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TELLING NUMBERS

The gap between high and low earners, in India and world

LABOUR INCOME DISTRIBUTION (%) BY DECILE

(Deciles ordered from bottom 10% earners to top 10%)

DECILE	GLOBAL		INDIA	
	2004	2017	2004	2017
1	0.1	0.1	0.30	0.25
2	0.4	0.5	0.62	0.63
3	0.7	1	0.95	1.01
4	1.3	1.8	1.37	1.33
5	2.1	3	1.87	1.92
6	3.5	4.9	2.57	2.67
7	5.8	7.6	3.65	3.65
8	10.2	11.9	5.73	5.59
9	20.3	20.1	13.05	13.53
10	55.5	48.9	69.9	69.42

The Global Labour Income Share and Distribution', International Labour Organisation

THE TOP 10 per cent earners in India made over 69 per cent of the country's labour income in 2017, in contrast to 0.25 per cent made by the bottom 10 per cent earners, according to a global report by the UN arm International Labour Organisation (ILO). This gap has been consistent in India since 2004, when the top decile had earned about 70 per cent of the total income and the poorest 10 per cent had earned 0.30 per cent.

Globally, the top 10 per cent earners made a little under half the total income of 2017, compared to less than 2 per cent earned by the the lowest paid 30 per cent workers, said the report, which covered 189 countries. On an average, the bottom 10 per cent workers earned \$22 a month in 2017 while the top decile earned \$7,475. In other words, the poorest 10 per cent would need to work three centuries

more if they were to reach the \$7,475 level of the top decile.

While the pay inequality has remained consistent in India, it has reduced at the global workplace in the last 13 years. The income share of the richest 10 per cent was down to 48.9 per cent in 2017 from 55.5 per cent in 2004. While the report attributed this to the rise of emerging markets such as China and India, the pay inequality in these countries is more pronounced. China's 10 per cent richest workers earned 42.12 per cent of its labour income against the bottom decile's 0.47 per cent in 2017.

Worldwide, the income share of the middle 60 per cent workers grew to 30.2 per cent in 2017 from 23.6 per cent in 2004, while the share of the richest 20 per cent workers came down by 6.8 percentage points.

SHIVNARAYAN RAJPUROHIT

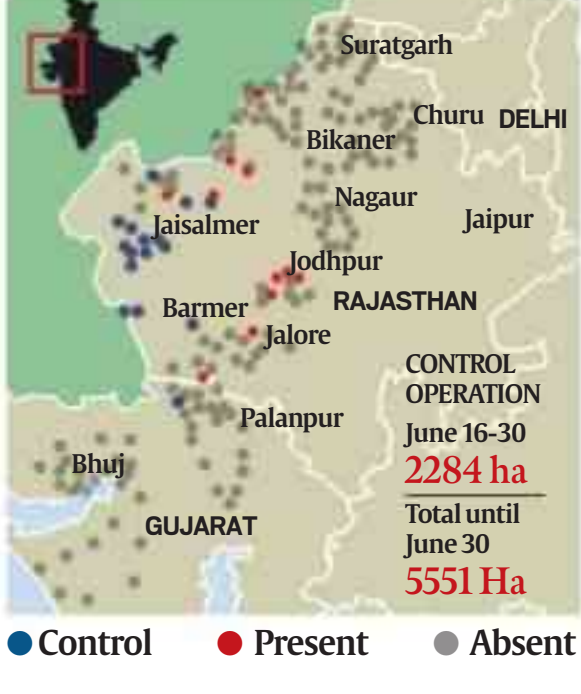
FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

HOW INDIA CONTROLS LOCUSTS

ON TUESDAY, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told Parliament that since May 21, there has been an incursion of desert locusts in Rajasthan and Gujarat from areas bordering Pakistan. "Neither the desert locust control teams nor any state agriculture functionaries have reported any damage to the crops," Tomar said (*The Indian Express*, July 10).

India has a Locust Control and Research scheme that is being implemented through the Locust Warning Organisation (LWO), established in 1939 and amalgamated in 1946 with the Directorate of Plant Protection Quarantine and Storage (PPQS) of the Ministry of Agriculture, according to the PPQS. The LWO's responsibility is monitoring and control of the locust situation in Scheduled Desert Areas mainly in Rajasthan and Gujarat, and partly in Punjab and Haryana.

The LWO publishes a fortnightly bulletin on the locust situation. The latest bulletin on the PPQS website, for the second fortnight of June, said control operations had covered 5,551 hectares by June 30. By July 3, this had risen to 8,051



Locust Warning Organisation status report. The area covered has risen since this bulletin for June 16-30.

Desert Locust Situation Bulletin, PPQS, Ministry of Agriculture

hectares, according to the minister's written reply in Parliament.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

PRADEEP KAUSHAL

NEW DELHI, JULY 10

AS MORE and more MLAs of the Congress and the JD(S) resign in Karnataka, reducing the ruling coalition to a minority, all eyes are on Speaker K R Ramesh Kumar who has not yet decided on the resignations. What is the role that is expected of the Speaker under such circumstances? A look at what the rulebook says, and the unfolding situation:

Where do the resignations leave the ruling coalition in term of numbers?

The majority mark in the 224-member Assembly is 113. Without taking the resignations into account, the ruling coalition has a strength of 116 — 78 MLAs of the Congress, 37 of the JD(S) and one of the BSP — besides the Speaker himself, whose casting vote, if required in a trust vote, would raise the count to 117.

So far, 16 MLAs — 13 of the Congress and three of the JD(S) — have submitted their resignations. If these are accepted, it will reduce the Assembly strength to 208, the majority mark to 105, and the ruling coalition's strength to 100, besides the Speaker.

The BJP, which already had 105 MLAs, now has an effective strength of 107, with two independent MLAs having already quit the ministry.

What has the Speaker's stand been?

On Tuesday, he told the media: "Anybody can come and resign; they are free to do so. I will be in my office till evening. But I cannot accept [the resignations] immediately as I would need to verify them. I need to go through the rulebook, understand it and then come to a conclusion. All members are elected individually. I don't want to commit a mistake; the future should not consider me as an accused."

