



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A HOME IN SPACE

ISRO's plan to build a permanent space station is a natural progression of the vision to expand its footprint beyond earth

ISRO HAS DECLARED its intention to build a permanent space station for itself, possibly in the next five to seven years. After the mission to moon and Mars and a proposed manned space flight before 2022, this is the next logical step for the agency. What the step seems to suggest is that, in the coming years, ISRO would be undertaking many prolonged space exploration projects and sending many astronauts into space, such that it would require a permanent station for itself.

For four decades since its inception in the early 1960s, ISRO had, apart from building its capacities, focused primarily on harnessing space technologies for societal benefits. Yash Pal, the first director of Space Application Centre in Ahmedabad, once described India's space mission as "almost a sociological programme" as much as a technological programme. Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme, used to repeatedly make the point that India must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to "the real problems of man and society". Even as late as in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi got all government departments to sit down with ISRO and identify the areas where space technology could help them achieve their objectives. In the next phase, beginning this century, ISRO established itself as a reliable and economical launcher of commercial satellites. It demonstrated its capabilities to launch all kinds of satellites, and delivered close to 300 payloads of foreign countries in space in the last 12 years. This service is likely to continue since it generates the much-needed revenue to fund ISRO's various missions.

However, ISRO is signalling that it is now ready to take a leap into space exploration. Chandrayaan-2 and Gaganyaan are, in fact, heralding ISRO into this new phase. There is a mission to the sun coming up next year, while another to Venus has also been announced. More inter-planetary explorations, and possibly a human flight to the moon, are also in the pipeline. The space station is a facility India would need in the context of missions such as these and more. NASA's International Space Station, the only one functional right now, is slated to retire by 2025, or latest by 2028, and no replacement for it has been confirmed so far. It is likely that future space stations would be commercial facilities, available to anyone for a fee. For an agency that is still to execute a successful human space flight, all this might seem a little premature. And the proposed five to seven-year timeline to achieve it, surely, is ambitious. But ISRO is known to set ambitious targets, and achieve them as well.

WELCOME MEASURE

Lower contributions to employees' state insurance could boost formalisation further

IN A WELCOME move, the Union government has announced a significant reduction in the contribution by workers and employers towards the employees' state insurance (ESI) scheme. From July 1, the overall contribution to ESI is slated to decline from 6.5 per cent to 4 per cent, with employers' contribution falling from 4.75 per cent to 3.25 per cent, and that of employees from 1.75 per cent to 0.75 per cent. This decision, which lowers the cost of hiring for employers, should be seen in conjunction with recent initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojna (PMRPY) that aim to boost the creation of formal jobs by lowering the costs associated with formalisation.

The ESI Act provides for medical care and cash benefits in case of contingencies to employees drawing a salary up to Rs 21,000 per month. It is one of the pillars of the social security architecture in the country. But, its current cost structure is prohibitive. A look at its accounts shows that the current levels of contribution far exceed the benefits disbursed by it — in fact, only around half of the contributions are paid out as benefits. For instance, in 2016-17, while total contributions stood at Rs 16,852 crore (including interest income of Rs 3,069 crore), total expenditure incurred for medical benefits was only a fraction at Rs 6,409 crore. This growing divergence between collections and disbursement has led to a substantial build up of its reserves. At the end of March 2018, its corpus stood at Rs 73,303 crore, up Rs 13,920 crore from last year. Between 2012 and 2017, it earned Rs 19,993 crore as interest income alone on this corpus. But this rise in income hasn't translated to greater benefits. As the standing committee on labour noted in a report last year, people continue to be deprived of the benefits of the ESI scheme "due to lack of coverage of ESIC scheme, poor functioning of hospitals, etc". This suggests that contributions can be substantially lowered, while maintaining benefits at current levels.

Prohibitive mandatory contributions such as the provident fund/employee state insurance tend to act as deterrents to formalisation. As the experience of PMRPY has shown, lowering these costs tends to have a positive impact on formalisation. In fact, much of the recent rise in the EPFO subscriber base is on account of PMRPY. Lowering costs further, or offering employees the choice of who handles their contributions, could accelerate the process further.

ONE SMALL STEP

NASA's recognition of African American women's role in the first moon mission is a welcome act of contrition

IN 1969, THREE of the people who were an essential part of Neil Armstrong taking "a giant leap for mankind", each working at the cutting edge of mathematics and astrophysics, were not allowed to eat, study or even use the same bathroom as their white peers. The seminal contribution of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson — among several other African-Americans — to the Apollo 11 mission was little known until the 2016 book, *Hidden Figures*, brought it to light for the general public. NASA has now renamed the street outside its Washington headquarters Hidden Figures, to honour those that were once treated as second-class citizens even as they literally shot for the moon, and managed to hit the target.

