



Blue-sky visions

The ambitions of the Economic Survey depend on the implementation of its ideas

The Economic Survey for 2018-19 reflects the views of its principal author, Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) Krishnamurthy Subramanian. And the CEA has made bold to use the new government's first economic assessment-cum-agenda setting exercise to posit a range of ideas that he attributes to "blue sky thinking". From an embrace of a "world that is in constant disequilibrium", and the need therefore to adapt to it, to the stress on drawing upon Richard Thaler's work in the behavioural economics of 'nudge' for addressing issues including gender equality, savings and tax compliance, the survey attempts to reset multiple paradigms. The broad goal is to help drive economic strategy to achieve sustained real GDP growth of 8% so as to enable fulfilment of the government's grand vision of making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025. For that, the first task is to take stock of the economy's current state. The CEA is cautiously confident that the slump in investment, which he rightly identifies as the key driver of growth, jobs and demand, has bottomed out. Setting the huge electoral mandate for the government as an enabler that would "push the animal spirits of the economy", the survey projects real GDP growth to rebound to 7% in 2019-20. But the CEA doesn't shy away from flagging 'consumption' as being crucial in determining the growth trajectory in the current fiscal year, and in pointing out its vulnerability to the health of the monsoon-dependent rural economy. With rainfall as on July 3 about 28% less than average and large parts of southern and western India in the grip of a crippling drought, clearly the circumsppection appears well warranted.

On the fiscal front, the survey is even less optimistic. It lists several challenges to achieving the fiscal deficit target of 3% of GDP by March 2021: the "apprehensions of slowing of growth" and the implications for revenue collections; the shortfall in GST collections and the imperative that it places on revenue buoyancy this year; the hunt for resources to fund the expanded PM-KISAN scheme, Ayushman Bharat and other government initiatives; and the impact on oil purchase prices due to the U.S. sanctions on import of crude from Iran. It is, however, on the policy prescriptions front that the CEA comes into his own. Central to the recommendations is the focus on triggering a self-sustaining "virtuous cycle" of savings, investment and exports. To achieve which, he suggests, presenting data as a 'public good', ensuring policy consistency and reducing the cost of capital. Micro, small and medium enterprises must be nourished, especially firms that are most likely to boost both job creation and productivity, and labour laws made flexible. Ultimately, it is the implementation that may well decide how "blue sky" these ideas are.

Raising the bar

Rahul Gandhi has forced a churn in the Congress that might lay the basis for a revival

With Rahul Gandhi stating categorically that he would not continue as Congress president, one uncertainty that had gripped the party has ended. But this culmination does not end the disorder and chaos in the party, which is in a state of paralysis since its rout in the parliamentary election. Mr. Gandhi's letter of resignation is part self-reflection, about the Congress in general and his own personal role in it, and part a critique of the state of affairs of Indian politics. Mr. Gandhi felt the need for introspection and accountability, and restated his long-held position that he was in politics not for power but social change. By sticking to his decision to quit as party chief, he has thrown a challenge at his colleagues to find a life outside the shelter of the Nehru-Gandhi family. The coterie that flourished around his mother and predecessor Sonia Gandhi had reduced politics to manipulation and turned the party into an instrument of vested interests. A small club of self-seekers who reinforce one another and don't face the electorate had taken over the Congress years before Mr. Gandhi came on the scene. His letter is an indictment of these leaders, whose personal fortunes never waned, even as the party's plummeted.

Mr. Gandhi's limitation is not in his understanding of the challenges before the party or the country, or in his vision for both. His inexact articulation is not reflective of any insurmountable weaknesses. His real failure has been his inability to free the party from the clutches of what his father Rajiv Gandhi had famously called power-brokers. In calling for accountability, he is effectively asking a group to self-destruct for the larger cause of the party, which in turn must fight for the larger cause of the country. By refusing to be the façade for their parasitical existence, Mr. Gandhi might have forced a productive churn at all levels. Any moral appeal could only have had a limited impact on the seasoned veterans, but the example Mr. Gandhi set by accepting responsibility for the defeat while reiterating his commitment to the larger cause might help inspire a resuscitation of the party. But questions abound. Mr. Gandhi himself will remain active in politics, as he has made clear, but how much authority he would want to exercise remains an open question. His insistence on stepping aside also comes from a realisation that the dynasty tag is more a drag than a booster for his politics, and the party, in the current environment. The process of reducing the Congress to a family enterprise had started with Mr. Gandhi's forbears and their supporters as much as their opponents. Only a family member could have sought to challenge the notion that the Congress cannot survive without the dynasty. If the absence of a Nehru-Gandhi at the helm was a precondition for the reconfiguration of the Congress and the formation of a viable alternative to Hindutva, Mr. Gandhi has created that situation.

Expanding India's share in global space economy

ISRO should embrace a civilian identity and, aided by legislation, form partnerships with the industry and entrepreneurs



RAKESH SOOD

From a modest beginning in the 1960s, India's space programme has grown steadily, achieving significant milestones. These include fabrication of satellites, space-launch vehicles, and a range of associated capabilities.

Today, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s annual budget has crossed ₹10,000 crore (\$1.45 billion), growing steadily from ₹6,000 crore five years ago. However, demand for space-based services in India is far greater than what ISRO can supply. Private sector investment is critical, for which a suitable policy environment needs to be created. There is growing realisation that national legislation is needed to ensure overall growth of the space sector. The draft Space Activities Bill introduced in 2017 has lapsed and the government now has an opportunity to give priority to a new Bill that can be welcomed by the private sector, both the larger players and the start-ups alike.

ISRO's thrust areas

Since its establishment in 1969, ISRO has been guided by a set of mission and vision statements covering both the societal objectives and the thrust areas. The first area was of satellite communication, with INSAT and GSAT as the backbones, to address the national needs for telecommunication, broadcasting and broadband infrastructure.

Gradually, bigger satellites have been built carrying a larger array of transponders. About 200 transponders on Indian satellites provide services linked to areas like telecommunication, telemedicine, television, broadband, radio, disaster

management and search and rescue services.

A second area of focus was earth observation and using space-based imagery for a slew of national demands, ranging from weather forecasting, disaster management and national resource mapping and planning.

These resources cover agriculture and watershed, land resource, and forestry managements. With higher resolution and precise positioning, Geographical Information Systems' applications today cover all aspects of rural and urban development and planning. Beginning with the Indian Remote Sensing (IRS) series in the 1980s, today the RISAT, Cartosat and Resourcesat series provide wide-field and multi-spectral high resolution data for land, ocean and atmospheric observations.