On Saturday, he had told the media that he had asked his office to take the resignations for the time being. "Tomorrow [Sunday], the office will be closed... Monday I have prior engagement, so on Tuesday I will go to office and take further action, in accordance with rules."

So, what does the rulebook say?

Under Rule 202(1) of the Rules of Procedure of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, "a member who desires to resign his seat in the House shall intimate in writ-



JD(s) and Congress MLA at the Speaker's office to submit their resignation on July 6. Speaker Ramesh Kumar (below) has not yet taken a decision. PTI



ing under his hand addressed to the Speaker his intention to resign his seat in the House in the following form and shall not give any reason for his resignation."

Thereafter, it lays down the format of a resignation letter: "I hereby tender my resignation of my seat in the House with effect from (the date)."

The rulebook spells out the mode for dealing with any deviation from the process

laid, saying: "Provided that where any member gives any reason or introduces and extraneous matter the Speaker may in his discretion omit such words, phrases or matter and the same shall not be read in the House."

The subsequent sub-rule, 202(2), says: "If a member hands over the letter of resignation to the Speaker personally and informs him that the resignation is voluntary and genuine and the Speaker has no information or knowledge to the contrary, and if he is satisfied, the Speaker may accept resignation immediately."

When 13 of the 16 MLAs — 10 of the Congress and three of the JD(S) — reached the Speaker's office on Saturday to submit their resignations, the Speaker reportedly left his office and they submitted their papers to his office. Later, they met with the Governor and informed him of their decision to resign.

What happens if an MLA cannot submit his or her resignation letter in person?

Sub-rule 202(3) says: "If the Speaker receives the letter of resignation either by post or through someone else, the Speaker may make such inquiry as he thinks fit to satisfy himself that the resignation is voluntary and genuine. If the Speaker, after making a sum-

mary enquiry either himself or through the agency of Legislative Assembly Secretariat or through such other agency, as he may deem fit; is satisfied that the resignation is not voluntary or genuine, he shall not accept the resignation."

In this case, however, the MLAs had personally gone to his office to hand over their resignations.

In fact, Article 101(3) of the Constitution, as originally framed, did not contain any provision for acceptance of the resignation by the Presiding Officer, and this implied that the resignation became effective when it was received by the Presiding Officer or the Secretariat. According to M N Kaul and S L Shakhder ("Practice and Procedure of Parliament"): "The element of acceptance of resignation was introduced by the Constitution (33rd Amendment) Act, 1974 to place a check on any forced resignation."

Sushil Chandra Varma, the then BJP MP from Bhopal, had sent his letter of resignation to the Lok Sabha Speaker on February 15, 1999. He was asked to confirm whether his resignation was voluntary and genuine. Meanwhile, Varma not only participated in a vote held on February 26, 1999, but also started signing the members' attendance register from March. After he was summoned by the Speaker and asked to clarify on this, Varma wrote to the Speaker on March 19, 1999, stating that the issues that had made him tender his resignation had since been sorted out. On his request, the Speaker treated his resignation as having been withdrawn.

What is the case of 'disqualification' that the Congress is talking about?

While Congress leaders are trying to wean the defectors back, the party leader in the Assembly, K Siddaramaiah, has said that the Congress would seek the disqualification of rebel MLAs who have put in their papers because, he claimed, their resignations were not voluntary and genuine.

The 10th Schedule of the Constitution provides that a member of an Assembly or Parliament will be disqualified "if he voluntarily gives up the membership" of the party on whose ticket he has been elected.

In the currently unfolding situation, however, neither the Congress nor the JD(S) has complained yet about any of the MLAs giving up the membership of their respective parties. The 16 MLAs have themselves chosen to quit the Assembly.

How PIB accreditation helps journalists

KRISHN KAUSHIK

NEW DELHI, JULY 10

THE UNION Ministry of Finance has justified recent restrictions on the entry of journalists, even those holding a Press Information Bureau (PIB) card, in the Finance Ministry on the ground that the government is simply streamlining the interactions between the media and the government. Many journalists holding a PIB card are feeling aggrieved.

What does PIB accreditation do for journalists? Does it provide free access to all government departments? How does having a PIB card help journalists in their work?

Eligibility

A PIB accreditation is only given to journalists who live in Delhi or its periphery, and works with a media organisation that has been functioning continuously for at least a year and if 50 per cent of its content is news or commentary of general public interest. The content should also include news and information emanating from the headquarters of the Government of India.

According to the Central News Media Accreditation Guidelines, 1999, PIB accreditation "shall not confer any official or special status on news media representatives, but shall only recognize their identity as a professional working journalist".

The guidelines define accreditation as "recognition of news media representatives by the Government of India for purpose of access to sources of information in the Government and also to news materials, written or pictorial, released by the Press Information Bureau and/or other agencies of the Government of India". The PIB card given to all accredited journalists mentions on its back that it is "valid for entry into buildings under MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) security zone".

To be eligible for PIB accreditation, a journalist needs to have a minimum of five years' professional experience as a full-time working journalist or a cameraperson in a news organisation, or a minimum of 15 years as a freelancer. Journalists working full-time for a news organisation seeking accreditation must be earning a minimum salary of Rs 4,500 per month. A newspaper or a period-

ical needs to have a minimum daily circulation of 10,000, or 75,000 if it is part of a chain, and news agencies must have a gross annual revenue of a minimum Rs 20 lakh for their journalists to be eligible for accreditation. Similar rules apply for foreign news organisations and foreign journalists.

Applications for accreditation are vetted by a Central Press Accreditation Committee headed by the DG, PIB. After a journalist applies for a PIB accreditation, there is a mandatory security check conducted by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, which also includes on-site verification of the journalist's residence by the police.

Benefits

As such, PIB accreditation has several advantages. First, in certain events involving senior public functionaries such as the President, the Prime Minister, and other ministers, only a PIB accredited journalist is allowed entry.

Second, journalists accredited with the PIB are eligible, along with members of their family, for subsidised health services under the Central Government Health Scheme, meant

for employees of the Union government.