The whitewashing of the role that Black Americans had in the moon-landing and their suffering under segregation only brings to focus the many petty cruelties — the institutionalised inequalities — that have been as much a part of modernity as the great achievements of our times. That one of the great advances in modern science and technology can exist, almost without comment, with as immoral and counter-intuitive a practice as segregation on the basis of skin colour presents a disturbing contradiction.

There is some evidence, though, that things in 2019 have progressed since 1969. While the contradiction between modernity and deeply retrograde systems of discrimination abide, the acknowledgment by the world's leading space agency of those that helped it become so is a welcome correction. And perhaps a much-needed attempt at expressing contrition. Meanwhile, it appears that the ISRO is unlikely to repeat NASA's mistakes: Chandrayaan 2, India's second exploration of the moon, is being headed by two women — Ritu Karidhal and Muthayya Vanitha — and ISRO has been only too keen to publicise their role. As space exploration moves to new horizons, it appears, thankfully, that there are no more hidden figures.



JASMINE SHAH

THE DELHI GOVERNMENT'S decision to make public transport free for women in the national capital has ignited a welcome debate on safety and mobility of women in Indian cities. The policy is being debated on two fronts: Whether it is desirable at all to adopt such a policy, and if it is feasible for the Delhi government to implement it at present.

Any discussion on the desirability of this or any subsidy targeted at women must begin by accepting the shocking gender divide that exists in India and particularly, Delhi. India ranks a lowly 95 out of 129 countries in the recently released SDG Gender Index. A survey by Thomson Reuters Foundation in 2017 ranked Delhi as the most unsafe megacity in the world for women. Official data shows that crimes against women in Delhi have seen a phenomenal increase of 83 per cent between 2007 and 2016. Analysis abounds on factors that contribute to this — ineffective policing, poor conviction rates, dark spots, unsafe modes of transport, social norms towards women, among others — but there is hardly any talk of transformative solutions.

The Delhi government's decision solves an important part of this problem by making public transport the default mode of transport for the city's women. Experts across the globe vouch that public transport is the safest mode of transport — there's safety in numbers. In Delhi, a large fraction of women from poor and lower middle classes, often living at the margins of existence, are constrained to walk long distances or use unsafe modes of transport than buying a bus ticket. The metro is not even an option for most of them.

By providing unrestricted access to public transport, the Delhi government's decision also provides women an opportunity to reclaim public spaces. Besides further enhancing safety, this directly impacts the second objective of the Delhi's government's decision — economic empowerment of women by significantly improving access to education and job opportunities.

A detailed study published last year by the Sustainable Urban Transport Project (SUTP) and backed by the Government of India shows how women forego opportunities to work outside their neighbourhoods if they perceive transport fares and services to be expensive and unreliable. A 2017 study by a World Bank

Metro bonanza

Free rides for women in public transport is a part of Delhi government's push to make the city safe, inclusive

This is important since India

is among the few countries globally that has seen decreasing participation of women in workforce in the past decade despite stellar economic growth. In Delhi, women account for only 11 per cent of the workforce - perhaps the least among Indian cities. India cannot aspire to be global superpower by ignoring the constraints faced by 50 per cent of its population to access work opportunities.

economist, Girija Borker, in Delhi's colleges covering 4,000 students shows that female students are willing to choose a lower quality college, travel longer and spend much more than men in order to travel by safer route.

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This brings us to the feasibility of implementing the free public transport policy. Majority of the critiques offered so far suggest that public transport system may get choked or that last-mile connectivity and pedestrian safety also matter. Some have advised the Delhi government to spend public money on buying more buses and improving their reliability, while some others have invoked fancy economic theories like "broken window fallacy" that are completely irrelevant to this debate.

The big problem with all these critiques is they frame these policy choices as an either/or debate. The Delhi government has never claimed that making public transport free is a silver bullet to ensuring women's safety — a lot more should and must be done by all public agencies concerned, especially the Delhi Police, which reports to the Centre.

On its part, the Delhi government has been making necessary financial allocations and implementing all the above policy measures year-on-year. Delhi's 5,576 buses currently operate on average at 80 per cent of their passenger carrying capacity and can easily handle an estimated 10 per cent additional load due to this policy. Further, Delhi's bus fleet is all set to increase by 1,000 in the next six months — an increase by 18 per cent. Another 2,000 buses are at different stages of procurement.

Delhi government has deployed dedicated bus marshalls in 60 per cent of its buses to exclusively deal with women safety issues, a first such effort by any city in India. The same is being extended to cover the remaining buses. Connect Delhi, the most ambitious reform so far to improve the reliability of Delhi's buses, is also under way. The initiative promises to

rationalise the bus and feeder services in Delhi so that all parts of Delhi are connected with a reliable public transport facility within 500-metre walking distance and at every 15 minutes. In March, the first leg of this reform was launched in Najafgarh covering 17 bus routes that are now seeing schedule adherence upwards of 90 per cent.