A third and more recent focus area is satellite-aided navigation. The GPS-aided GEO augmented navigation (GAGAN), a joint project between ISRO and Airports Authority of India, augmented the GPS coverage of the region, improving the accuracy and integrity, primarily for civil aviation applications and better air traffic management over Indian airspace. This was followed up with the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), a system based on seven satellites in geostationary and geosynchronous orbits.

It provides accurate positioning service, covering a region extending to 1,500 km beyond Indian borders, with an accuracy greater than 20 metres; higher accuracy positioning is available to the security agencies for their use. In 2016, the system was renamed NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation).

With growing confidence, ISRO has also started to undertake more ambitious space science and exploration missions. The most notable of these have been the Chandrayaan and the Mangalyaan missions, with a manned space

mission, Gaganyaan, planned for its first test flight in 2021. These missions are not just for technology demonstration but also for expanding the frontiers of knowledge in space sciences.

None of this would have been possible without mastering the launch-vehicle technology. Beginning with the Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV) and the Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV), ISRO has developed and refined the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) as its workhorse for placing satellites in low earth and sun synchronous orbits. With 46 successful missions, the PSLV has an enviable record.

The Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) programme is still developing with its MkIII variant, having undertaken three missions, and is capable of carrying a 3.5 MT payload into a geostationary orbit. Compare this to the French Ariane 5, which has undertaken more than 100 launch missions and carries a 5 MT payload, with an Ariane 6 in the pipeline for 2020.

Over the years, ISRO built a strong association with the industry, particularly with Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) like Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, Mishra Dhatu Nigam Limited and Bharat Electronics Limited and large private sector entities like Larsen and Toubro, Godrej and Walchandnagar Industries. However, most of the private sector players are Tier-2/Tier-3 vendors, providing components and services. The Assembly, Integration and Testing (AIT) role is restricted to ISRO, which set up Antrix, a private limited company, in 1992 as its commercial arm to market its products and services and interface with the private sector in transfer of technology partnerships.

Today, the value of the global space industry is estimated to be \$350 billion and is likely to exceed \$550 billion by 2025. Despite ISRO's impressive capabilities, India's share is estimated at \$7 bil-



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lion (just 2% of the global market) covering broadband and Direct-to-Home television (accounting for two-thirds of the share), satellite imagery and navigation. Already, over a third of transponders used for Indian services are leased from foreign satellites and this proportion will rise as the demand grows.

Developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analytics has led to the emergence of 'New Space' – a disruptive dynamic based on using end-to-end efficiency concepts. A parallel is how the independent app developers, given access to the Android and Apple platforms, revolutionised smartphone usage. New Space entrepreneurship has emerged in India with about two dozen start-ups who are not enamoured of the traditional vendor/supplier model but see value in exploring end-to-end services in the Business-to-Business and Business-to-Consumer segments. However, these start-ups have yet to take off in the absence of regulatory clarity.

'New Space' start-ups

The New Space start-ups discern a synergy with government's flagship programmes like Digital India, Start-Up India, Skill India and schemes like Smart Cities Mission. They see a role as a data-app builder between the data seller (ISRO/Antrix) and the end user, taking advantage of the talent pool, innovation competence and technology know-how. They need an enabling ecosystem, a culture of accelerators, incubators, Venture Capitalists and mentors that exists

Talking sanctions, endangering peace

The Trump administration's successive punitive actions against Iran can only be interpreted as a desire for direct conflict



SUVRAT RAJU

More than a year ago, the U.S. unilaterally abrogated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and began to squeeze the Iranian economy using sanctions. The latest round of sanctions were announced in June. Iran announced a week later that it had exceeded a limit set by the JCPOA on its stockpile of nuclear fuel.

The U.S.-Iran conflict is often portrayed in the media as one that involves two flawed actors struggling for supremacy on a complex West Asian stage. But a closer look reveals a simpler underlying reality: the Donald Trump administration is using the U.S.'s clout in an old-fashioned attempt to assert the country's hegemony; Iran is just doing whatever it can to resist U.S. pressure.

The Shah connection

The roots of this dispute can be traced back to 1953, when the Central Intelligence Agency orchestrated a coup to remove Iran's elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh. After instituting the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the U.S. encouraged him to establish a nuclear programme.

The U.S. built Iran's first nuclear reactor in 1967. The Shah was clear that his ambitions went beyond nuclear energy, and extended to nuclear weapons. In 1974, he explained that Iran would acquire nuclear weapons "without a doubt, and sooner than one would think." Nevertheless, the West continued to provide nuclear technology to his government.

After the Shah was toppled in 1979, the new government, under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, cancelled his plans for a large nuclear-energy sector, retaining only those facilities that had already been established. Khomeini also declared that nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) were *haram* – forbidden in Islam. Whatever one may think about Khomeini's government, his spiritual injunctions were taken very seriously. When Iraq attacked Iran with chemical weapons, with the tacit support of the Ronald Reagan administration, Tehran refrained from responding in kind despite having the requisite technology.

It is possible that during the Iran-Iraq war, some elements within the Iranian establishment started exploring the possibility of developing a nuclear deterrent. Even if this was the case – and the evidence on the matter is far from conclusive – these activities were definitely stopped by 2003. In the same year, Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued an



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unambiguous fatwa against nuclear weapons.

Soon after invading Iraq on the false pretext that it had WMDs, the U.S. attempted to build a similar narrative around Iran, which had established a modest programme to enrich uranium to fuel its existing reactors. The U.S. alleged that the fuel was intended for a bomb. These allegations were undercut by U.S. intelligence agencies themselves who reported that "in fall 2003 Iran halted... nuclear weapons... activities". In 2015, after a multi-year investigation, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) went further, declaring that "activities relevant to... a nuclear explosive... did not advance beyond feasibility and scientific studies" and, as a "coordinated effort", were only carried out "prior to the end of 2003".

In spite of these facts, successive U.S. administrations imposed sanctions on Iran, demanding that it completely halt uranium enrichment. It was only during President Barack Obama's second term that the U.S. sought a temporary truce,

leading to the JCPOA.

The JCPOA recognised Iran's right to maintain a civilian nuclear programme, but placed significant restrictions on its size and scope for 10 to 15 years. Most importantly, Tehran reiterated that "under no circumstances" would it "seek... nuclear weapons." The IAEA was granted unprecedented powers to inspect Iran's nuclear activities, and has repeatedly verified Tehran's compliance.

So, when the Trump administration ceased to abide by the JCPOA last year, this could only be interpreted as a message that the U.S. was not interested in arms control, but rather in initiating a direct conflict with Tehran.