Third, and most importantly, a PIB accreditation helps a journalist carry out her professional responsibilities. It does so by helping a journalist protect her sources. Since a PIB card comes after security clearance from the Home Ministry, accredited journalists are allowed to enter the premises of most Union government ministries without prior appointment.

They are not required to register or record their presence at the reception, or with any other official in any ministry. This firewalls the journalists from attempts at finding out when and on how many occasions they have visited the premises of an office, and which officers they have met.

The anonymity of sources is one of the essential principles of journalism across the world. It may take years for a source to start confiding in a reporter. The trust between the journalist and her source is, to a large extent, based on the latter's faith that his/her identity will not be revealed. This becomes paramount when a source is willing to speak out against a senior official or a minister, or against the policies of the government.

Where India stands in battle against measles, how Sri Lanka eliminated it

ABANTIKA GHOSH

NEW DELHI, JULY 10

SRI LANKA HAS made health history after spending three years free of any new measles cases (*The Indian Express*, July 10), and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared that the deadly childhood infection has been eliminated in the island nation. In contrast, India has a long road ahead, particularly because vaccine-resistant voices are sometimes being heard. Last year, the Delhi High Court had put on hold a vaccination campaign citing lack of parental consent.

A look at the battle against measles:

The disease

Measles is a serious and highly contagious disease that can cause debilitating or fatal complications, including encephalitis, severe diarrhoea and dehydration, pneumonia, ear infections and permanent vision

loss. The disease is preventable through two doses of a safe and effective vaccine. India currently gives a measles rubella vaccine in its universal immunisation programme to tackle both measles and rubella.

Rubella, more commonly known as German measles, can have severe consequences during pregnancy. An infection just before conception and in early pregnancy may result in miscarriage, foetal death or congenital defects known as congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). A woman infected with the rubella virus early in pregnancy has a 90% chance of passing the virus to the foetus.

Status in India

The latest Global Measles and Rubella Update, which lists provisional data received in June and covering the period between May 2018 and April 2019, says India reported 47,056 measles cases and 1,263 rubella cases during these 12 months. India, as part of the global initiative, has targeted elimination of

MEASLES CASES: TOP 10

COUNTRY	CASES
Madagascar	84,929
Ukraine	83,533
India	47,056
Philippines	34,700
Nigeria	21,199
Pakistan	17,805
Yemen	11,984
Brazil	10,231
Kazakhstan	7,349
Thailand	6,960

WHO Global Measles and Rubella Update; provisional data for May 2018-April 2019, as reported to WHO in June 2019

measles and control of rubella by 2020. Rubella control is achieved when a country reduces the number of rubella cases by 95%

as compared to cases in 2008.

India has initiated the world's largest Measles-Rubella (MR) Campaign targeting vaccination of 410 million children and adolescents aged between 9 months and 15 years. The MR campaign began in February 2017, and as of November 2018, 135 million children have been vaccinated in 28 states/UTs. Under the programme, two doses of measles and rubella vaccines are to be given at ages 9-12 months and 16-24 months.

The Sri Lanka milestone

Sri Lanka is the fifth country in WHO's Southeast Asia region to eliminate measles. The other four countries are Bhutan, Maldives, DPR Korea and Timor-Leste. Sri Lanka's success follows its persistent efforts to ensure maximum coverage with two doses of measles and rubella vaccines being provided in the childhood immunisation programme. The vaccination coverage in the country has been consistently high -

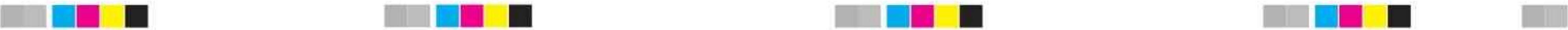
over 95% with both the first and second doses provided to children under the routine immunisation programme. Additionally, mass vaccination campaigns with a measles-rubella vaccine have been held periodically to plug immunisation gaps, the last one in 2014.

The country has a strong surveillance system and all vaccine-preventable diseases are an integral part of the communicable disease surveillance system. Measles is a notifiable disease in the country.

Last year, Sri Lanka achieved rubella control, along with five other countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Timor-Leste.

Comeback concerns

Globally, there are concerns about vaccination gaps that are allowing the disease to resurface in areas where it is not very common. In 2019, a large number of American states including Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida,



The IndianEXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

MAY WE COME IN?

Access of press to government is at heart of people’s right to know. Finance Minister should relook at her ministry’s order

THERE IS NO ban on the entry of media persons, the Ministry of Finance has “clarified”. But that clarification has failed to stem the unease. Because the fact is that, by an order, restrictions have been imposed on access to the North Block ministry of journalists, including those holding Press Information Bureau (PIB)-accredited cards. What was earlier a short and specific period of quarantine to protect the secrecy of the budget, has now been extended and enlarged into a blanket and arbitrary curb on the press’s access to the Ministry and its officials. As a result, the finance ministry joins a club of government addresses that are off limits for all journalists without prior appointment. The fact is also this: For a government that begins a second term after an overwhelming mandate, promising that it will win “sabka vishwas”, and for Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman who showed the grace — not common today on either side of the divide — to seek out former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh before presenting her first budget, this raising of the wall, this attempt to fence off a crucial ministry from the media gaze, sends out unflattering signals. The government is insecure and distrustful, it says. It does not trust the institution of the press, or, for that matter, its own officials, it says.

The Finance Ministry’s order does not just put a question mark against the elaborate process and purpose of accreditation, it also shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the mandate of the media. Journalists accredited by the PIB under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are professionals with minimum five years’ experience; the accreditation, issued after a detailed security check by the Ministry of Home Affairs, is for the “access to sources of information in the government and also to news materials...”. A journalist’s work, necessarily and legitimately, includes engagement with all levels of government, both on and off the record. This lies at the heart of the people’s right to know. Access to its corridors, therefore, is no favour granted by the government, and it cannot be governed by its whim or the jargon of the rule-book alone — it is the acknowledgement in a constitutional democracy of the imperative to make space for, and give room to, the check and balance on the elected and the powerful. By trying to keep the journalist out, by making her hostage to the vagaries of executive discretion and the bureaucracy of permissions, the finance ministry risks undermining the unstated but essential compact of reciprocity and respect between institutions.