The present decision of making public transport for women free comes in the backdrop of these multiple reform efforts, and backed by the fiscal space the Delhi government has created for itself by sound management of state finances: Delhi's budget has doubled from Rs 30,900 crore to Rs 60,000 crore in the last five years. That's also the reason why all doomsday predictions of the AAP government ruining the state exchequer by its decision to give free water and power subsidy have proven to be untrue.

In fact, by carefully-targeted subsidies and an unprecedented expansion of social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, what the AAP government has managed to achieve is build the economy from below by investing in people — what Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia calls as "Trickle Up Economics". The current decision of making public transport free for women is designed to work in a similar fashion.

Meanwhile, accountability must also be fixed on the Central government whose flawed decision of doubling fares of the Delhi metro in 2017 has seen a shock decrease in metro ridership from 28 lakh per day in 2017 to 25 lakh per day today even as the total length of metro network has increased by 55 per cent in the same period. This single move has upended all ridership targets of Delhi metro that was designed to reach 40 lakh by end of Phase 3, hitting the economically disadvantaged sections the most, including women.

The worsening state of women safety and workforce participation in Indian cities in the past decade are the result of a policy failure. Delhi government's decision to make public transport free for women is a welcome policy innovation in this context — something the rest of the country can learn from.

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ON A STICKY WICKET

Cricket and religion have combined to impose a disturbing piety in Pakistan



KHALED AHMED

DOES CRICKET LEAD to religious piety? Or is religious piety so deeply ingrained in certain players that they go "pious", which in Pakistan means growing a flowing beard, shaving off the moustache and putting a cap on? In Pakistan it is not a "phase" that you outgrow — it is a permanent transformation. And, it seems to pay off. In India, former cricketer Gautam Gambhir has embraced Hindutva but it is not the same thing. In Pakistan, you can even become the prime minister.

In the case of Imran Khan, it is all explained in his book *Pakistan: A Personal History* (2011), where he recalls the "early signs" of being "chosen". He writes: "Pir Gi from Sahiwal said I would be very famous and make my mother a household name." But the man who stood by him as his spiritual mentor was Mian Bashir, who shocked him by naming the Quranic verse his mother used to read to baby Imran. Bashir also predicted that Allah had turned the tables in Khan's favour in the Allan Lamb-Ian Botham libel suit whose reparations would have pauperised Khan.

Till the 1992 World Cup, no one prostrated before Allah Almighty after getting a rival player out or scoring a century. Today, it is an unspoken rule. The selector, former captain Inzamam-ul-Haq, is today heavily bearded. He was the one who "changed" during his captaincy and "persuaded" the entire team to "embrace Islam". In the book, *White on*

Green (2016), Richard Heller and Peter Osborne note the "piety" trend gaining ground after preachers like Dr Israr of Lahore called cricket a lascivious anti-Islam entertainment with Khan rubbing the cricket ball "sinfully" in the "groin area".

Before Khan, another captain, Fazal Mahmood, had suddenly become Islamic after retirement from the police department, writing a book, *Urge to Faith* (1970), indicating that something indeed happens to famous sportsmen forced to stay away from normal life during their careers. Before Khan, there was the former captain Saeed Ahmad who first "played around", marrying and divorcing a "society girl", before growing a beard and joining tableeghi jamaat that has transformed many other cricketers since: Ahmad himself often barged into dressing rooms and treated the team to sermons of piety.

The case of leg-break bowler and test player S F Rehman is serious. He is now Maulana Sheikh Fazlur Rahman Al Azhari following the Wahhabbi path of Islam — this after an MA degree and a PhD in Islamiyat, and going to Cairo to embrace the "hard Islam" of Wahhabism, which rejects the "imitative" jurisprudence of Pakistani Islam. He defended the killer of Punjab governor, Salmaan Taseer, saying that the act represented a reaction against "liberalism" that aims "to destroy all faiths". Taseer had defended a Christian woman wrongly accused and convicted to

death for blasphemy.

Ex-captain and Christian Yusuf Yohanna secured himself against trouble by converting to Islam during his career as a batsman. He benefitted from conversion but many Christian men who tried to follow his example were not similarly rewarded. Though, leg-spinner and Hindu test-player, Danish Kaneria, usefully cultivated the habit of saying inshallah and mashallah as part of his conversation in a state increasingly hostile to non-Muslims, something like what India is in the process of becoming. Tableeghi Jamaat seduced Shahid Afridi too but this was nothing compared to the marvelously gifted opener Saeed Anwar who, understandably, succumbed to Inzamam's evangelism after a tragedy in his family.