An economy devastated

Over the past year, the U.S. has made threats, mobilised troops and warships, and provoked Tehran by flying military planes dangerously close to its border. However, Washington's primary strategy has been to use economic measures as a weapon. It has prevented foreign entities from trading with Iran, devastating the Iranian economy.

India has also been hurt by these policies. Until recently, Iran was one of India's largest oil suppliers. Even though Iranian oil came with discounts on freight, and favourable terms of payment, the Indian government obeyed Washington's dictates and stopped purchasing oil from Iran in May.

in cities like Bengaluru which is where most New Space start-ups have mushroomed.

Equally, clear rules and regulations are essential. ISRO can learn from its 1997 SatCom policy which neither attracted any FDI in the sector nor a single licensee. A similar situation exists with the Remote Sensing Data Policy of 2001, amended in 2011, which too has failed to attract a single application. The 2017 draft Bill raised more questions because it sought to retain the dominant role of ISRO/Antrix as operator, licensor, rule-maker and service provider.

Another revolution under way is the small satellite revolution. Globally, 17,000 small satellites are expected to be launched between now and 2030. ISRO is developing a small satellite launch vehicle (SSLV) expected to be ready in 2019. It is a prime candidate, along with the proven PSLV, to be farmed out to the private sector. This requires giving it responsibility for AIT activities.

Years ago, ISRO launched the idea of Village Resource Centres to work in collaboration with local panchayats and NGOs but only 460 pilots have begun. Expanding this for rural areas is a formidable challenge but has the potential to transform rural India if properly conceived as a part of the India Stack and the Jan Dhan Yojana.

With the Ministry of Defence now setting up a Defence Space Agency and a Defence Space Research Organisation, ISRO should actively embrace an exclusively civilian identity. A new Space law for India should aim at facilitating growing India's share of global space economy to 10% within a decade which requires a new kind of partnership between ISRO, the established private sector and the New Space entrepreneurs.

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India's investments in Iran's Chabahar port are nominally exempt from U.S. sanctions, but they have been damaged anyway since suppliers are reluctant to deliver equipment. The sanctions have also prevented ONGC Videsh, which discovered the Farzad B gas field off Iran's coast, from pursuing its investments there.

Further, New Delhi has refused to explore several available strategies that could ameliorate the impact of sanctions. China has maintained some commercial ties with Iran by routing transactions through the Bank of Kunlun. U.S. sanctions on this bank have been ineffective since it is carefully insulated from the U.S. financial system. European countries have attempted to bypass sanctions through a special mechanism called INSTEX.

It is revealing that India has failed to join any of these initiatives or to develop its own solution. A few months ago, Prime Minister Modi boasted that India's foreign policy had become "fearless, bold and decisive". Is this fearlessness restricted to India's interactions with its smaller neighbours, or is his government also willing to stand up to the biggest bully in the room and protect India's interests from Washington's destructive policies?

Suvrat Raju is a physicist associated with the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace. Views are personal

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Rahul bows out

Rahul Gandhi's resignation as Congress president is a rare instance of a leader accepting responsibility for his party's defeat in elections (Page 1, "Rahul Gandhi formally quits as party chief, makes letter public" July 4). The fact that his party won 19% of the national vote share attests to its political relevance. The need of the hour for the party is to choose a strong successor to Mr. Gandhi, someone who can help Congress regain the trust of the voters. Indira Gandhi lost the 1977 election following

the Emergency, but made a strong comeback in 1980 by winning back the people's confidence. Mr. Gandhi's successor can take a leaf out of Mrs. Gandhi's book.

JAYANT MUKHERJEE, Kolkata

■ The Congress should learn to sail through difficult times even without a captain from the Nehru-Gandhi family. It should go back to the leadership system it followed in the pre-Independence period, by electing presidents for a year and conducting sessions in different parts of the country. The party should

stand for the principles of truth and non-violence. The next president should also put all his efforts to bring back the breakaway parties like Trinamool Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party and the YSR Congress Party back into the Congress's fold. Finally, it should utilise the popularity of Mr. Gandhi to consolidate its presence across the country.

K. MUHAMMED ISMAVIL, Kodalvely, Kerala

Petition to EC

It is laudable that a group of former senior civil servants have listed out serious irregularities in the conduct

of the 2019 elections (News page, "Ex-officials cast doubt on poll result," July 4). The common man was a witness to blatant violations of the Model Code of Conduct by leaders and parties, transgressions ignored by the Election Commission. The poll body also did not make public the dissenting opinion of Ashok Lavasa. However, one wonders whether the petitioners can expect an honest reply from the EC.

THARUN S. FERNANDO, Chennai

Rayudu retires

Ambati Rayudu's decision to retire, after being snubbed

twice for the World Cup, does not come as a surprise. Mr. Rayudu, a reliable middle-order batsman, was all along tipped to fill the crucial No. 4 spot in the team and should have found a place in the original squad. But it was shocking that he was not considered even

after two players got injured. Of course, he is not the first victim of the cricketing body's whimsical selection process and, one fears, he will not be the last either.

N. VISWANATHAN, Coimbatore

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>>The report about Telugu poet and activist Varavara Rao being brought to Karnataka – "Karnataka police take Varavara Rao into custody in 2005 case" (South page, July 4, 2019) – talks about the 2005 naxal attack in Pavagada taluk of Kolar district. It should be Tumakuru district.

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Can the government help create jobs?

PARLEY

Expansion of public employment and a national skilling programme could boost employment

Data released by the Labour Ministry show that the unemployment rate in 2017-18 was 6.1%, arguably the highest in 45 years. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) findings have been the subject of intense scrutiny and debate ever since a leaked report in January revealed a surge in joblessness as well as a drop in the labour force participation rate. In a conversation moderated by Suresh Seshadri, Jayati Ghosh and Ajit Ranade discuss the issue. Edited excerpts:

Dr. Ranade, how much confidence do you place in the PLFS data and what do you draw as the key conclusions from it?

Ajit Ranade: This was started as a pilot project about two years ago and the purpose was to get a much more granular and in-depth understanding of the labour market. And there was a change in methodology, from sampling based on expenditure categories, which was done by the National Sample Survey (NSS), to education status. So, of course this is a very welcome initiative, because we need better data on the labour market. As far as how much confidence we have, since this is the best we've got, I think we have to use this data. I'm sure it will be fine-tuned and perhaps the numbers will become more reliable, but as such the numbers do tally with other indicators of the labour market conditions or the economy's condition.