Other political regimes may have done it too. Delhi’s AAP government imposed curbs on press access to the Secretariat but lifts them each day at 3 pm, Congress governments have been no exemplars of openness either. It may also be that the move may invite no great resistance from the public given the populist trend of cynicism about the media. It is asked: Why should reporters meet officers without seeking prior appointment? Why shouldn’t reporters be banned from informal meetings with them? Such questions are out of place in a democracy. Surely, Sitharaman knows that.

ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL

By choosing to celebrate a Twitter landmark, Rahul Gandhi underlines a persisting disconnect

WHEN RAHUL GANDHI stayed with his resolve to quit the post of party president, sections of the electorate that wish to see an effective Opposition in Parliament welcomed his decision to leave behind a vacuum in which talent from outside the dynasty could emerge. But just days after stepping down, Gandhi again invited the familiar catcalls about his political immaturity by tweeting that he had passed the Twitter landmark of 10 million followers, and that he would celebrate the occasion in Amethi. Imagine the perplexity of the people of the family pocket borough, which he is visiting for the first time after losing it to Smriti Irani. Rahul Gandhi has thanked his followers, which is a sign of his natural decency, but the promise to celebrate suggests that he does not know who he is, or what his role is. Such celebrations and self-congratulations are alright for people like hackers and jungle musicians, not for a politician who speaks to all of India. One, moreover, whose party is currently falling apart in Karnataka and other places.

Besides, are the Twitter numbers ever for real? How many of Rahul Gandhi’s 10 million faithful are bots? How many are citizens of Botswana? How many are just rubber-neckers? And how many are trolls who follow him for the sole purpose of making fun of him, just for the lulz? Rahul-baiting is a flourishing industry owing to abundant natural resources, but its labour base should be left out of a reckoning of his Twitter following. The Twitter numbers game is funny business, no more credible than matka odds.

Rahul Gandhi did not exactly take to social media like a fish to water. He had started very tentatively, with the depersonalised handle of @OfficeofRG, which kept him at a safe distance from the very people he was trying to reach out to, while BJP leaders excelled by making direct contact. And it took him a good, long time to outstrip Shashi Tharoor, who has been the most successful communicator in his party. But a disconnect online is not necessarily a deficit. India is still won or lost by politicians who don’t try to conserve their chappal leather. Gaining a 10 million following online in a nation of 1.5 billion is nothing to tweet home about.

LIKE THE WIND

Dutee Chand again shows her ability to leave everyone else, and her own troubles, behind

INDIA’S FASTEST WOMAN Dutee Chand’s 100 metres gold at the World University Games has brought the focus back on the athletic ability of the 23-year-old who has been in the spotlight after becoming the first Indian athlete to acknowledge a same-sex relationship. Along with 400 m junior world champion Hima Das (19), javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra (21) and high jumper Tejaswin Shankar (20), Dutee is one of India’s most promising athletes. Each of Dutee’s medals on the international stage, be it at the Asian Games or the Asian Championships or the University meet, should be given added weightage because sprint events are not India’s strength. So poor has been the talent pool and so disappointing the results that national camps have been cancelled.

Dutee has consistently won medals but the gold at Napoli is special because of the strife she has faced over the past few months after her fallout with her coach and her sister, who she alleged was blackmailing her over her same-sex relationship. She took the difficult step of coming out of the closet, a year after the Supreme Court legalised same-sex relationships. Even as many applauded her courage, her parents, weavers who live in Chaka Gopalpur village, disapproved of her relationship. With her family turning their back on her, the sprinter had in front of her a new hurdle.

However, like always, she has bounced back to prove her mettle. Dutee has dealt with the challenges off the track in the past when she successfully challenged guidelines which banned women with elevated levels of testosterone from competing in track and field events. Her timing of 11.32 seconds wasn’t fast enough to book a berth for next year’s Tokyo Olympics or the Doha World Championships in September–October. Yet the good news for fans of Indian track and field is that she has once again shown the ability to overcome personal trauma and run like the wind — and leave the rest of the field in her wake.



AMIT COWSHISH

WHILE PRESENTING THE regular budget for the current fiscal on July 5, the finance minister made no mention of, and proposed no additional funds for, defence. Consequently, the total outlay for defence remains at Rs 4.31 lakh crore, as proposed earlier in the interim budget presented to Parliament in February.

This works out to 2.04 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and accounts for 15.47 per cent of the total expenditure of the central government envisaged in the budget. On both these counts, the allocation for defence shows a downward trend vis-à-vis the last year’s outlay. The question, however, is whether additional funds could have been provided by the finance minister at this stage.

Considering that the die had already been cast by the interim budget and the finance minister had barely five weeks to prepare the regular budget after the present government was sworn in, it was never going to be easy to make any substantial change in the budget already allocated to various ministries and departments.

This is evident from the fact that in the budget presented last week, the total estimated receipt of the government has gone up by a measly sum of Rs 2,149 crore vis-à-vis the interim budget. This was the only additional income of the government that was up for grabs.

Last year (2018-19), the allocation for the armed forces was approximately Rs 1.12 lakh crore less than what they had demanded. Assuming that this year the gap would be half of that, it would still be more than Rs 55,000 crore. So, even if the entire additional income of Rs 2,149 crore were to be passed on to defence, it would have been just a drop in the ocean.

The finance minister could, of course, resort to higher taxation, disinvestment and borrowing, or reduce the allocation for other schemes in order to generate more income or savings and then set aside a substantial portion of that for defence. But no one can seri-

Defence plans will have to factor in the shortage of government funds

ously argue that it would have been pragmatic to exercise one or more of these choices to provide additional funds for defence in the regular budget.

Seen in this backdrop, it is just well that the finance minister did not make routine statements in her speech about the government’s commitment to defence and security of the nation and its willingness to make additional funds available for the armed forces, if required. There is no point making promises that ring hollow when made and difficult to keep when the time comes.