Osborne refers to an article in the 2006 edition of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*: "Rare today in the Pakistani cricket is the soundbite or even private utterance not bracketed by Bismillah (in the name of Allah) or inshallah (God willing). The team prays together fastidiously, recites ayats (Quranic verses) in its huddles and celebrates personal and collective milestones with sajda (the act of kneeling in Muslim prayers); they all fast during Ramadhan, some even during games."

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JUNE 17, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

LABOUR NUMBERS UP

DESPITE THE EMPHASIS on rural development, the number of landless workers in India has increased by 220 lakh in 14 years, at the rate of nearly 15 lakh per year. Their daily earnings have also gone down from Re 1 to 88 paise. These figures have been culled partly from the rural labour enquiry reports of 1964-65 and 1974-75, and partly from the latest data the Planning Commission has collected for the Sixth Plan. According to these sources, agricultural labourers numbered 310 lakhs in 1964-65, but this figure increased to 460 lakhs in 1974-75 and to 530 lakhs in 1977-78. This means that marginal farmers have been swelling the labour force. They

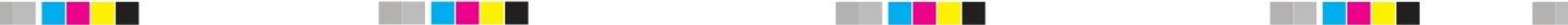
have been forced to part with their land either because of new burdens or old debts. Apparently, the thousands of crores channelled to rural areas has gone to big farmers.

INDO-SOVIET BOND

INDIA AND THE Soviet Union voiced their opposition to "any interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of Afghanistan". A joint statement, signed by Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev was released in Leningrad at the end of Desai's visit to the Soviet Union. The statement did not mention Pakistan by name but it is clear that the message was primarily meant for Islamabad.

AVIATION CENSORSHIP

FACED WITH A spate of adverse publicity in recent months, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has imposed strict censorship on the departments and public sector undertakings under its charge. Officers of Air India, Indian Airlines and the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation have been forbidden from speaking to the press. Even the directors of public relations have been asked to remain mum. So scared are officials that copies of any press statement are immediately dispatched to the ministry by special messengers, so that the ministry's mandarins do not complain that they learn of developments from the morning newspapers.



THE IDEAS PAGE

GDP growth, again!

Is it possible that growth was over-estimated by a large 250 bps a year for five years and no one knew about it, including economists in government?



NO PROOF REQUIRED

BY SURJIT S BHALLA

FORMER CHIEF ECONOMIC Adviser to the Ministry of Finance, Arvind Subramanian (hereafter AS) contends in a working paper at the prestigious Harvard University that India's GDP growth between 2012 and 2016 (period II) likely averaged somewhere between 3.5 and 5.5 per cent yielding an average AS growth of 4.5 per cent. Given that the official GDP growth for this period was 7 per cent, there is an average overstatement in the official GDP statistics of around 2.5 percentage points (ppt) a year. You can search far and wide, in journals and in newspapers, but no one, absolutely no one, has made such a calculation, and assertion, that AS has done for any non hyper-inflation economy for such a long period of time (except for one China estimate — see below).