Dr. Ghosh, you had in a blog post pointed to how the PLFS data coheres with other estimates including those of the CMIE. How do you then view opinions that posit that the unemployment rate is painting an inaccurate picture when viewed in the backdrop of rising school and college enrolment?

Jayati Ghosh: Many of the criticisms of the PLFS survey are actually not very well informed because they are suggesting that the results are not comparable with the earlier

large sample surveys of the NSS. The sampling method has not changed; it's never been a stratified sample, it's always been a random sample of households and it always tries to capture as many different forms and levels of education, occupation and so on and so forth. That's the point of the sample.

The PLFS is different because it was trying to get quarterly data: that is, how does the employment of the same family vary across every quarter, and that is very important and would have been very useful. However, what the earlier NSS used to do was to take just one quarter for each household and extrapolate to that for the whole year. If you take the same PLFS data and do that, you get completely comparable data. The PLFS will give us slightly better estimates of how the same family, the same household, responds over a period – over four quarters of the year: do they stay in employment, do they lose employment, does it go from casual to regular and so on and so forth. In that sense, it's a better survey. The trouble is that it was really meant to be continuous. We were not supposed to have any gaps in it at all. So, not only did we get only one year's data but we then didn't get that for a very long time because it was suppressed.

But, essentially, what it is showing us fits very well with all the other unfortunate indicators, which are that there is a real problem of divergence of output growth and employment in the country. Unemployment actually reflects those who are in the labour force. If you are in education, you are simply not in the labour force. Those who say, "Oh, it doesn't capture the fact that more and more people are in education" don't know what they're talking about. Because the unemployment rate is the ratio of those who are actually seeking work to all of those who are either employed or seeking work. If you are in education or training, you are not in the labour force. The high unemployment rate, however, does possibly reflect the impact of previous education, which is, and that shows in the data, the more educated you are, the more likely you are to be unemployed.



played. The highest unemployment rates are found among the tertiary educated, that is, those who have done beyond high school, and that reflects the fact that you're then not willing to take just any job; that you will actually try and wait and hope to get something that, at least, is vaguely related to your qualifications.

If one accepts the premise that improved access to education has led to a more aspirational youth segment, which in turn is loath to work in low remuneration jobs, how do we tackle the problem?

AR: This is a very big key challenge to having adequate, good-quality, well-paying jobs and this is a very large agenda. But since you asked me what would help, then one can think of multiple things, each of which is probably a small step but it does help. For example, setting up an enterprise. As you know, in India there are perhaps 60 million odd enterprises, and mostly in the unregistered sector. And out of the 60 million only about one, one-and-a-half million, 1.2 million actually contribute towards Provident Fund or ESI [Employees' State Insurance]. So, a very large proportion is in the unregistered or informal sector. So, as a first step, perhaps we can make it easy for these firms to get registered, or to comply. So, the big, big challenge is in the ease of doing business, setting up businesses, getting them registered. You have multiple registrations – you need to register for GST, for ESIC [ESI Corporation], for Provident Fund.

The PLFS data will be fine-tuned, but as such the numbers do tally with other indicators of the labour market conditions or the economy's condition.

There are probably dozens and dozens of registrations. This just makes it very hard for the whole process, to set up and start employing people. Then, you have this thing about on-the-job training, that workers need to be skilled but employers don't want to invest in skilling. We need a portable national programme where you acquire apprenticeships in one firm, you solve this problem of underinvestment in skilling by individual firms, so that is a very big agenda. But this is a huge challenge, how to get firms to hire in bigger numbers and how to get them a little more into the formal, registered sector.

Dr. Ghosh, is the situation of decades-high joblessness more a result of the economy's trajectory or an outcome of government policies?

JG: It's clearly both. This is a process that's been ongoing for about 15 years, this separation of economic activity and job creation. So, I think it's a deeper structural problem and part of the difficulty that I am having with the current government is that whenever you talk about joblessness, they seem to see this as a political attack, whereas this is really an issue of economic policy that has deeper roots.

Now, in terms of what you do about it, I think some of the issues

that Dr. Ranade mentioned are certainly valid, but I would argue that you also need a very large push in terms of the expansion of public employment. And there are two reasons for this. One, public employment has very obvious, standard multiplier effects, which are fairly pronounced in a country like India, and we know that we are hugely lacking in terms of the public services that we provide our people.

If you look at the average of public employees per population, which is a kind of indicator of what public services you're providing: globally the average is 3.5 per 100 people, in Europe it's more like 6 per 100, in Scandinavia it's as high as 8 per 100, in India it's less than 2 per 100. We are under-providing public services. It's not just in health and education. If you actually bring public services up to a minimum level that is required of, let us say, even a lower middle-income country, Kenya, you would require a tripling of public employment. That, in turn, has massive multiplier effects. All these people who you pay will get incomes that they will go out and spend, and when they spend they will create demand; there's a huge paucity of demand in the economy. With that demand, you will get the emergence of new activities, which will then generate the kind of entrepreneurs that Dr. Ranade was talking about and then if there are start-ups, if there are micro entrepreneurs, they will have a market to cater to. In other words, you really have to have a big employment push from the government.

Dr. Ghosh, this talk about the need for reforms to labour legislation, has it been a little wrong-headed? Instead of focusing on easing restrictions on hire and fire and contractual hiring norms, should we move towards ensuring more formalisation, say of high-volume job-creating sectors like construction, with more supportive laws? There are some laws, but I think it's at the State level and not all of them have been implemented well.

JG: You put your finger on it. None of them is enforced. We have actually pretty good legislation for construction workers; we have a num-

ber of laws and regulation for various other workers. Mostly they are not implemented. On the other hand, you do have inspector raj of a most terrible kind for small and micro-entrepreneurs. It's a peculiar combination of the worst of all possible worlds, whereby the legislation and things that would actually protect workers are simply not enforced, and all the kinds of things, the flexibilities that small producers do need are not allowed to them or rather they'd have to pay massive bribes to be able to take advantage of any kind of flexibility.

Whether it is your street vendor or it is a small person running a small factory or a small service provider, all of them have to face the rather oppressive hand of the state in different ways, which doesn't really help them in terms of improving their productivity. Now, does that mean that we should just allow the freedom to hire and fire? I frankly think that's a red herring. I mean, factories do what they want anyway, this is all nonsense that they cannot expand. I will take you to factories in the National Capital Region where more than half of their workforce are actually daily wagers and do not have a permanent contract. So, this notion that factories can't expand, or employers can't expand because of labour laws, I think it's completely off track.

AR: On labour laws, I think we have to move towards a system where the laws protect the worker but not the job. So, worker protection is paramount but not job protection.