It is also just as well that she did not announce setting up of the long-talked-about non-lapsable fund for modernisation of the armed forces, which she is known to have been supportive of when she was the defence minister. The practicality and utility of setting up such a fund is questionable, notwithstanding the fact that even the standing committee on defence (ScoD) has been supporting the idea.

The crux of the matter is that the funds have to be raised by the finance ministry through one or more of the means mentioned above, regardless of whether these are made available via a non-lapsable modernisation fund or out of the budget outlay for the year in which these are required by the armed forces.

Bemoaning inadequacy of the budget outlay for defence is of no help. Serious efforts have to be made to figure out how the level of defence funding can be raised in a sustainable manner without causing an adverse impact on the funding for health, education, agriculture, infrastructure development, and other social sector schemes. While everyone talks about the need to raise the defence budget no one seems to have a clue as to how this can be done.



AJIT ABHYANKAR AND SOUMOJIT CHAKRABORTY

ON JUNE 29, a wall collapsed at a construction site in Kondhwa, Pune, on top of tin sheds housing the construction workers, killing 15 of them and their family members. As a compassionate gesture, the Maharashtra chief minister has announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh per deceased and an enquiry has been ordered.

However, these gestures cannot hide the truth that none of these deceased workers are eligible for any compensation from the Construction Workers’ Welfare Fund as beneficiaries, though crores of rupees raised through a cess dedicated for this very purpose are lying unutilised for years in the bank account of the so called “welfare” board. The same situation prevails at the national level with a few exceptions.

There has been a complete failure to register even 25 per cent of the total construction workers in the country. Rs 28,000 crore is lying unutilised for years. Over Rs 37,000 crore has been collected under the Building and Other Construction Workers’ (BOCW) Cess Act over the last 11 years. Maharashtra is the worst performing state — it has spent only Rs 830 crore of the Rs 7,482 crore that has been raised since 2007. The dereliction of the welfare board is not only tragic but also makes a mockery of the well-being of construction workers. No wonder the Supreme Court (Madan B Lokur) judgment on the contempt of court petition no. 52/2013 questions the conduct of the state governments and Union Territory Administrations (UTAs): “Directions given by this Court from time to time to implement the two laws have been flouted with impunity... the BOCW Act has been disregarded by State Governments and UTAs.

STAGNANT CESS POOL

Construction workers lose out on welfare benefits due to loopholes in the law

Hopefully, the gravity of the situation... will be realised by someone, somewhere and at some time”.

The construction industry is inherently unorganised, decentralised and transitory, with the majority of workers being in migratory and non-permanent employment. There exists a multi-step, graded sub-contracting system starting from the developer down to the last labour contractor at the site.

In view of this, Parliament enacted two laws — Building and Other Construction Workers Act in 1996 and Building and Other Construction Workers’ Welfare Cess Act, 1996 (the BOCW Acts). The purpose was to provide workers protection and welfare benefits, which included safe working conditions. The latter act (Welfare Act) imposed a cess at the rate of 1 per cent on the construction cost incurred by the builders on each new project. The funds raised through this cess was to be handed to state-level Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards, set up as per the said Act. Maharashtra approved this act in 2007.

However, there has been a total failure in the implementation of these two acts. In this context we can see a clear contradiction between the processes of cess collection and its expenditure. On the one hand, it is mandatory for the builder to pay the cess at 1 per cent of the construction cost towards the welfare of the workers employed by him, before the commencement of any construction. On the other hand, enrolment with the board — which is the minimum eligibility for welfare schemes as well as any compensation in case of accidents — is left to the worker. Builders or employers

or the board have no responsibility or liability to enrol the workers as members. Contrast this with similar beneficial legislations like Provident Fund or ESIS, where both the registration of a worker as well as the employer’s contribution are compulsory. The same compulsory enrolment and inclusion provision must be introduced for membership of welfare boards for construction workers.

Finally, this is precisely the reason why the construction workers who died in Pune have been deprived of welfare benefits, despite their employer-builders having paid the required cess at the rate of 1 per cent of the cost of construction. The Welfare Act provides that the administrative expenditure should not exceed 5 per cent of the expenditure incurred on welfare. Imposition of such limits, though justifiable, are absolutely misconstrued in application. This is because an elaborate administrative setup has to be in place prior to the enrolment of prospective beneficiaries from among such a huge and unorganised set of workers, and the extension of any welfare schemes to them. Maharashtra has 29 such schemes on paper. These require a large amount of paperwork and monitoring to prevent undeserving elements from taking undue advantage of the schemes. Prior establishment of a proper machinery is a pre-condition, even for minimal implementation of any welfare scheme for beneficial legislation.

Abhyankar is a CITU office bearer and CPI(M) Maharashtra state committee member. Chakraborty is studying at Symbiosis College of Liberal Arts, Pune

the GDP. Since the budget speech was largely devoted to laying out the government’s vision for the future, it would have been nice had the finance minister announced setting up of a task force of defence economists to suggest how the defence outlay could be increased to meet the expectations of the defence establishment.

It would also have been nice if in her speech the finance minister were to give an account of the outcome of several measures announced in the past five years: Constitution of the defence planning committee, commencement of the industrial corridor project, unrolling of the defence technology fund, setting up of an investor cell, promulgation of the strategic partnership scheme, and several Make in India projects, just to mention a few.

That she did not mention any of this in her speech needs to be taken in its stride, though. The most pragmatic thing to do at this stage would be to quickly reformulate the modernisation roadmap for the next five years making sure that it conforms to the likely availability of funds. This has happened but rarely in the past.

Even as recently as in July 2017, the armed forces had sought Rs 27 lakh crore over the next five years. This would have required defence budget to be more than doubled. No serious discussion ensued to figure out how this feat could be achieved, or if it could not be achieved, what would be the best alternative.

It is time to get real and work according to a financially viable plan, which recognises that money is going to be the biggest challenge till the experts find a solution to the problem or India’s economy hits the \$5-trillion mark and starts yielding higher receipts for the government.