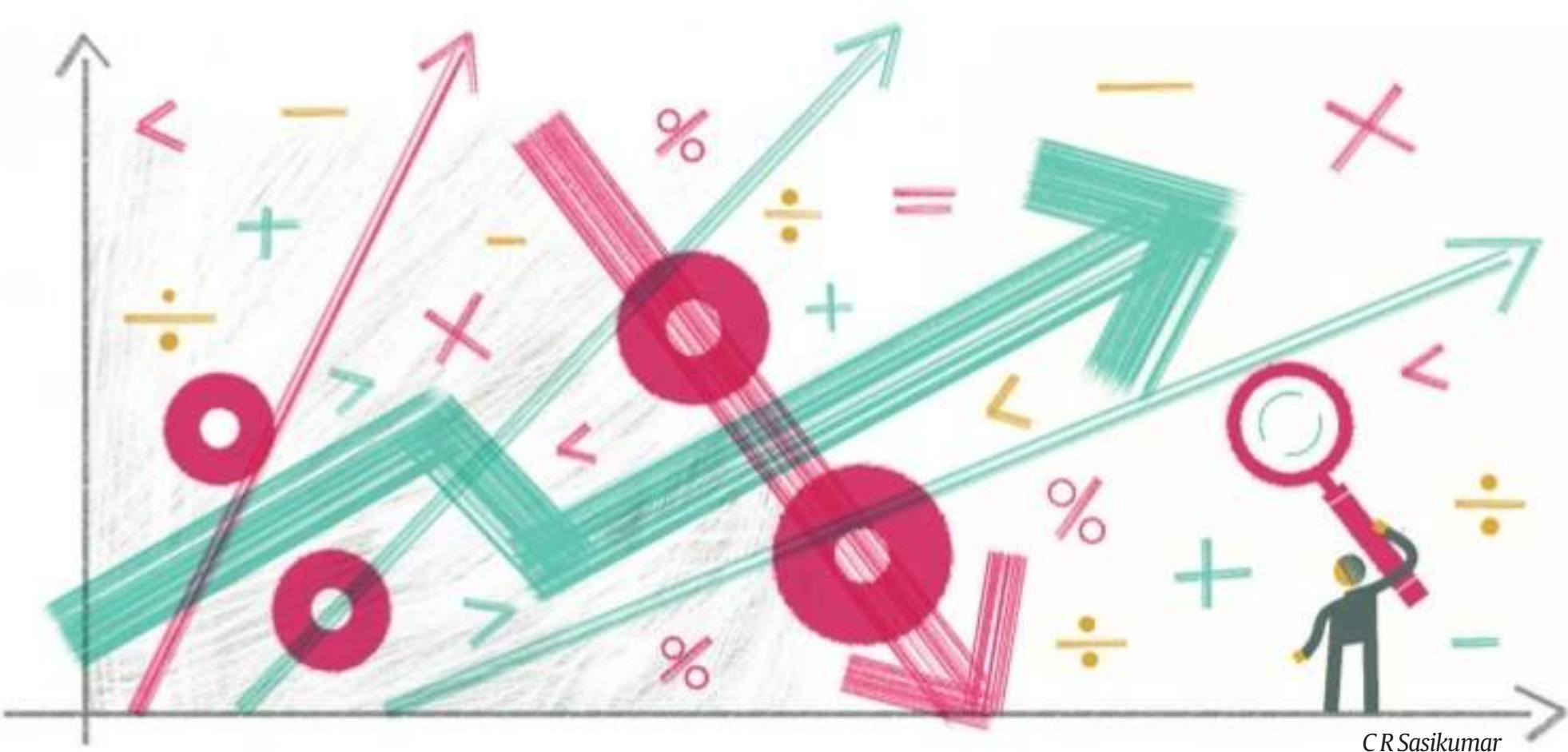
Coincidentally, AS's assertion is similar to the contention of two Hong Kong-based economists, that for the nine-year period 2008-2016, official statistics-reported GDP growth for China was higher by an average 1.7 ppt a year. However, there is one paper by history and economics professor at the University of Pittsburgh, Thomas Rawski, who asserted that cumulative GDP growth in China between 1998 and 2001 averaged just 3 per cent over the four years 1998-2001, compared to the official estimates of 8 per cent-plus. Rawski based his calculations on electricity consumption and his estimates were soon discarded by experts who used trade data to demolish his thesis. The question remains whether the same fate awaits AS's estimates.

We examine AS's computational method below, but first a few general comments. One had thought that post election 2019, politics would not encroach upon the substantive mis-measurement conclusions reached by AS. Unfortunately, there are still journalists and "experts" congratulating themselves that their election-oriented assertion that the Narendra Modi government had presented lies about the economy has now been proven right by AS's paper.

Two points need emphasis. For the period studied 2001-2016, is there any additional data that AS now has that he did not have when he was CEA from October 2014 to June 2018? The answer is no and while we all have doubts about all forms of data (in India, China, the US and the world) the fact remains that there are no known revisions of the data post 2018 (and post 2017) for the data used by AS. Given this fact, the question obviously arises that if no new information is available, then what is the point about AS's contention about mis-measurement of GDP growth for the period 2012-2016?

The second point relates to GDP revisions involved with the base-year change from 2004-5 to 2011-12. This is a routine exercise, undertaken for most economies (especially developing economies) from time-to-time. The normal occasion for this revision is the availability of new household survey data on expenditure (or components of income). The consumer expenditure survey data for 2017-18 is expected to be released shortly; so brace yourself for another round of base-year revisions over the next year or two.

However, it is relevant to point out, and AS is well aware of this fact, that 2014-15 base year revisions had important components of



"structural change" in data collection and interpretation. In particular, balance-sheet data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) was used to estimate value-added in manufacturing and service industries. Previously, the CSO used the index of industrial production and the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data (available with a two-year lag) to estimate value-added in industry. For an important part of the service sector — wholesale and retail trade (WRT) — accounting for 10-15 per cent of GDP), the CSO used the previous growth rate in employment as observed via the Employment and Unemployment Surveys. For example, for the years 2004-5 to 2011-12, the CSO used employment growth trends for 1999-00 to 2004-5 to assume WRT employment (and hence value-added) trend between 2004-5 and 2011-12. It turns out that this estimation led to a gross overestimate of the WRT sector since employment growth was less than 1 per cent between 2004-5 and 2011-12, a big decline from the near 3 per cent annual employment growth observed between 1999-00-2004-5.