JG: I would argue that at the moment they protect neither.

Lastly, if there's one single key intervention that the government can do to create jobs, what would be your prescription?

JG: Fill the vacancies [in the government sector], but expand good quality public employment.

AR: I would support filling up the vacancies, which are more than two million. But also, a national-level apprenticeship programme with portability, subsidised and well-defined accreditation, which you can take to any part of India.



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An upbeat tone amid tensions

The gushing rhetoric between India and the U.S. says something about the strength of the relationship

MICHAEL KUGELMAN

In recent weeks, amid an upsurge in U.S.-India tensions, the rhetoric on both sides has remained remarkably upbeat. While there has been ample criticism from senior U.S. and Indian officials, it has largely been directed at policies rather than at the partnership. Even U.S. President Donald Trump's India-directed taunts tend to target the issues that aggravate him rather than the relationship.

Gushing rhetoric

Witness, for example, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's effusive praise for the partnership in June. "We've come a long way," he said. "And now the Trump administration and the Modi administration have an incredibly unique opportunity to take advantage of this special partnership. We can move further." Mr. Pompeo and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar expressed similar sentiment about the relationship and expressed hope that they could overcome its obstacles when they held a joint press conference in New Delhi several days ago. And President Trump himself said of the relationship at the G20 meeting in Osaka: "We have become great friends and our countries have never been closer. I can say that with surety."

Given that the U.S.-India relationship is suffering through one of its most challenging periods in years, it's natural to dismiss such happy talk as a mere ploy to mask the serious strains in the partnership. In reality, the gushing rhetoric is more significant than it may seem – and it says something about the continued strength of the relationship.

For one thing, it is a reminder of just how much worse things could be. The last time the relationship faced a particularly bad stretch was in 2013, when India's deputy consul general in New York, Devyani Khobragade, was arrested in New York, subjected to a strip search, and briefly jailed. During that tense period – much tenser than today – there was no happy talk, only angry words. One

Indian official described Ms. Khobragade's treatment as "despicable and barbaric," while another fumed that "we're not a banana republic". In a dramatic response, New Delhi removed security barriers from the U.S. Embassy and revoked many perks for American diplomats in India.

Imperative to move forward

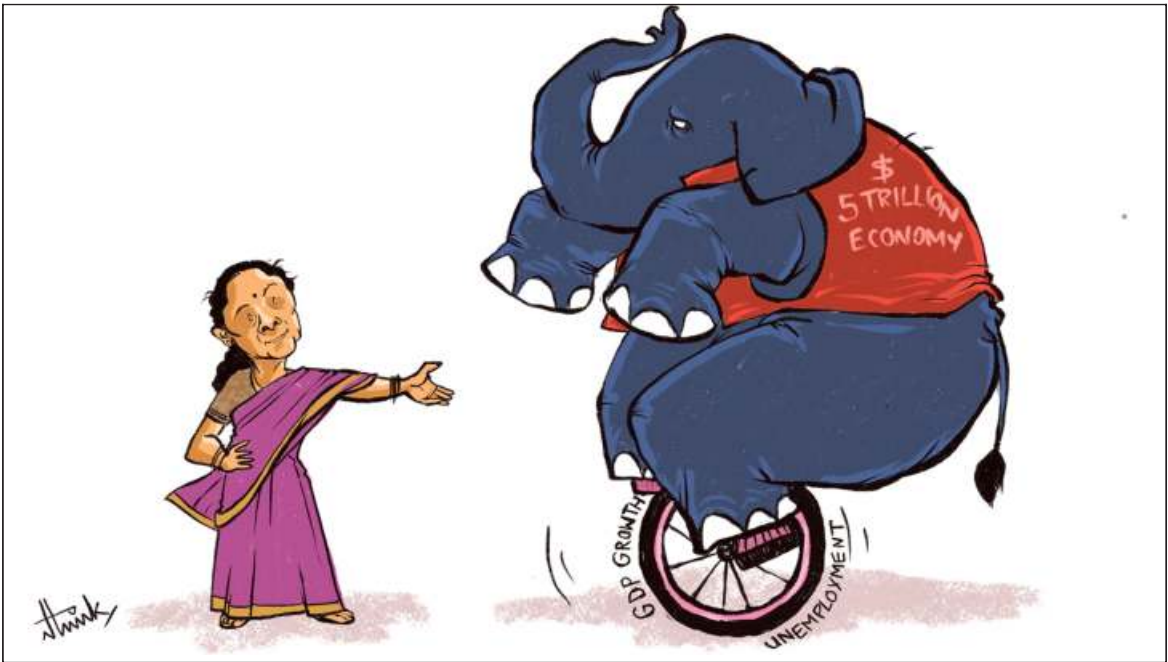
In contrast, today the criticism is softer and the reprisals less dramatic. In fact, until New Delhi's recent decision to slap retaliatory tariffs on the U.S., India had been very restrained amid the intensification of trade tensions. Additionally, the positive messaging from both sides signals the commitment of both countries to work through their disputes – a commitment rooted in the realisation that there is a strategic imperative to move forward. Washington and New Delhi appear to genuinely believe



that their shared vision for Asia – a free, open, rules-based system meant to push back against Chinese power – ensures a continued strong partnership. To be sure, such future comity is far from guaranteed. As pointed out in a recent essay by the Brookings Institution, converging U.S.-India views on China following the 1962 India-China war did not lead to deeper cooperation. Still, the positive rhetoric telegraphs the belief on both sides that the relationship, wars and all, remains on a positive trajectory, at least for now.

Also, the relationship could eventually turn sour and even plunge into a full-blown crisis. Imagine if the U.S. were to investigate India's trading practices, or if it penalises New Delhi for completing its S-400 deal with Russia. Such moves would ratchet up tensions to the point where any effusive rhetoric would sound disingenuous more than reassuring. But that's not where we are today.

The writer is Deputy Director and Senior Associate for South Asia with the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington, DC



NOTEBOOK

The many ways of watching a movie

One man's abuse is often entertainment for many

NAMRATA JOSHI

Sometimes it's not a movie but the experience of watching a movie that stays in the mind – and not entirely for the right reasons. For me, the popular *Once Upon A Time In Mumbai* franchise will always be about grandiloquent lines. There is one exchange in *Once Upon A Time In Mumbai Dobaara!* between Akshay Kumar and Sonakshi Sinha in which Kumar tells his lady-love: "Paanch minute mein izzat utaar sakta hoon (I can rape you in five minutes)." I don't know what hit me more: the obnoxiousness of the hero and his expression of so-called love or the catcalls and whistles of the audience in reaction to this statement. The insensitivity and inappropriateness of the response made me feel vulnerable, disgusted and angry in turn.