The writer, former financial advisor (Acquisition), Ministry of Defence, is a distinguished fellow with the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

JULY 11, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

LS MEMBERS RESIGN

MMORARJI DESAI’S GOVERNMENT was neck deep in trouble tonight with as many as 27 Lok Sabha members having resigned from the Janata Party. A little before midnight the ruling party’s strength in the Lok Sabha had come down to 274 in a House with an effective strength of 538. Six more resignations from the ruling party could reduce Desai’s government to the status of a minority government. Desai’s government is already facing a no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha on which discussion will begin tomorrow. The crucial voting on the no-confidence debate will take place on Monday, but much before that Desai will have to weather the

raging storm in the Janata Party.

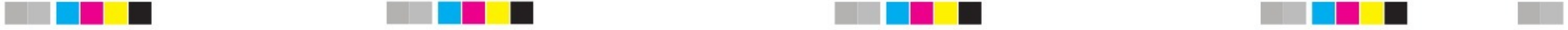
LALDENGA RAIDS

AN UNDISCLOSED AMOUNT of money, including 2,800 US dollars in bills of various denominations, was seized from the Gulmohar Park house where Laldenga, president of the banned Mizo National Front (MNF), was arrested on July 8 morning. Sources in the Central Intelligence Bureau said that three more houses, including one in Sarojini Nagar, a government employees’ colony, were raided in the pre-dawn Sunday swoop. Among the documents seized in the raids, it is said, were letters from some foreign sources received by Laldenga at various addresses in Delhi and other places. Sources

said that a number of places were being kept under surveillance following reports that of late some youths from Mizoram had been visiting Laldenga’s “friends and relatives”.

GENERAL’S RETURN

AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI has ordered the reinstatement of the commander of the country’s military police, Brig. Gen. Amir Rahimi. BBC’s Teheran correspondent describes the move as a humiliating reversal for the government of Premier Mehdi Bazargan, which had ordered the general’s dismissal. An aide to the Ayatollah in Qom told the correspondent that “When Ayatollah Khomeini orders. no one has the right to refuse.”



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Secularism is no spectacle

Secularism doesn't ask Hindu politicians to wear the skullcap or Muslim politicians to perform the aarti. Inclusive India shines through simple, everyday interactions



IRENA AKBAR

I AM MUSLIM. I don't wear a bindi or apply sindoor. I don't perform aarti. I visit temples only as a tourist. Does that make me less secular than Nusrat Jahan, the young Muslim MP from Basirhat, West Bengal, who wears bindi, applies sindoor, and inaugurates Jagannath Yatra, a Hindu religious pilgrimage?

Does my non-participation in Hindu rituals reflect my disbelief in "inclusive India", unlike Jahan's belief in "inclusive India", expressed in her adoption of Hindu symbols/rituals?

Do I disrespect Hinduism while Jahan respects it? No. A resounding, unapologetic, and most importantly, secular "no".

Secularism, as a state policy, is indifference to religion, or equal rights for people of all religions, including the right to practise religion. At an individual or social level, it translates into practising your religion, and respecting the right of your colleague, friend or neighbour to practise their religions. "Respecting" the rights of people of other faiths means not imposing your beliefs on them, and not degrading their practices or symbols, either by speech or action. It doesn't require you to adopt or participate in the rituals of someone else's religion.

Secularism is not a difficult or lofty thing, it is as basic and uncomplicated as minding your own business. As a Muslim, I don't expect or demand a Hindu to fast in Ramzan or offer namaaz. Likewise, no Hindu has ever demanded that I perform puja or attend a kirtan. An undrawn threshold exists, which is respected by both sides, or all sides, in a multi-faith society like India.

Not crossing the threshold doesn't make you less secular. A practising Hindu or Muslim who refrains from adopting or wearing non-Hindu/non-Muslim customs/symbols still qualifies as secular, as long as he/she doesn't harbour or incite ill-will against the other. A Muslim woman wearing a headscarf is no less secular than Nusrat Jahan in a bindi. A Hindu woman fasting on karvachauth is no less secular than a Hindu woman who eats biryani at a Muslim home on a Tuesday.

Secularism doesn't need grand, camera-friendly spectacles such as Hindu politicians wearing skullcaps in iftar parties, or Muslim politicians doing aartis. If anything, these public acts put unnecessary burdens on entire communities to prove their secular credentials.

An inclusive India, rather, shines through in simple, everyday affairs. In offices, colleges, and homes. My former supervisor, a Hindu, would remind me to go to the masjid across the road for my iftar and namaaz. She didn't practise a single Muslim ritual, but for me, she was a secular icon. Likewise, I never asked my Hindu domestic help to cook meat on Tuesdays or during Navratras. Beyond the bare minimum, we've gone out of the way to help each other in distress, be it lending money or donating blood between ourselves. The operating principle across these instances has been raw compassion, free of the



Suvajit Dey

need to adopt each other's religious customs.

An increasingly majoritarian India, though, seeks to complicate secularism, and burden minorities, especially Muslims, to prove their inclusiveness. A Nusrat Jahan who sports Hindu symbols was praised by the media for "putting country before faith". A fatwa, that was never issued by Deoband, was blown out of proportion, and debated endlessly on TV channels. Jahan, in her defence, talked of believing in "inclusive India". Even after the fatwa, was exposed to be fake, Jahan continued to give bytes to irresponsible TV channels about being "secular" and not responding to "hardliners". I seek no explanation from Jahan for her personal choices, but as a representative of people, the young MP needs to realise that her flawed definition of an "inclusive India" puts an unnecessary burden on Muslims to follow her example.

Perhaps, the first person, at least in the public eye, to bear that burden was 18-year-old Zaira Wasim. A few days after Jahan's bindi and sindoor made news, Wasim publicly announced her retirement from acting, citing difficulties in practising her religion in the movie industry. Wasim's religiosity was pitted against Jahan's brand of secularism, with the latter supported by both liberal and right-wing Hindus. Jahan was praised for her choice and 'standing up against' a fatwa that never was; Wasim was bashed left, right and centre for 'giving into pressure' and being 'indoctrinated and radicalised' by faith.