All of this was well known by all the statistical experts when they sat down, in multiple committees, to design a new method of estimation for GDP for industry and services. It is important to emphasise that international experts from the UN, World Bank and IMF were involved in the review exercise and most of this was completed before Modi became PM. The CSO report and method was finalised in January 2015, when AS was already in office for four months. Since all major economists were privy to this revision method (along with the National Statistical Commission — again, all appointees of the Manmohan Singh government) it is a bit unexpected for AS to now claim that he had doubts about the new method of estimating GDP.

For the period 2011-2016, there is the whole statistical world (and UPA) approving of the new method — and AS has now positioned himself against these experts and himself (pre-2019 AS). To finish this line of argument, what would have been most useful if AS had documented the source of the new data (information) and how this new data has changed his interpretation of reality. Note that GDP revisions undergo revisions, around the world, of 10-50 basis points, but a revision of 250 bps, annually, is unheard of, at least since Rawski made a parallel attempt two decades ago.

What about the statistical method that AS uses to reach his conclusions about gross-estimation? Perhaps mindful of Rawski's fate (AS has written a laudatory book on China's GDP growth), AS's estimation is based on four major variables — export and import growth, real credit growth and electricity consump-

It is relevant to point out, and AS is well aware of this fact, that 2014-15 base year revisions had important components of 'structural change' in data collection and interpretation. In particular, balance-sheet data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) was used to estimate value-added in manufacturing and service industries. Previously, the CSO used the index of industrial production and the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data (available with a two-year lag) to estimate value-added in industry. For an important part of the service sector — wholesale and retail trade (WRT) — accounting for 10-15 per cent of GDP), the CSO used the previous growth rate in employment as observed via the Employment and Unemployment Surveys.

tion. He chooses two time-periods — 2001-2011 and 2012-2016. I have absolutely no disagreement with his choice of time-periods. The High Level Advisory Group (HLAG) to the commerce minister, which I had the privilege and honour of heading, used precisely these break points to measure trade performance in the world. The reason being that world trade literally fell off a cliff in 2012. Between 2001 and 2011, world exports grew at double digit levels (in nominal dollars) and collapsed to -1.5 per cent pa in the 2012-16 period. In real terms, the fall in world exports was from 4.6 to 1 per cent.

The world has changed in many ways since 2011: World trade is down, drastically, and world inflation is now at 3 per cent levels (distributed roughly at 1-2 per cent levels for the developed world and around 2-4 per cent levels for the developing world). I will be examining the AS methodology regarding GDP over-estimation in a detailed research note. For the moment, let me point out a few salient facts which suggest that AS may not have got it right in his over-estimation prediction of 250 bps of annual growth.

Manufacturing — value-added vs IIP growth: In period I, the two growth rates are virtually identical: 7.7 vs 7.3 per cent pa. In period II value-added in manufacturing increased at 7.2 per cent pa and IIP increased at only a 3.1 per cent rate. If the MCA data for period II are considered problematic, and IIP correct, then there is an over-estimation of 4.1 per cent per year. With a weight of 15 per cent, this will lead to an over-estimation of GDP of 60 bp per year in period II.

Wages in manufacturing (ASI data): Real wage per day growth was only 0.4 per cent an annum in period I which accelerated to 2.2 per cent pa in period II.

Agricultural wage growth: For (unskilled) ploughmen, this accelerated from 1.9 per cent in period I to 3.3 per cent in period II; for (semi-skilled) rural carpenters, the acceleration was much sharper — from 0.9 per cent to 4.5 per cent.

Real wage growth is an important component of GDP growth, and both Annual Survey of Industries and rural wage growth indicators suggest that the second 2012-16 period (spanning both UPA and NDA) contributed a higher portion to aggregate GDP growth. The trend in wages conflicts with AS's derivation of over-estimation of GDP growth. A meaningful analysis of AS's assumptions, and cross-country estimation methods, deserves serious investigation — especially a comparison of how other countries performed for the two growth periods.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Americans should be concerned by anything that might diminish the Federal Reserve's political independence, actual or perceived."

— THE WASHINGTON POST

Preening nationalism

India has gone from false hopes in 2014 to false pride in 2019



PRANAB BARDHAN

NARENDRA MODI'S STUNNING victory in the recent general elections is no doubt a great personal achievement for a leader whose oratorical and political skills (often tinged with a bit of venom) are indeed impressive and matched by indefatigable energy. Of course, he has been helped by disproportionately large corporate donations that gave him a megaphone to drown other voices, by a largely supine media that, apart from allowing him to escape hard questioning, became used to blowing his trumpet, by a fragmentary Opposition with immature leadership, by an army of volunteers canvassing both door-to-door and via WhatsApp, and, of course, a last-stage unexpected gift from Masood Azhar in the form of a terrorist incident to "boldly" respond to. But all this is not enough to fully explain the victory that Indian voters have handed him.

