology* last July, "the findings illustrate that... spoilers for television and film appear to have quite small and qualified effects on audience responses to

these programs."

The experiments included the Marvel Cinematic Universe's *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2015) and episodes from *Game of Thrones* Season 05, screened in 2015. In one experiment, they asked participants to view clips of various films and TV episodes, and presented them with text introductions, some with spoilers and some without. In another, participants were presented spoiled or unspoiled summaries of other films. In the third experiment, the participants answered a questionnaire on *GoT* Season 05.

The studies sought to analyse a wide range of the effect of spoilers. For example, they found that a spoiler may enhance the enjoyment of those who viewed a clip from a fantasy thriller film — a genre that includes *Endgame* — but may make a comedy clip less enjoyable. In the *GoT* experiment, spoilers were found to have limited effect. For viewers familiar with the literary source, *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R R Martin, consistency with the original made the viewing experi-