A few days after Jahan's bindi and sindoor made news, Wasim publicly announced her retirement from acting, citing difficulties in practising her religion in the movie industry. Wasim's religiosity was pitted against Jahan's brand of secularism, with the latter supported by both liberal and right-wing Hindus. Jahan was praised for her choice and 'standing up against' a fatwa that never was; Wasim was bashed left, right and centre for 'giving into pressure' and being 'indoctrinated and radicalised' by faith.

Hypocrisy has never been so glaring. When a Taberz Ansari is lynched to death over the forced chanting of "Jai Shri Ram", when scores of Muslims have been killed by "indoctrinated and radicalised" Hindu youth over the last five years, it takes a special kind of audacity to lecture the besieged community on "indoctrination" and "radicalisation". These sermonisers were not ordinary social media users, but "intellectuals" who appear on TV and Congress politicians such as Abhishek Singhvi who, in a tweet, questioned the "progress" of Muslims given that "halala is allowed and acting is haram".

To be fair, liberals have taken on the right-wingers in the discourse against rising fascism, even risking tags like "anti-nationals" and "urban naxals". But the difference between the Hindu liberal and the Hindu right-winger blurs when they applaud a Nusrat Jahan and bash a Zaira Wasim, when they salute a Muslim woman doing Hindu rituals and bash a Muslim teen talking of her relationship with Allah, when they judge choices according to their own biases. Hindu liberals are doing Muslims no favour in their anti-Hindutva activism. The fight is not for Muslims per se, but for upholding the secular, inclusive values of India. Perhaps, it would do well to go back to the basics of those values: You follow your faith, I mine. Let each be.

The writer is a Lucknow-based entrepreneur and former journalist

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The US president is angry at the British ambassador's frank assessment. His reaction reinforces Kim Darroch's verdict on his administration."

— THE GUARDIAN

Road to \$5 trillion

It is not redistribution but growth that matters. We have to increase the size of the cake



GOPAL KRISHNA AGARWAL

IF WE ARE concerned with the economic well-being of the nation, we have to focus on economic growth. Setting a target and working on a roadmap to reach it is the only way to success, and who knows this better than Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In 2014, when Modi came to power, he set up a performance matrix, which seemed far-fetched, but his tireless efforts hit the bull's eye.

He has caught the bull by the horn on issues such as NPA, corruption, leakages and cleanliness; and effective solutions like the insolvency and bankruptcy code (IBC), GST, demonetisation, Jan Dhan accounts and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan have given confidence to the electorate that nothing is impossible — "Modi hai to mumkin hai".

That spirit continues. For many who believe that India becoming \$5 trillion economy by 2024 is a sweet dream; wait, we have the roadmap. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has unleashed it in her maiden budget. The budget is a vision document of the government. It is a major policy statement. In her budget speech, the FM said "it took 55 years for our economy to reach \$1 trillion... Our economy was at approximately \$1.85 trillion when we formed the government in 2014. Within five years it has reached \$2.7 trillion. Hence, it is well within our capacity to reach the \$5 trillion in the next few years."

The Economic Survey has laid down the parameters for achieving this target. It has mentioned that issues like job creation, savings, consumption, demand, should not be looked at in silos. The CEA has said that with the current 7 per cent GDP growth rate, if we accelerate investments and target 8 per cent growth, the \$5 trillion economy is well within sight. Investment is the key; others will follow. We will get out of the vicious circle of low liquidity, low demand, low investment, low production and lower growth to the virtuous cycle of investment, savings, production, consumption, demand and growth.

The government has continued its push for infrastructure development so that ease of living is continuously upgraded, with a focus on rural roads, waterways, and low cost housing. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana alone has set a target of building 1.95 crore houses. The government has also allowed an additional deduction of Rs 1.5 lakh for interest payment of housing loans.

A lot has been announced to promote private higher education under the "Study In India" initiative, and building world class institutions and also sports universities under Khelo Bharat.

The government has also announced opening up of the sovereign debt market. Those who doubt the government's intention can draw comfort from the fact that this will help the government swap high-cost domestic debt for cheaper international credit, thereby helping to reduce in-

terest rates.

The banking sector has seen many reforms in last five years. Further, to help private capital formation, the government has promised Rs 70,000 crore of fresh capital infusion into public sector banks. It will also set up development financial institutions to support long-gestation projects and tackle the asset-liability mismatch. To boost consumption and resolve the NBFC issues, the government has guaranteed 10 per cent of loss on assets pool purchases to the tune of Rs 1,00,000 crore from NBFCs.

At present, the private sector is largely over-leveraged, and is under pressure to resolve its debts and is short of capital. For capital formation, the government has to depend on foreign capital and, therefore, is continuing with its policy of liberalising FDI, particularly into insurance, aviation and single brand retail segment.

MSMEs have also has received special allocation by the government; to support manufacturing, the government has announced streamlining 55 labour laws into four codes and enhancing minimum wages. Small traders with turnover up to Rs 1.5 crore will get the benefit of a pension scheme.

The government has reduced the corporate tax to 25 per cent for small enterprises with a turnover up to Rs 400 crore, and has announced several measures to boost the start-up ecosystem. To continue with the benefits of this provision, it is expected that it will not be misused by the beneficiaries as is done at times under capital gains tax, dividend distribution tax and buy-back of shares.

Modernisation of railways is estimated to require about Rs 50 lakh crore of investment. The government has proposed public private partnerships and selective route privatisation to augment its resources. Initiatives like building a national power grid and a warehousing grid will have far-reaching benefits.

For ease of doing business, tax compliance is crucial. The government's plan to implement e-assessment is a big game changer: It will bring transparency and reduce harassment of tax payers due to subjective human intervention.

The government's initiative in resolving pending indirect tax litigation through Sabka Vishwas Legacy Dispute Resolution Scheme is commendable. This scheme covers, past disputes and provides relief ranging from 40 to 70 per cent, and also relief on levy of interest and penalties.