These are early days to carry out a full analysis of the electoral data for deciphering the range of explanatory factors, but there are enough straws in the wind to venture some guesses. First, it is unlikely that the economic achievements of the Modi regime played much of a role, and it is not a coincidence that the ruling party campaigns, particularly in periods of apparent desperation, did not much emphasise them either. Some did talk about toilets (though the actual use of those toilets lagged far behind their bureaucratic targets of construction) and gas cylinders for the poor (though evidence suggests refills of those cylinders lagged far behind their initial acquisition), but their impact on voting behaviour was likely to have been marginal (as suggested by the opinion polls by mid-February). One, of course, did not hear much about the slaying of the dragon of corruption through demonetisation, the grand hoax of November 2016. The stories of agrarian distress, which led to the hurried start of the PM-KISAN scheme, did not melt away and with the current state of land records, the two-hectare limit in the scheme must have been a block in implementation in large parts of the country. The other economic concern about the lack of good jobs for young people remained uppermost in many a mind, a promise of 2014 obviously belied.

People often talked about Modi's incorruptibility, but the same was true of Manmohan Singh, the leader of a regime associated with corruption scandals. Corruption is not necessarily associated with dynastic politics. Even if it were, the latter is not completely absent in the ruling party (a significant fraction of its MPs are "dynasts"), and its NDA partners. More importantly, there is only a thin line between public corruption and crony capitalism which has been rampant in both UPA and NDA regimes. Besides, in India's system of highly secretive election funding — made murkier by electoral bonds — a party

far ahead of others in benefiting from that system cannot deny complicity.

There have been many accounts of young people telling press reporters that they may not have jobs, but Modi has ensured that India is respected in the league of nations: Undoubtedly, this has been important to many voters. This kind of preening nationalism is based on a deep inferiority complex, that the rest of the world does not give us enough respect. Many people abroad have not been much impressed by India's actions in the Balakot airstrike, and, many in India are unaware that India's reputation abroad has substantially declined as well in several respects under the Modi regime. India used to be respected for its pluralism and democracy. In the widely-cited report of the Economist Intelligence Unit on the State of Democracy in the World for 2018, India's rank declined sharply in just four years since 2014. The lynchings of Muslims, atrocities on Dalits, the assault on some universities by goons and politicians, the repression of dissent, and the prominence given by the regime to Hindu supremacists (like Yogi Adityanath or Pragna Thakur) have brought us disgrace in the civilised world. Politicians pontificating on plastic surgery or test-tube babies by ancient Hindus, or rants against evolution or the cancer-curing properties of cow urine, have made us a laughing stock in the world. Yet, in our echo-chambers, there will be non-stop hype about the Modi regime raising our national prestige.

Yes, nationalism can have a positive role in unifying people and transcending inter-cast group conflicts, but the kind of ethnic pseudo-nationalism that the RSS/BJP propagates is highly divisive, not unifying. If it is really the case that, as some people believe, Modi's appeal can cut across castes and regions, and therefore is a positive step for India, then this nationalism has to transcend majoritarian ethnicity. It has to be, instead, a kind of "constitutional nationalism", based on our constitutional values and norms. Modi once called the Constitution his "holy book", but that has been mere empty rhetoric; in reality he has connived with his party members and associates, frequently violating the Constitution in letter and spirit. Majoritarianism is not democracy — I don't like the oxymoronic term "illiberal democracy", used by many people, from Fared Zakaria to Viktor Orban, as this ignores in some sense the essence of democracy. Effectively turning nearly 200 million people in our country into intimidated, second-class citizens is a violation of that constitutional nationalism, however impressive Modi's electoral victory may be. Concentration of power in one person, intimidation of critics and dissenters, weakening of institutions of checks and balances and misuse of police, bureaucracy, tax and investigative agencies against political opponents, are all gross violations of the Constitution which can put the world's largest democracy to shame.

If the victory in 2014 was partly based on false hope, then that of 2019 seems based on false pride.

The writer is professor of graduate school at the department of economics, University of California, Berkeley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNHEALTHY STRIFE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Get back to work' (IE, June 13). The developments related to the doctor's strike in West Bengal are nothing new in our country. There is a tendency in India to give a political colour to what is otherwise a completely non-political issue. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee should not threaten the striking doctors. The BJP should avoid trying to gain political mileage out of this unfortunate incident. The patients and their families need to have complete faith in the doctors. And lastly, the doctors need to get back to work, though their anger is justified.

Bal Govind, Noida

ROT IN CONGRESS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Let him go' (IE, June 14). Rahul Gandhi has shown some character by owning up the Congress's debacle, but the party does not seem to have the gumption to accept his resignation. The Congress must show courage and try to be a party of substance rather than a party of sycophants. It's high time the Grand Old Party develops inner-party democracy and involves grass root workers in electing its working committee.

Ashok Goswami, Mumbai

LANGUAGE, WISDOM

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The enigma of English' (IE, June 13). The approach when it comes to language must not be to devalue English. Rather, it must be to work to develop the language and culture of non-English

LETTER OF THE WEEK

SOFT POWER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Neighbours first', (IE, June 11). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Male and Colombo underlines the importance of these island states in India's foreign policy. It seems a subtle tactic to wean away these countries from Chinese influence. While India cannot compete with China economically, it can use the soft power approach. It can also extend generous lines of credit, step up initiatives such as joint counter terror drills and enhance maritime trade and commerce, which can help India to exercise its influence in the Indian Ocean regions.

Pranay Kumar Shome, Kolkata

speakers. Mother tongue is the only way to inculcate values and basic knowledge. The Constitution's Article 343(1) lays down that: "Over a period of 15 years from enactment, use of English as an official language is to cease, unless Parliament decides otherwise." But it still holds the status of the "subsidiary official language" of the Union. English emerged as a lingua franca for commercial, diplomatic and administrative convenience. But the language one is born into is apt for foundation knowledge.

Ashpreet S Ekhnour, Fazilka



G S BAJPAI

ABOUT FOUR MONTHS ago, when news about a district court in Madhya Pradesh sentencing a person to death under the POCSO (Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences) Act was doing the rounds, research conducted by the Counsel to Secure Justice (CSJ) and National Law University Delhi (NLUD) offered significant insights. Drawing from a survey conducted with the survivors and family members, as well as the accused, in child sexual assault cases in areas in and around Delhi, this study revealed that the meanings of "justice" tend to vary for the victim, offender, family, and community. The survivors or their families did not necessarily want the death penalty — or even strict punishment — for the accused. Rather, in many cases, they wanted the offenders to acknowledge their wrongdoing or tender an apology for their act.

These ideas are a part of "restorative justice", which is emerging as a powerful tool in the criminal justice process, especially with regard to conciliation and mediation. The concept involves bringing the victim and offender together to remedy the harm — it makes the offender accept his/her offence. Criminologist Howard Zehr notes that crime violates both people and relationships. Restorative justice involves the victim, offender and the commu-

nity in its quest for solutions, which are about repairing, reconciliation, and reassurance.

Punitive options, including the death penalty, are not the product of the concerns of victims or their families — they are notions of the state and therefore, driven by political considerations. Punishment seldom matches with the idea of justice held by the victims, their families or the community. Victimisation leads to trauma, shame, insecurity, and several other social and emotional consequences. Most people who were interviewed in the CSJ-NLUD study felt that the offenders need to go through similar pain and trauma. The victims wanted society to punish the offenders by shaming them as "rapists" or "molesters". Other victims wanted the offender to tender an apology as it gives them a sense of empowerment. The survivors felt that the criminal justice process is inconsequential if it doesn't drive the offender to experience regret, a sense of guilt and an obligation of reparation.

The study revealed that families of victims often felt that the offenders usually do not experience any remorse or guilt even after undergoing the severest of punishments. The stakeholders in these communities felt that, apart from harsh punishment, measures like community service, education — or even

treatment for the offender — and restorative programmes ought to be initiated.

Does the criminal justice system repair the harm done and heal relationships? Communities often perceive the system as corrupt, dismissive of the poor and insensitive towards victims and their families. The CSJ-NLUD study presents a powerful case for applying restorative justice, especially because re-victimisation and secondary victimisation, including discrediting crime victims during cross-examination, results in more harm than good — they discourage victims from reporting abuse. Victims believe that the system shares the society's victim-blaming culture.

Restorative justice programmes enable the victim, the offender and affected members of the community to be directly involved in addressing the situation that arises after a crime. They become central to the criminal justice process, with government officers and legal professionals serving as facilitators of a system that aims at offender accountability and reparation. This restorative process — that often involves face-to-face interactions between all parties — is a powerful way of addressing not only the material loss as a result of the crime, but the social and emotional trauma caused by it.

A restorative justice approach would require the POCSO Act to concentrate on the victims' needs — material, financial, emotional and social. POCSO ought to recreate or restore a community that supports the rehabilitation of victims and offenders — and in doing so, prevent crime. Adoption of such strategies will also obviate the costs and delays associated with the current legal justice system.

In 90 per cent cases of child sexual abuse, the offender is not only known to the victim but is also a close relative. Many organisations worldwide have "victim offender reconciliation programmes" or "sentencing circles". These involve trained facilitators who make the parties discuss possible solutions by driving the offenders to own up to their offence.

The current justice system often ignores the need to restore relationships that were broken, because family members blamed victims and failed to support them. The aim of the criminal justice process ought to be the creation of peace and, more importantly, enabling the community to deal with the effects of crime — as well as preventing it.

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