That was in 2013. Six years later, the story re-

peated itself with *Kabir Singh*. The majority of viewers rolled in laughter as a deplorable scene of abuse – a house help being ill-treated and threatened on screen – played out. There was evident approval when the heroine was slapped; I flinched. It's not to do with women alone. In *Badrinath Ki Dulhania* the assault on a man evoked big laughs. I couldn't understand what the joke was.

Are these scenes and responses a reflection of the inherent conservatism and toxicity of our society or are they indicative of cinema's role in the formation and acceptance of newer and more insidious themes being played by role models? The eternal debate rages on.

Meanwhile, for a film critic, watching a film 'first day, first show' all alone on a Friday morning often feels like being marooned on a choppy sea, holding

on to your own little raft of personal opinions in the face of tidal waves threatening to drown you. I choke on my coffee often, feeling the sheer solitariness of being at a tangent from the larger film audience universe. But more often than not, my digressive beliefs strengthen in the process and I feel the urgency to state them candidly and vigorously. It makes me dive deeper into the personal. The consensus around fires up the contrarian in me.

Simultaneously there is also the wonderment at the many possible ways of seeing. I often wonder whether I am watching the same film as the people around me. And it's not just to do with gender representation, it's also about humour and how it is perceived. A Mehmoond in *Padosan* may have brought the house down in north India, but was the character perceived as anything more

than a convenient caricature in the south? Was the Kantaben track in *Kal Ho Naa Ho* about homosexuality or was it a joke about homophobia? Be it the *balatkaar* (rape) gag in *3 Idiots* or the ageist one in *Sanju* about a 91-year-old woman, what may have been offensive and politically incorrect to a small section is also the kind of broad and adolescent humour that has more ready takers than you can even begin to imagine. One woman's abuse is often entertainment for many.

But on some rare occasions there is harmony. I don't think I would have been able to sit through the inanity of *Race 3* were it not for the manner in which the audience was laughing at its cheesiness. They sang the ditty written by 'Bhai', "Ik baar baby, selfish hoke, apne liye jeeyo na", in unison, deliberately out of tune. My heart couldn't help but sing along.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 5, 1969

Decade of Disappointment

(From an Editorial)

The disappointments of the first Development Decade that is ending this year are writ large in the report of the 18-member United Nations Committee on the goals and strategy of developmental planning for the Second Development Decade commencing next year. Apart from emphasising the responsibility of the advanced nations to set apart one per cent of their gross national product for economic assistance to the developing countries, the report suggests that "developed countries should attempt to supply at least 80 per cent of their financial assistance in the form of grants by 1975". It is indeed true that the volume of net aid has thinned considerably from year to year, what with debt charges (on repayment of principal and payment of interest) mounting and the quantum of total aid steadily going down. A larger element of grant in the assistance given will no doubt help. But more lasting help would be opportunities for increasing trade and this would call for the advanced nations lowering their trade barriers. The trade picture, however, remains unchanged despite the much-boosted Kennedy Round of tariff concessions.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 5, 1919.

Gold Theft at Mint.

Mr. Aston, Chief Presidency Magistrate, on Thursday [July 3, in Bombay] disposed of a case in which Harold Durham, head melter of His Majesty's Mint in Bombay, stood charged at the instance of the C.I.D. with disposing of gold on three occasions, valued at nearly Rs. 6,000 and on attempting on the 9th May to dispose of through an agent a gold bar valued at Rs. 3,594, when he knew it to be stolen. At the opening of the case the Crown Prosecutor, Mr. Campbell, stated that Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr. Harkar on receipt of information that gold was being smuggled from the Mint through one Kashiram, a subordinate of the Mint, and sold to one Rahimtullah in the city, laid a trap and arrested Kashiram while he was disposing of a gold bar weighing 112 tolas at Rahimtullah's shop. Kashiram implicated Durham. Mr. Campbell further stated that they were unable to show from the Mint records that there was any shortage in the gold and the only suggestion that they could make was that it was just possible that very small amounts might have been taken at a time which in the course of time, when accumulated must have made up the full amount.

Economic Survey presented in the Parliament today signals towards worrying signs for our economy. GDP growth rate is virtually stagnant and all indicators point that we are in a slowdown

ARVIND KEJRIWAL
Delhi Chief Minister

The Survey provides a comprehensive and clear picture of economic trends and challenges ahead. The measures to accelerate investments, especially from the private sector, to give a push to growth are the steps in the right direction

RAJIV KUMAR
NITI Aayog vice chairman

There is a lot of information on good governance in those texts and the Survey needs to be complimented for not just quoting Kautliya but also Kamandakiya Nitisara

BIBEK DEBROY
Chairman of Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister

From the highest level of economic policy uncertainty in 2011-12, India has made a leap into the era of high economic policy certainty. The graph of Indian growth story is on an upward trajectory

ARUN JAITLEY
BJP leader

Economic Survey is pessimistic about the economy and makes a feeble attempt to wake up the ruling party from its deep slumber of inaction on the economic front

RANDEEP SURJEWALA
Congress leader

We should focus on a virtuous cycle – increase in investments leads to higher productivity and this, in turn, leads to higher exports and more jobs

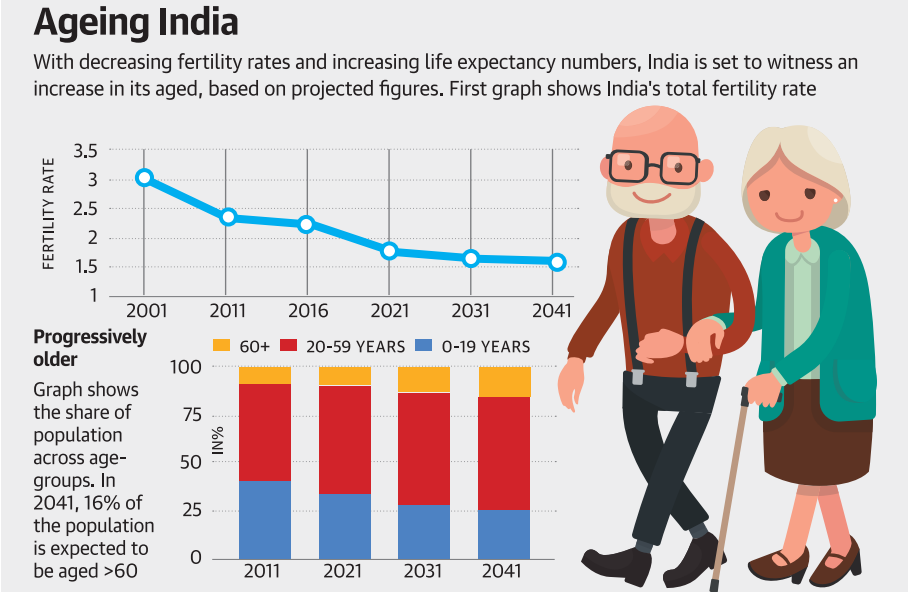
KRISHNAMURTHY SUBRAMANIAN
Chief Economic Adviser

‘Greying India must delay retirement’

Survey says the elderly population is expected to nearly double from 8.6% in 2011 to 16% by 2041

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India may have to raise the retirement age as the country sees a rapid increase in the size of the elderly population over the next two decades due to the slowing down of the population growth rate, according to the Economic Survey 2018-19. It is forecast that the population rate will grow less than 1% from 2021 to 2031 and under 0.5% from 2031 to 2041. This is primarily due to the fall in the total fertility rate (TFR), which is projected to decline between 2021-2041 and fall below replacement level fertility at 1.8 as early as 2021. The total fertility rate of 2.1 is called the replacement level fertility below which populations begin to decline. For India, the effective replacement level fertility is slightly higher than the normal benchmark due to the skewed gender ratio and is at 2.15-2.2. The current TFR in 14 out of the 22 major States



is already below the effective replacement level fertility. At the State level, southern States as well as West Bengal, Punjab, Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh have below replacement level fertility and will see TFR decline to 1.5-1.6 by 2021. And

by 2031, all States are likely to see below replacement level fertility. The size of the elderly population, 60 years and above, is expected to nearly double from 8.6% in 2011 to 16% by 2041, whereas the population size of those between 0-19 years, which is on the decline, is likely to drop from as high as 41% in 2011 to 25% by 2041. This will throw new policy challenges such as provision for health and old-age care, access to retirement-related financial services, public

pension funding, and retirement age, states the survey. “Increasing the retirement age for both men and women going forward could be considered in line with the experience of other countries. This will be key to the viability of pension systems and would also help increase female labour force participation in the older age-groups,” it suggests. Many countries such as the U.S., Germany and France have already raised the retirement age to reduce the burden on pension funding. The working-age population is expected to see a large increase leading to India’s demographic dividend peaking around 2041, when the share of those in the age group of 20-59 is expected to hit 59%. The survey highlights that this will mean additional jobs will have to be created to keep pace with annual increase in working-age population of 9.7 million during 2021-31 and 4.2 million during 2031-41.

Needed: a well-designed minimum wage system

Survey calls for streamlining the complex mechanism

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A well-designed and streamlined minimum wage system is required to reduce wage inequality in the country, the Economic Survey says. Currently, the minimum wage system, under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, in India is complex, with 1,915 different minimum wages defined for different job categories across States, the survey said. Despite the complex system, workers were still falling through the gaps, it said. “One in every three wage workers in India is not protected by the minimum wage law,” it said, citing the International Labour Organisation. For instance, the survey stated, domestic workers were covered under minimum wage laws in only 18 States and Union Territories. It also pointed out that while



the law did not discriminate between men and women, analysis of different wages showed a bias. “For instance, women dominate in the category of domestic workers while men dominate in the category of security guards. While both these occupations fall within the category of unskilled workers, the minimum wage rate for domestic workers within a State is consistently lower than that for the minimum wage rates for security guards,” the survey said.

Apart from increasing the ambit of the minimum wage system, it recommended deciding minimum wages on the basis of skills and split across geographical regions. With the government in the process of bringing the Code on Wages Bill in Parliament, the survey said the rationalisation of minimum wages proposed by the Bill should be supported. The survey suggested the government should notify a “national floor minimum wage” across five regions, after which the States can fix their own minimum wages, but not lower than the floor wage. This, it said, would bring uniformity and make States “almost equally attractive from the point of view of labour cost for investment as well as reduce distress migration.” The floor wage is currently non-statutory.



Sordid state: Garbage clogging a drain near the Seelampur area in New Delhi. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Private funds needed for Swachh Bharat

100% safe disposal of waste targeted

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With the Centre claiming that 99.2% of rural India is now open defecation-free, the next big goal on the Swachh Bharat journey is the 100% safe and scientific disposal of solid and liquid waste, according to the Economic Survey 2018-19. However, it emphasises that the large resources needed to reach this milestone will need to be met through crowd and corporate funding, private partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms by exploring the suitability of various financial instruments in specific contexts and interventions,” it says. Some examples are micro-financing, concessional loans, private partnerships, corporate social responsibility, and crowd funding aligned with local government financing. While these can ensure a smooth flow of funds for the procurement of various scientific technologies for waste disposal and mass awareness, governments must also “assign significant weight to the allocation of adequate resources as improvement in sanitation is one of the key determinants for the wider economic development,” says the survey. **Mindset change** Apart from financial resources, mindset change is the other major ingredient required for sustained progress in sanitation. The swachhagrahis or village level ambassadors who have already been recruited for Phase 1 of the programme are key to maintaining momentum, it says, in keeping with its thrust on leveraging behavioural economics.

must be dealt with in this next phase are sewer construction and water availability, scientific techniques for waste disposal, treatment of industrial effluence, drain bio-remediation, river surface cleaning, sustained rural sanitation and monitoring of villages, says the survey. “As the resource requirements are large, there is a need to facilitate and sustain innovative financing mechanisms by exploring the suitability of various financial instruments in specific contexts and interventions,” it says. Some examples are micro-financing, concessional loans, private partnerships, corporate social responsibility, and crowd funding aligned with local government financing. While these can ensure a smooth flow of funds for the procurement of various scientific technologies for waste disposal and mass awareness, governments must also “assign significant weight to the allocation of adequate resources as improvement in sanitation is one of the key determinants for the wider economic development,” says the survey. **Mindset change** Apart from financial resources, mindset change is the other major ingredient required for sustained progress in sanitation. The swachhagrahis or village level ambassadors who have already been recruited for Phase 1 of the programme are key to maintaining momentum, it says, in keeping with its thrust on leveraging behavioural economics.

Only tall claims, no vision, says Opposition

Glosses over plight of millions, whitewashes terrible economic record of past five years: Yechury

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties slammed the Economic Survey saying that it made tall claims, was clueless on the government’s vision for the country and did not reflect ground reality. CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said it ignored the challenges faced by millions of Indians. The leader also said the survey “whitewashes” the “terrible” economic record of the last five years and hit out at the government over the resignation of top RBI officials. “The Economic Survey is full of bombastic claims and grandiose declarations with-

out any basis in facts,” he said. Mr. Yechury added that any growth strategy on private investment will be a non-starter. “Economic growth needs more purchasing power amongst people, not more investment with higher unemployment,” he added. **‘Glossing over’** The survey, he said, glossed over the major challenges faced by millions of Indians in the past five years. “The departure of so many RBI governors and previous CEA tells us of the harsh reality,” Mr. Yechury said. His colleague from the



The Economic Survey is full of bombastic claims and grandiose declarations without any basis in facts. Any growth strategy based on private investment will be a non-starter; economic growth needs more purchasing power amongst people, not more investment with higher unemployment

SITARAM YECHURY
CPI(M) general secretary

Communist Party of India, D. Raja, said that blaming the party will not help the country. “...The government is trying to shirk its own responsibility. The survey does not portray the real picture of the economy. Instead it is

making tall claims in flowery language. It should have given a road map for the way forward,” Mr. Raja said. Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party leader in the Rajya Sabha Derek O’ Brien in a cryptic tweet indicated that the survey was

fuzzy about the government’s vision. “Spent three hours this afternoon, speed reading the two volumes of the #EconomicSurvey2019 It’s a cloudy, overcast afternoon in Delhi. Enough said,” Mr. O’Brien tweeted. **Stagnant growth** The Economic Survey showed that India’s growth rate was stagnant, Aam Aadmi Party convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said. “...It signals worrying signs for our economy. GDP growth rate is virtually stagnant and all indicators point that we are in a slowdown,” he tweeted.



Outlook is pessimistic: Chidambaram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said the Economic Survey tabled in Parliament on Thursday was ‘pessimistic’ and didn’t have any sector-wise growth projections. Mr. Chidambaram, in a statement, said the volume 02 of the Economic Survey did flag issues such as slowing growth, falling revenues and rising oil prices that were ‘neither positive nor encouraging.’ “It appears to me that the government, speaking through the Economic Survey, is pessimistic about the economy,” he said. The first economic survey of the new government under Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, claimed Mr. Chidambaram, opens with self-congratulatory references about the economy performing well in the past five years and had a ‘bland’ outlook for the year ahead. “I looked for the Outlook for 2019-20. It is in Volume-2, Chapter 01, but there is only a bland statement that growth of the economy is expected to be 7% in 2019-20. There are no growth projections sector-wise,” he said. Mr. Chidambaram said chapter 02 of Volume 2 of the survey came closest in terms of describing the ‘Outlook for 2019-20’. “The economic survey flags (1) slowing growth, (2) shortfall in revenue, (3) finding resources without compromising the fiscal deficit target, (4) impact of oil prices on the current account and (5) recommendations of the Fifteenth Finance Commission on central government finances. I am afraid, none of these is positive or encouraging,” he said. India’s economic growth, according to the survey, is expected to register 7% this year from a five year low.

Zero train collisions, 46 derailments

But incidents related to fire go up to 6



The total number of train accidents came down from 104 in 2016-17 to 59 in 2018-19, the Survey said. ■ SUDHAKARA JAIN

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

While the incidents of train collisions came down to zero and those of derailments declined to 46 during last year, occurrence of fire in trains went up to six, according to data provided in the Economic Survey 2018-19. The category-wise break-up of consequential train accidents shows that the incident of collisions has come down to zero in 2018-19 from three in 2017-18, while those of derailment declined to 46 from 54 in the previous year. However, incidents related to fire in trains increased to six in the year 2018-19 as against three in 2017-18, the survey said. The total number of train

accidents came down from 104 in 2016-17 and 73 in 2017-18 to 59 in 2018-19. Additionally, the survey said that in 2018-19, Indian Railways carried 1221.39 million tonnes of revenue earning freight, an increase of 61.84 million tonnes or 5.33% over 2017-18. The revenue earning freight loading by Indian Railways during 2017-18 was placed at 1159.55 million tonnes as against 1106.15 million tonnes during 2016-17, up 4.83%. “There is an increase of 2.09% in the number of passengers carried by railways during 2017-18 as compared to 2016-17 and 0.64% increase in 2018-19 as compared to 2017-18,” the survey said.

Call to ease legal logjam for better contract enforcement

‘Economic activity affected by delays across legal landscape’

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

Contract enforcement remains the single biggest constraint to improve India’s Ease of Doing Business (EODB) ranking, which currently stands at 163 in the world ranking, the Economic Survey 2018-19 said. It remarked that in spite of a number of actions to expedite and improve the contract enforcement regime, economic activity was affected by the long shadow of delays and pendency across the legal landscape. Noting that the relationship between economic governance and the rule of law (Dandaniti) is the key to prosperity, and a bulwark against *Matsyanyaya* (law of the fish/jungle), the survey said two key issues need to be dealt with in order to make the judiciary more efficient and to clear the ‘legal logjam.’ Firstly, the courts must achieve a 100% case clearance rate (CCR) so that there is zero accumulation to the existing pendency. Secondly, the backlog of cases already present in the system must be removed. CCR is the ratio of the number of cases disposed of in a given year to the number of cases instituted in that year. District and Subordinate

Justice delayed			
Indian courts had a backlog of more than three crore cases in 2018. Table shows the additional number of judges required to clear this backlog			
Parameter	D&S*	HC**	SC^
Case backlog (2018)	3,03,95,534	42,39,966	56,320
Additional judges required to clear this backlog in 5 years	10,431	454	9
Judges working as a % of sanctioned strength	78.64%	62.19%	90.32%
Disposal rate per judge	746 cases	2,348	1,415



(D&S) courts, which account for the bulk of pendency, received 1.5 crore additional cases in 2018 and had a backlog of 2.87 crore (as on January 1, 2018). But it managed to dispose of 1.33 crore cases in the year, thus, closing 2018 at 3.04 crore. There are currently 17,891 judges compared to the sanctioned strength of 22,750. On average, a judge disposes of 746 cases. “In order to reach 100% CCR in 2018, the D&S courts needed 2,279 additional judges. This is within the

sanctioned strength! However, in order to clear all the backlog in the next five years, a further 8,152 judges are needed,” the survey said. It suggested improving the efficiency of the courts, increasing number of working days of courts, establishment of Indian Courts and Tribunal Services, and deployment of technology in legal system. “Given the potential economic and social multipliers of a well-functioning legal system, this may well be the best investment India can make,” it said.