With all the constraints on expenditure, the finance minister has allocated funds across various social segments. The budget has increased funds allocated to central sponsored schemes by 8.8 per cent to Rs. 3,31,610 crore. The total expenditure of the government has increased by 13.4 per cent from the revised estimates. The fiscal deficit has been kept under check at 3.3 per cent of GDP. The budget meets the demand for investment and growth without disturbing the fiscal math.

It is not redistribution but growth that matters. The prime minister has rightly said that we have to increase the size of the cake. Economic growth is our target and the focus on empowerment of the weaker sections of the society though education, healthcare etc is the solution.

The writer is national spokesperson of the BJP on economic affairs



AKSHAY MARATHE

Eye for accountability

CCTVs in classrooms will empower parents, improve government schools

THE ARVIND KEJRIWAL government's CCTVs in classrooms project was the subject of two pieces published in *The Indian Express* on July 8, including the editorial, 'Classroom and eye'. Both spoke of the lofty ideals of education and how live streaming of restricted CCTV footage from classrooms to parents is antithetical to them. This reflects a deep disconnect between those who hold this view and the reality of the country's government schools.

Before the AAP government brought budgetary and administrative focus back on providing quality education in public schools, Delhi's government schools, not unlike government schools across the country, were in disrepair. Several steps were taken to improve schools. Although the infrastructure upgrade has lifted spirits of parents and teachers alike, what has truly turned schools around is the involvement of parents in the management of schools.

Government schools are a key public good that taxpayers fund to ensure every child has access to education, financial ability notwithstanding. Like any arm of the government, these schools will decay if not made accountable to the people.

When parents leave children in the custody of government schools, the government owes a duty to parents to look after their education, safety and well-being. The world over, parental oversight has been the bedrock of effective school management. In private schools, this is often achieved smoothly because parents are empowered by their own education and economic leverage due to the fees they

pay. To achieve this in state schools, extraordinary measures are needed to empower parents in order to hold schools accountable.

In Delhi, the government has revived School Management Committees (SMCs), parent bodies mandated by the Right to Education Act. They have been empowered to monitor and supervise basic deliverables of schools, such as teacher attendance, healthy mid-day meals, clean washrooms, drinking water, etc. The AAP government has constantly encouraged parental participation in school, especially through regular parent teacher meetings, which were a rarity in government schools. The CCTV in classrooms project is the natural next step towards increasing accountability of schools.

Sanjay Srivastava calls the project "gimmicky", but in my view the project may have been gimmicky had the government installed CCTV cameras in classrooms and left it at that. By sharing feeds with parents, it is actually ensuring that the crores of public money invested into CCTVs are not wasted. Often, CCTVs fail to serve their purpose for lack of motivated monitoring. Outsourcing of the monitoring to an invested stakeholder like parents is actually a smart innovation.

The CCTV feeds can aid parents to identify

several problems their children may be facing, including bullying, corporal punishment, inadequate attention spans, teacher absenteeism and even student truancy. It will empower them to not just raise their children better but also to ask the right questions to their child's school. This has the potential to transform the quality of education in state schools.

The insistence that such a measure is being forced on parents and that they are "agreeing" to it out of desperation is rather patronising. Delhi's education department had several rounds of interaction with parents after a pilot programme in five schools last year where CCTVs were installed in classrooms. Children and teachers have also been consulted. None of the stakeholders expressed any discomfort. In fact, parents are enthusiastic about it.

Why wouldn't they be? A major section of the households that send children to government schools have both parents working long hours. Making it to school even for a parent-teacher meeting means relinquishing a day's wage for many. With smartphones and internet data becoming increasingly accessible, if governments are leveraging technology towards a social good it must be welcomed.

While privacy as a fundamental right is

important, where does one draw the line between private and public? Classrooms cannot be classified as private by any stretch of imagination. Moreover, the feed being provided to parents is highly restricted. Only the feed for their own children will be provided to parents, through a mobile app that can be accessed thrice a day for maximum for 15 minutes each. The feed does not include audio, and can only be accessed live. One can only confirm the physical presence of the teacher and children in this window.

The criticism that there are no studies to suggest any positive impact of CCTVs in classrooms is oblivious to the fact that this is the first such project in the world. Proactive governments take decisions based on the problems at hand and social understanding. This project was first thought of after a series of crimes were reported in school premises a few years ago. A child was raped in a private school, a young boy was allegedly murdered in another, and most shockingly, a teacher was murdered by two Class 12 students inside a government school classroom. One doesn't need empirical data to gather that schools can be sites of crime. If CCTVs can be deterrents to crime outside schools, they can be deterrents within too. And the one flaw with CCTVs, that they are generally not well monitored has also been fixed by the AAP government.

Marathe is a member of Delhi government's Dialogue & Development Commission (DDC) Task force on school education

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SERVE PEOPLE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Spooked by vaastu' (IE, July 10). In his personal capacity, Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is entitled to do whatever he wants. But after holding a constitutional post he need be more than judicious in his use of public money. At a time when farmers are in distress, every effort should be made to provide as much relief to them through government and administrative support. Serving the people of Telangana will bring more political good fortune to KCR than vaastu.

Bal Govind, Noida

JUST A FRINGE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Vigilantism 2.0' (IE, July 10). The author is unreasonable when she attributes design and intent to a few reprehensible acts. A society with huge historical baggage, limited educational avenues, widespread economic disparities, lack of political awareness and unrestricted freedoms will have a few lumpen elements who indulge in such criminal activities. The law of the land must deal with these crimes. Unlike other Asian or African nations, democracy is safe and thriving in India due to the inherent decency and magnanimity embedded in the vernacular ideas of sovereignty.

H N Bhagwat, via email

AFTER BREXIT

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Bowled

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

over by a sea of blue', (IE, July 10). India has traditionally viewed Britain as its gateway to Europe. Brexit did make Indian business and policymakers apprehensive about the future of their long-standing partnerships in a range of areas. However, the experience with the long-drawn, lacklustre progress in the India-EU FTA negotiations does offer India the necessary motivation to engage with the UK for an FTA bilaterally.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata