

# Tenure erosion can be a subversive tool

If the law protects the tenure, the office-bearer is ring-fenced from acting under fear of being sacked



## WITHOUT CONTEMPT

SOMASEKHAR SUNDARESAN

Tenure protection for public servants is under attack. Amendments to the Right to Information Act, 2005, passed in this session of Parliament have blown off two fundamental statutory protections enjoyed by information commissioners all over the country — first, a statutory protection of tenure for information

commissioners, and second, protection of their remuneration.

Both, tenure and remuneration for information commissioners at the central level and the state level, will henceforth be "as may be prescribed" by the Central government. Before the amendment, there was a tenure of at least five years unless the incumbent reached the age of 65. Likewise, remuneration of the commissioners was on par with those available to the members of the Election Commission (and in the states with the chief secretary of the state) — which also underlined the importance of this office. Now that the Central government will decide both the tenure and the terms of remuneration of information commissioners at the Centre and at the states, the Central government will get to wield full political leverage over information commissioners all over the country. How the incumbents deal with enforcing the citizen's right to information will

be determined by how the reins are wielded by the government in power.

Tenure protection lies at the heart of protecting public office. If the law protects the tenure, the office-bearer is ring-fenced from acting under fear of being sacked. Our Constitution protects the tenure of the higher judiciary (the only way to remove a judge is through impeachment) only to ensure independence of the judge. It is because tenure of the judge is protected, that the manner of selection becomes the core issue with judicial appointments.

When the Supreme Court found that the trial of those accused of demolishing the Babri Masjid had dragged on for a quarter of a century, in 2017, it set a deadline of two years for completion of the trial with the judge being protected against any transfer. Last month, when it found that the judge would retire in two months, the court directed that the

judge's tenure be extended to let him focus on and complete the trial in nine months. At the heart of the issue was protecting the tenure for the junior judge to ensure that a very important trial was indeed completed.

Prakash Singh, a retired police officer, pursued public interest litigation, which led to the Supreme Court stipulating a two-year tenure protection for every police officer, right from the Director General of Police of a State to the Station House Officer heading a police station. Repeated attempts by state governments to have this disturbed, have so far been broadly repelled by the Supreme Court. Diabolically, some states were found rewarding loyal police officers with appointment to the post of Director General on the eve of their retirement so that they could enjoy another two years of legally-protected service tenure. Governments and their incumbents (both political and bureaucratic) have the deepest vested interests in resisting tenure reform.

Officers of regulatory agencies too are meant to have tenure protection. The law governing the office of the governor of the Reserve Bank of India, historically the most fiercely independent regulator, does not have age stipulations. That is why the term for which the governor is appointed by the government is a strong tool for exercise of governmental influence, if not control, over this sensitive office. An obnoxious practice of regulatory appointments for a specific term, extendable by another term at the discretion of the government, has also developed. This practice enables keeping the incumbent on leash — a "safe pair of hands", particularly towards the end of tenure.

Central bankers are wont to say having a little inflation is like being a little pregnant. This adage is equally true with legislation. Once a subversive measure is introduced in an area of law, it will inexorably find its way into other areas. The erosion of tenure protection for information commissioners could well be a cancerous cell that may turn into a malignant subversion for any other statutory or regulatory institution.

The author is an advocate and independent counsel. Tweets @SomasekharS

# Powering the EV mandate

Public and private sector enterprises have started investing in the eco-system for electric vehicles but viability remains an issue

T N NARASIMHAN

Last week, the GST council cut rate cuts on electric vehicles (EVs) from 12 per cent to 5 per cent and on electric chargers from 18 to 5 per cent, a clear signal that it proposes to forge ahead with its target of reducing urban pollution and crude oil import bill. Both rate cuts will considerably narrow the price differential between EVs and petrol and diesel vehicles. EV prices are expected to drop 7 per cent.

But narrowing the price differential is just one of the challenges to achieving the government's grand mandate. The lack of a robust ecosystem, principally recharging stations, and domestic battery manufacturing capabilities, could well short-circuit the government's stiff electric mobility targets. Most two-wheeler makers — Bajaj Auto, TVS, Hero and others — have been vocal on this point. Steffen Knapp, director, Volkswagen Passenger Cars, recently said his company doesn't think it possible to be part of India's electrification plan in the absence of supporting infrastructure.

Things could be changing now, with several public sector enterprises, private sector engineering and automobile companies as well as new-age start-ups venturing into the EV infrastructure

business (see table). "Having such full-scale infrastructure would definitely push the buying decision in favour of EVs," said Maxson Lewis, managing director, Magenta Power, an EV mobility solutions provider.

What kind of infrastructure is needed to achieve the government's mandate that all three-wheelers and two-wheelers go electric by 2023 and 2025 respectively, and others except commercial vehicles, by the year 2030. One estimate by Nomura Research puts the investment requirement of charging stations at ₹13,000-14,000 crore. Private sector start-ups alone are expected to add 50,000 to 60,000 charging stations over the next three years. Their contention is that given the initial low viability of the business, some sort of viability gap funding would be in order. In the second edition of its electric mobility policy (known as FAME 2), the government says it will allocate Rs 10,000 crore to set up charging stations to both public

and private sector players. "As a standalone business, EV charging stations is still a sunrise venture. It could be the future version of what gas stations are today, a money spinner, but only if investors are willing to wait," says a Tata Power executive.

Others suggest pushing for low-grade charging at home, offices and

other locations where vehicles stop — globally, these touch points account for 80 per cent of EV charging points. So far the only progress here has been a suggestion from the power ministry to state power utilities to facilitate such private charging points.

The availability of lithium-ion batteries will also be a critical determinant of EV adoption by consumers. Batteries account for over half an EV's cost and, currently, are almost entirely imported from China. India would require six plants of 10GWh each by 2025 and 12 by 2030 to cater to this emerging market.

Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said the objective was to "first work on about 80 per cent of components of two and three-wheelers and buses and also push manufacturing of batteries in India". To this end, the government is likely to issue tenders to set up 50 GWh of battery manufacturing in India, which would attract around \$50 billion in investment. "At present India depends on China for EV parts. However, by 2022, local production of cells will go up and even fuel cell might come to India," says a Tata Motors Ltd spokesperson.

One of the Tata group companies, Tata Chemicals, has already announced that it will set up a 10 GWh plant at Dholera, Gujarat. Several companies — established ones and new-age start-ups — are venturing into this business (see table).

Setting up local plants is only part



## ELECTRIC RESPONSE

### Companies setting up EV charging stations

**PUBLIC SECTOR:**  
BSES Rajdhani Power, IOC, Hindustan Petroleum, BHEL, Energy Efficiency Services (EESL), Union housing ministry

**PRIVATE SECTOR:**  
Tata Power, Ather Energy, Vakkrangee, Magenta Power, ABB, Acme Industries, Fortum India,

### Companies getting into battery manufacturing

**ESTABLISHED PLAYERS:**  
Suzuki Motor Corporation, BHEL, Adani, Group, Amara Raja, Exide Industries, Greaves Cotton, Tata Chemicals

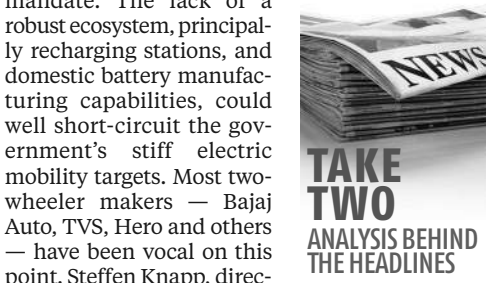
**NEW AGE COMPANIES:**  
Exicom, Greenfuel Energy Solutions, Trontek, Coslight India, Napino Auto & Electronics, Trinity Energy Systems and Versatile Auto Components.

of the challenge. As Amara Raja Batteries CEO S Vijayanand points out, only a high level of localisation will make the business viable. Currently, the raw material for batteries are not available in India. Battery chemicals account for 30-40 per cent of the costs of a battery pack, and the cell accounts for 25-30 per cent. Even a cell-to-battery assembly plant would improve value addition by 30-40 per cent. But India has such annual assembly capacity worth just 1 Gwh.

Companies like Amara Raja have, however, started back-end integration to accelerate the pace of localisation. The company established a battery

pack assembly capability and looking at backward integration into cell manufacturing. Right now, its localisation level is 25-30 per cent at the battery pack level.

Exercises such as these are, however, time consuming and unlikely to match demand. Yet they are vital to the success of the government's EV plans. As Vijayanand puts it, "India missed the magic of manufacturing consumer electronics and we also missed the magic of manufacturing in the renewable sector, such as the solar panels, but I think if you were to look at EVs, then as a country we cannot afford to miss the magic of manufacturing."



TAKE TWO  
ANALYSIS BEHIND THE HEADLINES

## INSIGHT

# Tigers and growth



DHIRAJ NAYYAR

It is lazy and wrong to view the goals of economic growth and conservation of the environment as inherently contradictory. It may even be convenient for some interests. The reality is different. Just look at how India has succeeded in doubling the population of its tigers in the last decade, a period in which the economy has also registered high growth rates. In fact, the population of tigers declined drastically over the long decades when economic growth was not so high. Now, every stakeholder, whether the government, judiciary, industry, NGOs and citizens must accept, in principle, that India can grow rapidly while preserving the environment — forests and fauna, air and water.

Often, it is unhelpful to put environment before economic growth. Poverty, or the lack of prosperity, leads to much greater environmental degradation. If the majority is living a subsistence livelihood, if industries are primitive (in a technological sense) and if government is starved of resources — all the characteristics of under development — the consequences for the environment are severe and the possibilities of mitigation or upgradation near zero.

Prosperity is good for the environment. For a start, it endows the government with greater financial resources to address the challenge of environmental degradation. It also

enables the population to be more educated and aware — without citizen participation, government efforts to preserve the environment will amount to nothing. It makes industry more advanced, profitable and able to use the best in class technologies to minimise adverse impact in terms of air and water pollution and dislocation of flora and fauna.

The most significant gain from rapid economic progress is on the technology front. That helps directly in conservation of the environment. Among other things, tigers have been protected and nurtured through the latest tracking technology. Those who attempt to illegally kill them, that is, poachers, or those who destroy their natural habitats, for instance, illegal logging/deforestation, can be caught and deterred through the deployment of appropriate technology. In industries like mining, for example, which have traditionally been viewed as damaging to nature, technology has advanced to enable successful transplantation of flora and fauna to alternative locations. It is not unusual for mining companies to have bio-diversity officers in-house or to partner with international organisations working in the field of the environment to achieve this. Importantly, once the mining work has been completed and the area vacated by man and machine, the entire ecosystem can return to its original state. There is evidence of this in India (in Goa) and abroad (in South Africa) where industry is mandated to spend the resources to make sure that the regeneration happens at a very fast pace.

But what of damage already done? The good news is that nature regenerates itself. Damage can be reversed. Often, the absence of human beings helps as the curious case of the Chernobyl disaster zone in Ukraine has proved. Three decades after a catastrophic nuclear accident rendered a large zone unfit for human habitation — radiation is still danger-



India has succeeded in doubling the population of its tigers in the last decade, a period in which the economy has also registered high growth Photo: PTI

ously high — both flora and fauna have reappeared to reclaim the area. With planning and management, the regeneration can be achieved without large-scale human displacement necessitated by disaster.

It is already happening. The positive news on the tiger population is not the only reason to be optimistic in India. According to the Union Minister for Environment and Forests, India's forest cover has grown by 16,000 square kilometers in the last five years. India's experience in successfully expanding its forest cover is not unique. Europe has achieved impressive rates of reforestation adding an estimated 90,000 square kilometres (approximately the size of Portugal) in the 25 years since 1990. Perhaps, it is easier for advanced economies for the obvious reason that they are rich and have greater resources and fewer polluting industries — those have been outsourced to the emerging economies. But the point is that deliberate intervention can aid regeneration.

Needless to say, it is important to

not get carried away and give economic growth unfettered priority over nature because the quality of that growth will be poor and it will be unsustainable. Worse, it will adversely affect the livelihoods and health of all citizens which would negate the hard-won prosperity.

The admittedly tough challenge for the government and courts is to strike the right balance. Stalling economic activity, by invoking the environment is likely to be counter-productive unless, of course, there are very pressing reasons to do so. At the very least, the possibilities of mitigation with the use of technology and ample financial commitment must be heard before a final decision is made. Industry must become responsible. And civil society must not be irresponsible.

India, which is already charting a unique economic trajectory, has an opportunity to show the world that it is possible to become richer and greener at the same time. A 21st century tiger economy.

The author is Chief Economist, Vedanta

## LETTERS

### Exercise caution

Even without verifying the facts, some leading Bengaluru business tycoons have jumped in to crucify the Income Tax authorities for Cafe Coffee Day (CCD) chain founder VG Siddhartha's unfortunate decision to end his life. In a letter purportedly signed by him, while taking the entire blame on himself for the "mistakes", he has accused the former DG, Income Tax, for harassing him by attaching his shares that caused serious liquidity crunch. On the other hand, the IT authorities have clarified that the searches were based on solid evidence of tax evasion and that the attachments were ordered to safeguard interest of revenue, which in any case was later revoked on Siddhartha's request. According to them, even though Siddhartha had admitted to huge unaccounted for income, he did not include the entire admitted concealed income in his IT return. The action of IT authorities ordering provisional attachments of Siddhartha's assets are in accordance with the law, which may possibly cause financial hardship, but cannot be called "harassment". At the same time, tax authorities must also exercise such powers judiciously so as not to bring a business entity's legitimate business to a grinding halt leading to a chain of adverse economic consequences.

S K Choudhury Bengaluru

### The real tragedy

Apropos "CCD founder missing, massive search on (July 31)", before one could finish reading the news about missing V G Siddhartha, owner of coffee shop chain Cafe Coffee Day, the news that his body

had been found on the shores of Netravati river has come as a big shock. The investigation agencies should look his death from all angles including the recent Karnataka horse trading exercise wherein some half a dozen rebels were kept in a hotel, all expenses paid by some unknown entity far away from the scene. After all, the deceased happens to be the son-in-law of a former chief minister of Karnataka who switched over to the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2017.

N Nagarajan Secunderabad

### Do something useful

While I welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in Discovery's wildlife show, I however, feel that the last person he should have associated with is Bear Grylls. Anyone who has watched even a few of this adventurer's *Man vs Wild* episodes knows the kind of wanton destruction of wildlife he perpetrates, in order to obtain food for his survival in the course of the futile "explorations" he undertakes on a variety of inhospitable terrains. One just doesn't understand what Gryll proposes to achieve or teach through them. He must realise that discretion is the better part of valour and imagine the number of innocent animals that can be spared if he can carry non-perishable food items with him in his backpack.

CV Krishna Manoj Telangana

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## HAMBONE



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## Piling foreign debt

New ECB norms can make India more vulnerable to external shocks

The revised norms for end-use of money raised through external commercial borrowings (ECBs), announced by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday, have brought in significant changes. Under the new norms, ECBs with a minimum average maturity period of 10 years can be used for working capital and general corporate purposes as also by non-banking finance companies for on-lending. The RBI, in consultation with the central government, has also permitted firms to raise ECBs for repaying rupee loans taken from domestic sources for capital expenditure in the infrastructure and manufacturing sectors, classified as SMA-2 or non-performing asset (NPA), in order to make a one-time settlement (OTS) with lenders. Besides, banks have been allowed to sell such loans to eligible foreign lenders. At the company level, the revised norms can potentially help raise funds more freely from external sources. Since the Indian banking system is still struggling with NPAs and may not be in a position to fund the requirement of the Indian corporate sector, the new norms will enable companies to diversify their borrowings.

The possibility of Indian companies borrowing overseas to repay domestic lenders will also enable banks to lend to smaller businesses which are not in a position to borrow from external sources. In view of the fact that the cost of money in the global financial markets is expected to come down further, some companies may be able to reduce their interest burden by borrowing abroad or by swapping their rupee loans with foreign-currency debt. But they will need to carefully manage the currency risk. Also, instead of heading for the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) solution, banks and companies can now get into an OTS scheme, the funds for which have to be raised abroad.

The latest move appears to be part of an overall strategy that Indian companies should tap global resources to lower cost. However, potential benefits at the company level should not make policymakers lose sight of the broader macro picture because increasing reliance on foreign capital can be dangerous. It is correct that there are problems in the Indian financial sector and the corporate balance sheet is also stressed. But depending on foreign debt to address some of these issues can exacerbate difficulties for India and should be avoided. For instance, higher foreign borrowings would put upward pressure on the rupee, which anyway is excessively overvalued, and affect exports. The other problem is the reluctance of Indian companies to hedge their risks. Unhedged exposure can become a threat not only to individual companies, but to the system and its stability. Experience in many countries have shown that corporate crisis can turn into a macro-economic risk in no time.

Further, this will increase India's foreign debt exposure and, in the absence of consistent inflows, servicing can become a problem. This can result in significant volatility in the currency market and, among other things, increase the repayment burden for Indian companies. India's foreign debt which needs to be repaid by the end of this fiscal year is over 43 per cent of the total external debt and 57 per cent of foreign currency reserves. This is not to suggest that India should not tap foreign funds to supplement domestic savings. India should target higher direct equity investments, which are more stable and will help augment growth. Increasing dependence on debt, as the relaxation in ECB norms shows, will make the Indian economy more vulnerable to external shocks and increase risks to financial stability.

## Insurance flaws

PMFBY fails to live up to the hype

The government's much-hyped crop insurance scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), has remained an underperformer since its inception in 2016. Some critical structural flaws and inept implementation have proved its nemesis, though the scheme is better than all the risk-mitigation systems tried out since the early 1970s. Complaints have been mounting about the delayed clearance of claims and, more importantly, meagre reimbursements of losses. Farmers' organisations and even some political parties, notably the Shiv Sena, have threatened to launch agitations against the insurance companies to press for adequate compensation to the farmers for the crop damage because of aberrant weather, pests, diseases, and other calamities. The Estimates Committee of Parliament, headed by Murlidhar Manohar Joshi, acknowledged in its 30th report (December 2018) that the PMFBY suffered from several problems that have shaken the farmers' faith in it. Inordinate delay in loss assessment, belated or non-payment of claims, and lack of transparency are among the faults pinpointed by this panel.

The waning interest of the farmers in the PMFBY is borne out by the downtick in the insured area from 57.2 million hectares in 2016-17 to 47.5 million hectares, or just 24 per cent of the gross cropped area, in 2017-18. The area coverage is estimated to have shrunk further in 2018-19, though the final figures are not yet out. The claims for the last year's kharif and rabi seasons have not yet been fully paid. The government intends to expand the PMFBY coverage to 50 per cent of the cropland. This may not be possible unless the scheme is suitably revamped to make it attractive for farmers. Since 85 per cent farmers are small and marginal landholders have hardly any loss-bearing capacity, the need for a sound risk-hedging system is paramount.

Viewed from this angle, the PMFBY can be rated high because it covers almost all major crops, requires farmers to pay only a nominal premium, and takes care of a wide range of perils, from prevented sowing to post-harvest damage to the produce from localised calamities. However, making the states a 50 per cent partner in expenditure sharing and involving banks in its operation for the loanee farmers have been among the key mistakes. The blame for delay in claims clearance is often put on the states for their failure to pay their share of funds to the insurance companies and belated communication of crop-cutting experiment data to enable the assessment of losses and computation of compensation. The involvement of banks, on the other hand, blocks direct contact between farmers and the insurers. The farmers often do not get to see the policy documents or receipts of the premium paid on their behalf.

The government is now making crop insurance voluntary, rather than mandatory, for the indebted farmers; removing high-premium crops from its ambit; and allowing flexibility to states to devise their own models for offsetting farmers' losses. If that happens, it would rid the scheme of many of its ills. But greater use of technology, including drones and satellite imagery, is vital to expedite damage assessment and ensure prompt and realistic claims settlement.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



## Automotive slump & industrial policy

The sector is needed as a growth engine and a risk of collapse needs to be averted

Mention "industrial policy" and there are strong reactions: An angry buzz from free-market enthusiasts, or approval from the diminishing ranks of believers in government intervention. But as economist Dani Rodrik observed over a decade ago, reality has not been kind to either set — neither the belief that the way forward (for developing economies) is through strong government interventions, nor the belief that it is best for the government to stay entirely away from the economy. Although there were successes sometimes with import substitution, planning, and state ownership (a case in point is Indian Space Research Organisation), these practices were often overdone or became inflexible, leading to failures and crises. Likewise, liberalisation benefitted some sections of the economy such as exporters, financial intermediaries, and some skilled workers, but often fell short of economy-wide growth.<sup>1</sup>

Another topic on which opinions differ strongly is whether development should focus on comparative advantage based on factor endowments, or if structural changes should be attempted through the support and extension of infant-industry protection, as for example in manufacturing electronics and telecom (ICT) equipment in India. In 2009, the Overseas Development Institute in London organised a debate between Justin Yifu Lin, then chief economist at the World Bank and formerly the director of the China Centre for Economic Research at Beijing University, in favour of comparative advantage, and Cambridge University's Ha-Joon Chang speaking for infant-industry protection. Interestingly, both favoured strong government intervention, although in different ways.<sup>2</sup> Mr Lin was for facilitating comparative advantage, while Mr Chang was for treating comparative advantage as a base line to be defied for a country to upgrade its industry.

Industrial policy has many interpretations. There is the "horizontal" notion of basic infrastructure, that is like a rising tide for all aspects of the economy (although the sheer location, proximity and form of infrastructure itself create biases for the favourably affected and against

those that are not). The opposite is state planning and control for verticals (picking winners). In between is a mix of degrees of enabling government regulations and support (tax incentives and disincentives, labour regulations, financial consideration, land allotment/zoning or acquisition) and of coordination with the private sector. These can be limited to industry and manufacturing, or more broadly, extend to all economic activity, including agriculture, dairy farming, and services.

Historically, a degree of industrial policy has been practiced everywhere. In the US for example, in the Reagan years (1980s), the Defense Advanced Research

Projects Agency (DARPA) created consortiums of government and private sector participants for coordinated action. One was the Semiconductor Manufacturing Technology (SEMATECH) consortium with companies such as Intel and Texas Instruments, to revitalise the US semiconductor industry by reducing manufacturing costs and product defects. Another was The National Center for Manufacturing Sciences (NCMS) for the development of an advanced machine tools and automation industry. Another, Project

Socrates<sup>3</sup>, was a classified programme to ascertain the causes for America's declining competitiveness, and to develop solutions to re-establish US dominance. Their conclusion was that the US was losing its technology-based ability to compete, because decision-making after World War II transitioned from technology-centric planning to finance-centric planning. Success for the latter is measured by financial returns, whereas for technology-based planning, the objective is to use technology to gain competitive advantage and satisfy customer needs (which presumably leads in the long run to better returns). The Bush administration terminated Project Socrates in 1990, as it was considered an interventionist industrial policy (picking winners) when free-market ideology was ascendant.

### Industrial planning and India's automotive sector

In 2006, the Ministry of Heavy Industries embarked on an initiative conceived in 2002 in consultation with



SHYAM PONAPPA

inequality, declining mobility, and greater concentration of economic power — have called into question the benefits of globalisation. In addition, the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath have undermined faith in American-style capitalism. China's rise, and the perceived consequences for America, has also stoked US skepticism about globalisation. A broad swath of US elite and public opinion believes that China has abused America's largesse, via currency manipulation, intellectual-property theft and espionage, and forced technology transfer. Furthermore, China's recent tilt toward statism and political repression adds to a broader US sense of betrayal, and of an investment in shared prosperity that has gone badly wrong. This discordant G2 world and the end of ideological convergence now threaten economic convergence, and thus developing countries' prospects. The "golden age" of convergence had, in any case, already started to face headwinds. First, climate change poses risks

to developing countries' agriculture. Problems in this sector will reverberate throughout these economies, because high and rising agricultural productivity has been the key to successful structural transformations from farming to manufacturing. In addition, the spread of technology-enabled automation is replacing unskilled labor with machines, directly threatening the ability of poorer countries to lift incomes through labor-intensive manufacturing. But the biggest threat comes from an ideological decoupling between the West and the Rest. The G2 of China and the US, instead of supplying the key global public good of open markets that the economic historian Charles Kindleberger saw as the responsibility of hegemony, is now providing global public "bads."

As the US and China impose tariffs and trade restrictions on each other's goods, and as the US undermines multilateral trade rules and institutions, world trade is slowing markedly, threatening developing countries' export sectors and the viability of their overall development strategies. At the same time, the US and other Western governments are clamping down on migration. As a result, developing countries are boxed in, and will

find it increasingly difficult to export their products or their excess labour. American repudiation of the Paris climate agreement does not bode well for the poorer countries who will bear the brunt of the consequences of global warming. That situation is dire enough. But perhaps the most critical "bads" provided by the US and China are the most subtle. America's unilateral measures, which flout the global rules that it helped to devise, have begun to damage the Bretton Woods institutions and the associated system of international cooperation. China, meanwhile, is a hobbled hegemon, having become dominant without acquiring genuine international appeal.

Moreover, hegemony need to provide open markets. Yet China is not offering enough export opportunities for poorer countries, even though it previously benefited greatly from deeper trade links with more advanced economies. The Chinese government's recent turn toward self-sufficiency and promoting domestic champions is contributing to the rapid decline in the country's imports. To be clear, China is entitled to pursue a development strategy that has aided its extraordinary rise. But the country cannot be a benevolent hegemon if it insists on maintaining a protectionist stance that deprives the global system — and other developing countries — of key public goods. The US-dominated G1 world is long gone, and the G2 system in which the US and China shared hegemonic responsibilities is now fading into memory. Instead, we live in a *G-Minus-2* world in which the two hegemony, instead of providing the Kindleberger global public goods of cooperation, are doing exactly the opposite.

Understandably, developing countries have begun to ask some pointed questions. What will happen to the global economy? How will we weather the next round of global turbulence? And does it even make sense to talk about cooperation when the two leading global protagonists are undermining multilateralism and the institutions that sustain it? Consumed by their quarrel, the US and China have so far provided no answers to these questions. There is an old African proverb that says "when the elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." Right now, the rest of the world is very afraid.

the automotive sector. The Automotive Mission Plan (AMP) 2006-2016 was a programme across government agencies, industry participants, and academics, to make India a global hub for the automotive industry. It was successful despite the slumps of 2008 and 2013-14, and employment increased from 10 million to 32 million by 2016. The next phase is under way through AMP 2016-2026 (<http://www.siamindia.com/cpage.aspx>), aiming to increase exports more than double to 35-40 per cent of output, and employment by 65 million. Momentum has declined in the last year, however, because of a number of adverse factors. These include confusion and uncertainty regarding policies on diesel and electric vehicles, trade tensions, slowing gross domestic product (GDP) growth here and abroad, higher costs from mitigation strategies and taxes, and funding constraints arising from problems in the financial sector.

With a slowing automotive sector and reports of possible layoffs in large numbers, is urgent policy intervention needed? Some observers think so, while others dismiss the slowdown as cyclical, and reports of distress as exaggerated, to seek concessions to improve profits. Let us recognise that India isn't comparable to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) markets. For instance, car ownership in India was under 27 per 1,000 in 2017, compared with several hundred in the OECD countries. That's the potential for employment to grow, provided industry stays profitable, and investments happen as planned (without denying the downsides: Of mitigating for environmental impact, fuel imports, and having to build more roads).

There is little doubt that India needs the automotive sector as a growth engine. Given its impact on employment in manufacturing and the economy through all the feeder industries and ancillaries, if there is a risk of collapse as in telecommunications, construction, and finance, it needs to be averted if possible. With corporate profits down to 3 per cent of GDP in 2018 from 7.8 per cent in 2008, the government needs to deal with ground realities. The facts must be evaluated to take corrective action if necessary.

There are relevant case studies on possible corrective action, such as a report on steps the USA, France and China took after 2008: "Shifting Gears: Industrial Policy and Automotive Industry after the 2008 Financial Crisis".<sup>4</sup> Our primary requirement is a stable and supportive regulatory environment. Changes, such as policies for electric vehicles or for diesel vehicles, need to be through collective consultation processes. The automotive sector has the Automotive Mission Plan 2016-2026.

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## The G-Minus-2 threat

For an all-too-brief period between the late 1980s and the late 2000s, the world was characterised by convergence, both ideological and economic. The West and the Rest agreed that an open liberal order was the best way to increase prosperity. Now, however, this ideological order threatens to unravel, with adverse consequences for the world economy.

The two-decade-long "golden age" was one of trade hyper-globalisation, reflected in an unprecedented increase in the ratio of world exports to gross domestic product (GDP). It was also an era of economic convergence: For the first time in centuries, living standards in a broad cross-section of developing countries started catching up with advanced-economy indicators. Moreover, globalisation and convergence were handmaidens: Open markets enabled developing countries to prosper by building up modern, efficient, export-based industries. And no country benefited more from hyper-globalisation than China.

The liberal order underpinning this era was largely created by the US. Exactly 75 years ago, when both the economic turmoil of the 1930s and World War II were fresh in the collective consciousness, the US was able and willing to supply three vital global public goods through the postwar institutions created at Bretton Woods. Emergency finance would come from the International Monetary Fund, and long-term lending from the World Bank. Above all, open markets would flourish under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (and its successor, the World Trade Organization). It was a G1 world, and America was the unchallenged hegemon. Today, we have neither a G1 world nor ideological convergence. Because of its spectacular growth since 1978, China has become the second dominant economic power alongside the US (Europe is still too decentralised and beset with internal problems to wield strategic influence). And the consensus about what constitutes good economics has broken down.

In the West, and especially the US, a series of negative economic trends — including slower growth, rising

inequality, declining mobility, and greater concentration of economic power — have called into question the benefits of globalisation. In addition, the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath have undermined faith in American-style capitalism. China's rise, and the perceived consequences for America, has also stoked US skepticism about globalisation. A broad swath of US elite and public opinion believes that China has abused America's largesse, via currency manipulation, intellectual-property theft and espionage, and forced technology transfer. Furthermore, China's recent tilt toward statism and political repression adds to a broader US sense of betrayal, and of an investment in shared prosperity that has gone badly wrong. This discordant G2 world and the end of ideological convergence now threaten economic convergence, and thus developing countries' prospects. The "golden age" of convergence had, in any case, already started to face headwinds. First, climate change poses risks

to developing countries' agriculture. Problems in this sector will reverberate throughout these economies, because high and rising agricultural productivity has been the key to successful structural transformations from farming to manufacturing. In addition, the spread of technology-enabled automation is replacing unskilled labor with machines, directly threatening the ability of poorer countries to lift incomes through labor-intensive manufacturing. But the biggest threat comes from an ideological decoupling between the West and the Rest. The G2 of China and the US, instead of supplying the key global public good of open markets that the economic historian Charles Kindleberger saw as the responsibility of hegemony, is now providing global public "bads."

As the US and China impose tariffs and trade restrictions on each other's goods, and as the US undermines multilateral trade rules and institutions, world trade is slowing markedly, threatening developing countries' export sectors and the viability of their overall development strategies. At the same time, the US and other Western governments are clamping down on migration. As a result, developing countries are boxed in, and will

find it increasingly difficult to export their products or their excess labour. American repudiation of the Paris climate agreement does not bode well for the poorer countries who will bear the brunt of the consequences of global warming. That situation is dire enough. But perhaps the most critical "bads" provided by the US and China are the most subtle. America's unilateral measures, which flout the global rules that it helped to devise, have begun to damage the Bretton Woods institutions and the associated system of international cooperation. China, meanwhile, is a hobbled hegemon, having become dominant without acquiring genuine international appeal.

Moreover, hegemony need to provide open markets. Yet China is not offering enough export opportunities for poorer countries, even though it previously benefited greatly from deeper trade links with more advanced economies. The Chinese government's recent turn toward self-sufficiency and promoting domestic champions is contributing to the rapid decline in the country's imports. To be clear, China is entitled to pursue a development strategy that has aided its extraordinary rise. But the country cannot be a benevolent hegemon if it insists on maintaining a protectionist stance that deprives the global system — and other developing countries — of key public goods. The US-dominated G1 world is long gone, and the G2 system in which the US and China shared hegemonic responsibilities is now fading into memory. Instead, we live in a *G-Minus-2* world in which the two hegemony, instead of providing the Kindleberger global public goods of cooperation, are doing exactly the opposite.

Understandably, developing countries have begun to ask some pointed questions. What will happen to the global economy? How will we weather the next round of global turbulence? And does it even make sense to talk about cooperation when the two leading global protagonists are undermining multilateralism and the institutions that sustain it? Consumed by their quarrel, the US and China have so far provided no answers to these questions. There is an old African proverb that says "when the elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." Right now, the rest of the world is very afraid.

Arvind Subramanian, former chief economic advisor to the Government of India, is a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and a visiting lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He is the author of *Eclipse: Living in the Shadow of China's Economic Dominance*. Josh Felman is director of JH Consulting. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2019

## Half-hearted angst



### BOOK REVIEW

CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

The jacket of Salman Khurshid's new book proclaims that "Visible Muslim, Invisible Citizen" explains Islam to those non-Muslims who do not know enough about it, places the identity of the Indian Muslim in the context of Indian democracy, and deciphers the Muslim mind in social and political contexts, beyond theology. Only a man with credentials as impressive as Mr Khurshid's could venture

to write a book so ambitious in scope. He is an illustrious Muslim politician who has served the Government of India on multiple occasions, holding important portfolios such as external affairs, law and justice, and minority affairs. He also runs the Zakir Husain Memorial Trust named after his maternal grandfather, who was not only the third President of India but also Vice-Chancellor at Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University.

Despite all that access and influence, Mr Khurshid has churned out a book that offers nothing new, insightful or thought-provoking by way of historical analysis or a vision for the future. He comes off as an apologist for the Indian National Congress, the political party to which he owes allegiance, and not as an enlightened commentator who can speak authoritatively on matters concerning

the diversity of Muslim citizens who live in India. While addressing the possibility of a uniform civil code for India, which might conflict with Muslim personal law in relation to marriage and separation, he wonders if India is ready to legalise same-sex marriage following the lead of other countries. He does not take into account the fact that a significant number of young Muslims are now organising around LGBTQ rights. These are Muslims who are negotiating with their faith on the one hand, and their sexual orientation or gender identity on the other, through democratic institutions. Their voices are absent from Mr Khurshid's book.

Mr Khurshid engages with the question of citizenship only insofar as it concerns the equation between the individual and the state. He seems fairly uncritical of the role of patriarchy in determining how Muslims — women in particular — access their rights as citizens. The book makes a passing reference to the work of Bohra women who have begun to challenge the practice of female genital mutilation in

their community. Mr Khurshid frames this as an issue of faith versus claims of constitutional right to dignity, instead of clarifying his position on this issue or providing space to the perspectives of these women. They are actively resisting oppression, and creating spaces of solidarity for survivors. Mr Khurshid refers to gender justice only while engaging with the triple *talaq* debate and, here too, he dismisses it as a ploy by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to inflict injustice on Muslim men.

The fact that Muslims are more vulnerable to violence as a result of cow vigilantism, and the paranoia around the so-called love jihad, is well-documented. It is crucial to bear witness to what is happening right now under the watch of the BJP but it is shocking to see Mr Khurshid use it as a ruse to cover up his party's complicity in the Sikh genocide of 1984. He writes, "It was not easy to stifle the careers of Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar, both of whom retain considerable popularity, including among a section of Sikhs, despite decades of criminal proceed-

ings and Commissions of Inquiry. The dogged pursuit by activists and the expectation of politically correct behaviour by party colleagues forcing conspicuous aloofness about them must have had a heavy impact on their morale." He makes a connection between Indira Gandhi's assassination and this genocide but conveniently omits any mention of Operation Blue Star.

*Visible Muslim, Invisible Citizen* appears half-hearted, insincere, and hastily written. It reproduces large chunks of material from Mr Khurshid's previously published writing, and also from newspaper columns written by various commentators. Instead of exploring policy mandates and civil society responses that would uphold the rule of law, improve socio-economic indicators for Muslims, and also address deeply entrenched societal prejudices, Mr Khurshid ends up using this book as a platform to come clean on controversies that have got him into trouble with his own party members, fellow Muslims, or the media. "Muslims constitute 14 per cent of the

country's population, but only 8 per cent of the police force. On the other hand, they represent 21 per cent of the total under-trials and 16 per cent of all convicted prisoners," writes Khurshid. What are the structural barriers faced by Muslims who want to enter the police force? How can this situation be remedied? What kinds of offences are these people undergoing trial for? How can anti-discrimination training for the police force ensure that Muslims are not falsely implicated? Mr Khurshid leaves us with the statistics but does not ask any of these questions even as he talks about Muslim men killed in fake encounters. The weakest part of this book, however, is the moment when Mr Khurshid advocates the urgency to modernise Islam, and the model he comes up with is Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

**VISIBLE MUSLIM, INVISIBLE CITIZEN**  
Salman Khurshid  
Rupa; pages: 308; price: ₹595



# Opinion

THURSDAY, AUGUST 1, 2019



ON TRIPLE TALAQ BILL

Prime minister of India, Narendra Modi

Parliament abolishes Triple Talaq and corrects a historical wrong done to Muslim women. This is a victory of gender justice and will further equality in society. India rejoices today!

## Govt failure to fix what 'revenue' is haunts telcos

If telcos have to pay ₹92,000-cr in dues, it will be due to govt failure to settle definition of 'revenue' since 2006

**I**F TELECOM OPERATORS do lose their case against the department of telecommunications (DoT)—hearings are going on in the Supreme Court right now—and end up having to pay ₹92,000 crore, this will be a big blow to an industry which is already tottering under both large debt burdens and falling revenues. How much DoT will finally charge telcos is not clear since a large part of this is really penalties, interest and interest-upon-penalties. The largest dues are those of Airtel, which owes ₹21,682 crore, but of this, the actual dues are just ₹5,528 crore, the interest on this is ₹9,816 crore, and while the penalty is ₹2,407 crore, the interest on this is ₹3,930 crore. Not surprisingly, since the interest/penalty component is very large, just three years ago, in 2016, the total dues for all telcos were ₹29,474 crore. Given that, till now, there is no clarity on what comprises 'revenue', it is not clear how the government is even levying penalties and interest on these demands.

In 1999, when the telecom operators were in deep trouble and not able to pay the exorbitant fixed-license fees they had bid, the government offered a bailout and moved them all to revenue-share-license fees; while the grateful operators grabbed the opportunity, there was no formal definition of what was to be included in 'revenue'. While litigation soon started on this, in July 2006—DoT wanted most 'revenue' streams to be included while telcos said this couldn't include, for instance, the interest they earned on deposits—the Telecom Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) ruled in favour of telcos and said DoT couldn't charge a license fee from revenues/activities that did not require a license from DoT. When DoT took the matter to the Supreme Court (SC), SC dismissed the petition. Meanwhile, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) gave its recommendations on what should be included in 'revenue' and TDSAT accepted this in its final order in August 2007.

The DoT approached SC again on the TDSAT order, but with a new argument. DoT argued that it had decided what would be included in 'revenue'; so this was a 'licence condition'. TDSAT, DoT argued, could decide on a dispute on a licence condition, but it could not rule on whether or not a licence condition was fair or not. The SC agreed with this, and added that, if the telcos found the licence condition onerous, they could have exited the business. The TDSAT then looked at the matter again given SC's restrictions on its powers and, when it came out with an order, the telcos challenged this in various courts.

There are, then, two issues that arise from this. First, till now, there is no settled definition of what comprises 'revenues', so DoT shouldn't be charging penalties and interest on 'dues' from the past. More important, it speaks volumes for just how casual the government's attitude was, as a result of which, a dispute wasn't settled since at least 2006 when TDSAT first ruled on the issue; both the UPA and NDA governments are to blame for this. Sadly, this is not the only problem that the sector is facing; so, if the government is serious about helping it develop, a comprehensive solution is required for all these issues.

## Global issues, local answers

Scale-up citizen-led efforts to preserve environment

**W**ITH DRASTIC CLIMATE change already threatening the quotidian lives of millions of people, evidenced, most recently, in the long-delayed and disappointing monsoon and the extreme heat stress being experienced globally, the effects of environment degradation are for everyone for to see. However, what might not be as immediately visible are efforts at conservation and rehabilitation—mostly, because the most successful of these have resulted from protracted, concerted local efforts led by concerned citizens. Take, for instance, Jadav 'Molai' Payeng, who single-handedly raised a forest that spreads over 1,360 acres in Majauli Island in Assam by planting a sapling every single day for 35 years, reviving an island that scientists had declared near death. Payeng, who began this project when he was all of 16 years old and continues it till date—his aim is to create another 5,000 acres of forest cover—was awarded the Padma Shri in 2015.

Payeng's is not an isolated case; while they may not be recipients of civilian honours, others, too, have taken up the mantle in doing their bit to protect the environment. In Bengaluru in 2017, Anand Malligavad, a mechanical engineer by training, rejuvenated the 36-acre Kyalasanahalli Lake in a mere 45 days with the help of local citizens and CSR funds from Sansera Foundation, which the techie was then heading. Anand went door-to-door, covering almost 400 households, to spread awareness about the need to restore the lakes the city was famed for before people started showing up to help with the project. Together, they removed 5 lakh cubic metres of mud from the lake, diverted two canals of the storm-water drain away from the lake so that the September rains could revive it, and created two Japanese Miyawaki forests of almost 25,000 square feet on the lake. Further, 186 borewells were created and recharged around the lake to cater to the needs of farmers who constitute the majority population of the area, thereby dissuading them from using the lake water directly for irrigation purposes. Malligavad has since revived the Vabasandra and Konasandra lakes, and created plans to revive Gavi and Nanjapura lakes—all part of his goal to restore 45 lakes to their former glory by 2025. Similar success was noticed in the clean-up of Mumbai's Juhu beach, driven by citizens' collective action last year.

Evidently, if efforts by private individuals can bear such fruit, both the technology and the will to preserve, even improve the natural environment exist. What remains is for such localised efforts to be scaled-up, and involve both private organisations, through their CSR engagement, and the state, through greater citizen engagement in projects pertaining to common and public goods

## PoorRICH

Number of billionaires shrinking reduces inequality, but what matters more is increase in jobs for everyone

**I**NDIA'S BILLIONAIRES ARE shrinking in numbers as per a *Business Standard* report. It noted that the number of billionaire-promoters has reduced to a three-year low at 71, from an all-time high of 90 in 2018. The report highlights that 24 Indian billionaire promoters have exited the 'billionaire club' as of now, resulting in a combined loss of ₹1 lakh crore in their net worth. The exiting billionaires include names like Anil Ambani, Motilal Oswal, and Rana Kapoor. The major reason attributed to this is the decline in stocks and the overall decline of market cap—in 19 sessions after the Budget, more than ₹12.1 lakh crore of investor wealth has been wiped out with the Sensex falling 6.08%. Apart from the collapse in the markets that caused this, another reason for the fall is that, with the government getting more serious about getting after defaulters, and setting up the IBC process, many billionaires are being cut to size.

Given how the top one per cent of India's population is said to own around 51.4% of the total country's wealth (according to a Credit Suisse report in 2018), a decline in the number of billionaires may be viewed as a positive trend resulting in wealth inequality reduction. But, mere reduction of the number of billionaires will not result in the poorer being better-off; what matters is economic growth that creates job opportunities for the non-rich as well. Right now, with growth stalling, and prospects for a recovery a bit dim, the prospects for a broader jobs growth look poor though.

## THE GREAT TELECOM DEBATE

IT IS A PITY THE APEX TELECOM PANEL CHOSE TO ASK TRAI TO LOWER ITS PENALTIES CITING THE POOR HEALTH OF TELCOS; THESE FIRMS HAD QUESTIONED TRAI'S ORDER ON ITS MERITS

# Cutting extortionate levies is not a bailout

**A** RECENT ARTICLE opposes government intervention in the telecom sector reeling under a debt of over ₹7 trillion. It argues that the root cause of the debt is incompetently run private companies and their greedy promoters, and, therefore, there is no case for the government to review the penalties of over ₹100 billion facing them. Nor is there any reason to lower the reserve price of ₹4.92 billion per MHz for the forthcoming auction of the 5G spectrum.

Unfortunately, such an approach is short-sighted. It will prevent vital reform, hurt most stakeholders and won't fix rogue behaviour either.

The Digital Communications Commission (DCC) is the top policy body of the telecom sector, with secretary level representation from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the NITI Aayog. It had asked Trai to review its decisions on the two different matters of penalties and the 5G reserve price. It wanted lower penalties in view of the sector's poor finances and lower reserve price for 5G spectrum since otherwise, it would impede wider access to 5G services. Trai has declined both appeals. Though a final decision is still pending, the incumbent companies have clearly failed, thus far, in their efforts to have the penalty waived or the reserve price of 5G lowered.

It is misleading to suggest that either of these demands amount to seeking a bailout. Unlike DCC, incumbents have not cited poor finance as the reason to quash or reduce penalties. They have contested Trai's decision on merits. There was also a dispute about the jurisdiction of sector regulator Trai and the competition body, CCI, in matters related to competition in the telecom sector, which reached the Supreme Court, where the issue was ruled on ruled last year. Based on this order, Telecom Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) set aside Trai's orders, e.g., predatory pricing. The matters of jurisdiction and penalties

**MAHESH UPPAL**  
Director, Com First (India)  
Views are personal



are still in courts and have little to do with a bailout.

The appeal for a lower reserve price is even further from a demand for a bailout. Experts have raised several questions about the methodology adopted by Trai to arrive at the reserve price and pointed out professional errors in the computation. The reserve price is sharply out of line with similar estimates in other countries. Trai has provided little beyond cursory responses to the serious questions raised.

The approach to reserve prices is worrying considering why we need—and the Supreme Court ordered—the auctions in the first place. The idea is to let the markets discover the correct price given the complexities of computing it. While a very low reserve price could, admittedly, attract speculative bidders and should be avoided, a high reserve price seeks to pre-empt the results of the auction making it almost redundant.

India's experience confirms that final bids can be several times the reserve price, as happened in the auction of 3G spectrum in 2010. Equally, high reserve prices have been no guarantee of success. For example, thanks to the high reserve price of 700 MHz spectrum in 2016, it found no bidders. Several auctions have failed, with over 50% spectrum unsold or witnessing little to no bidding beyond the reserve price. In 2016, barely 21% of spectrum was sold above the reserve price.

The government's many pronouncements, including the National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP), speak eloquently about leveraging 5G technologies for India. It is said that with one

of the world's largest telecom networks and abundant expertise, India is well placed to drive its national agenda in 5G. This includes influencing technology, standards, hardware, adoption, etc. However, this is impossible without substantial private sector investments in the network, and in devices and services. The sector is now primarily driven by private players, with government companies playing a minor (and sadly, dwindling) role. The only tangible way, therefore, for the government to speed up deployment of 5G is to ensure that its rules, spectrum design and allocation do not deter investors in any part of the 5G ecosystem. Arguably, nowhere is the much-touted Ease of Business more relevant than in creation of capital-intensive infrastructure.

The existing spectrum design is a significant risk to investment and competition. This must worry Trai and the government alike. More so, since unsold or unused spectrum is not a protection against future shortages; unlike finite natural resources like coal, water, gas, etc, spectrum is inexhaustible. Not using it today does not leave more for future generations!!

There are reports that some incumbents plan to skip the 5G auction. It would be a small consolation if some old or new players do bid, despite the high reserve price. At that price, they will have a greater incentive to prioritise lucrative customers or regions over expanding coverage or developing India's nascent

**India risks missing the 5G boat, like it did for 2G, 3G and 4G. Except, this time, it would be because we were too greedy**

data markets. This is particularly relevant in the case of 5G where the business case is unclear even in mature telecom markets. A well-designed auction that attracts wider participation could provide a much-needed fillip to India's aspirations in 5G technologies. Otherwise, India risks missing the 5G boat, like it did for 2G, 3G and 4G. Except, this time, it would be because we were too greedy in our auction design.

The industry's poor financial health is hardly a claim of vested commercial interests alone. The sector's revenues are down by roughly 40%, as are the company valuations. The DoT and DCC both acknowledge it, as do a wide range of financial analysts and think tanks. Indeed, the Minister for Communications and Information Technology highlighted this very aspect in his maiden briefing after taking over the portfolio.

Indebtedness is not just a risk for players alone. It affects lenders—especially public banks—and the government, which receives roughly 30% of the sector's revenues in levies of various kinds. It affects consumers and the economy at large, given the countless ways in which telecommunication affects virtually every aspect of our lives. We ignore, at our own peril, the poor health of a sector that reportedly contributes over 6% of India's GDP.

There is good reason to reform the design of India's spectrum auctions. It is a travesty to suggest that a lower reserve price is a demand for subsidy. It is counterproductive to suggest that reform should be delayed simply because one believes companies are run incompetently or that their promoters are greedy. Indeed, coherent regulation is our best defence against rogue players and unearned profits.

*The author specialises in telecom regulation and policy*

## The backlash against "techlash" is unfair

Filter bubbles and echo chambers are dangerous, just not quite in the way most people think

**LEONID BERSHIDSKY**

Bloomberg

**IT WAS ALMOST** inevitable that "techlash"—the growing dislike of tech platforms and, in particular, social media for its role in undermining democracy—would attract its own backlash. Key theories such as the filter bubble and echo chamber are themselves being challenged.

In a *Medium* post this week, Jeff Jarvis, a journalism professor and blogger, reviewed some of the recent academic work on the subject. In particular, he looked at a paper by Axel Bruns from Queensland University of Technology in Australia provocatively entitled "It's Not the Technology, Stupid: How the 'Echo Chamber' and 'Filter Bubble' Metaphors Have Failed Us."

In it, Bruns argues we don't select friends on solely ideological criteria. Instead, "contacts from the many facets of the user's personal life—family, friends, acquaintances, workmates, and others—connect and communicate with each other in an unruly and often uncontrollable *mélée*." Because of this, users encounter a greater variety of views than non-users. They aren't locked into watertight "bubbles" by the social networks' content selection algorithms, Bruns says. So social networks shouldn't be held responsible for the proliferation of fake news and hyper-partisan commentary. In fact, Bruns argues, this debate distracts us from a much more important question: why are people getting more intolerant when confronted with opposing opinions?

He isn't the only academic to question echo chambers (a term coined by my *Bloomberg Opinion* colleague Cass Sunstein) and filter bubbles (a concept developed by Upworthy co-founder Eli Pariser). In 2016, Seth Flaxman from Oxford University, Sharad Goel from Stanford University and Justin Rao, a Microsoft Corp employee, noted that social networks and search engines increased people's exposure to material from their less preferred side of the

political spectrum, even if they did reduce "the mean ideological distance between individuals." Both effects, though, were relatively modest.

Perhaps coincidentally, these findings are similar to those of Facebook Inc's own researchers. In a 2015 *Science* article, Eytan Bakshy and collaborators wrote that social networks' algorithms expose users to "cross-cutting viewpoints"—but that users themselves tend not to click on such links. "Our work suggests that the power to expose oneself to perspectives from the other side in social media lies first and foremost with individuals," Bakshy wrote. "These are all valid points. Some social network users—and not just journalists—often make a conscious effort to follow people with opposing views as a reality check. And the vast majority of people have friends from across the political spectrum, something that exposes them to differing views."

But it would be misguided to dismiss the idea of the filter bubble as "the dumbest metaphor on the internet," as Bruns does, because it is highly likely that the way in which social networks work directly affects the behaviour of ideologically rigid individuals and their reaction to the opposing views they encounter.

A large body of academic literature points to the role social networks play in organising political action in real life. Troublingly, this goes for political violence, too. Last year, Karsten Mueller from Princeton University and Carlo Schwarz from the University of Warwick published a paper showing that in German towns with more active Facebook users, violence against immigrants also increased. In April, 2019, Mattias Wahlstrom and Anton Tornberg from the University of Gothenburg took those findings further by describing the mechanisms that translate social media interactions into real-world xenophobic violence in Sweden. At the time the Wahlstrom paper was

written, the largest political group on the Swedish segment of Facebook was the ultra-nationalist "Stand Up for Sweden" group with almost 170,000 members. Such large online communities, the Swedish researchers wrote, serve to lend moral legitimacy to violent actions by providing individuals with "feedback, mutual recognition and emotional responses that motivate action." Collectively, they also form an alternative news and analysis discourse that contradicts whatever they see of mainstream or "cross-cutting" views.

In the pre-social network world, it was hard for hyper-partisan, potentially violent people to find each other, and any groups such people formed were small. Now, anyone who has ever had a Twitter mob descend on them knows how easy it is to meet like-minded people and have your hatred reinforced and legitimised. Echo chambers and filter bubbles don't need to be perfectly insulated to produce the mob effect—and to provide opportunities for paid trolls to incite harassment and, ultimately, violence. The greatest danger posed by social media isn't insulation, it is amplification.

Of course, as Jarvis correctly points out in his *Medium* post, any journalist (myself included) works for an industry that competes with the social networks. Collectively, we can be seen as seeking to preserve our monopoly on content mediation. To me, however, there's no problem with being open about this. That mediation monopoly used to be a moderating factor. It kept public discourse civil and made sure out-of-control hatred was marginalised. Now, the online mobs have proliferated. I'm not certain this genie can be chased back into the bottle, but if the public backlash against social media grows rather than recedes, the chances of that happening will be greater.

*This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### On higher digital tax

At a time when lawmakers globally are considering an optimal rate of taxation for multinational tech companies, hitherto paying a relatively lower domestic tax despite earning significant revenues and profits from messaging, basic financial services and online-advertising, the economy must review the existing framework too. Implementation of stringent data-protection/KYC norms in conjunction with intelligent surveillance of transactions is important to ensure adherence to information security/financial standards. Consistency demands an advanced, tech-enabled mechanism to micro-monitor the operations of online/e-commerce portals and mushrooming messaging/social media platforms, including those rendering UPI-based payments/transfers, in order to enforce compliance. Fis, Fin-Tech and data-intensive firms with a widely dispersed consumer-base, require ample resources to establish a world-class infrastructure. A greater user awareness and large-scale innovation/optimisation is needed to facilitate efficient execution of R&D projects, availability of classified information without duplication/redundancy and cost-effectiveness in operations. Although restrictions can increase the cost of credit or transactions for retail-consumers and impact digital-operations, it is prudent to boost tax-revenues by levying an overhead, subject to the nature of business and the physical or virtual location of servers/gateways. However, establishing a viable differential tax-framework should be the long-term objective, wherein norms to tax multinationals are based not solely on profitability but also factor in CSR initiatives, employment-generation prospects, volume of transactions and the number of consumers. —Girish Lalwani, Delhi

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com





ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

**ANJANI KUMAR, SMRITI VERMA & ARABINDA K PADHEE**

Kumar and Verma are agricultural economists at the South Asia Office of the International Food Policy Research Institute, and Padhee is country director-India at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics based in Delhi. Views are personal

# Well begun isn't always half done

NEW MINISTRY

Can the welcome creation of a separate ministry of animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries bring fresh momentum in the growth of allied sectors? There are several challenges to deal with

The erstwhile Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DAHDF) was responsible for overseeing matters related to livestock production, preservation, protection from diseases, improvement of stocks, dairy development, and also matters pertaining to the Delhi Milk Scheme, the National Dairy Development Board, and inland and marine fishing and fisheries. It advised state governments and Union Territories on formulation of policies and programmes related to animal husbandry, dairy development and fisheries. Formed in February 1991, the department came under the purview of the ministry of agriculture and farmers' welfare. Earlier this year, a new department called the Department of Fisheries was created out of the erstwhile DAHDF. While the mandate of the new ministry is yet to be elucidated, the allied sectors of physical agriculture and allied, as is common in official and academic parlance, have largely been neglected for a long time despite their growing significance in agricultural economy and food and nutrition security of the country. The importance of animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries can hardly be overstated in times when agricultural diversification is being rallied as one the most important drivers of growth in rural incomes and realising the PM's vision of doubling farmers' income. The 19th Livestock Census (2012) counted a total livestock population of 512.06 million. Livestock and fisheries have together registered an average annual growth rate of six times more than that in the crop sector between 2012-13 and 2016-17. Livestock, fishing and aquaculture account for nearly 32% of the overall agricultural GDP and 5% of national GDP. Livestock and fish products together contribute over ₹7 lakh crore to total value of the agricultural output—nearly double the contribution of cereals and pulses together. While the share of crops in the value of agricultural output has been declining, that of livestock and fish products is on a steadily upward trend.

However, the policy focus and incentive structure in agriculture is highly

skewed in favour of crop cultivation. Agricultural policies were bent towards foodgrain cultivation to overcome the food shortage crisis in the mid-1960s. However, long after attaining self-sufficiency and even surplus production, agricultural policies have remained undesirably crop-centric. Packages of benefits, such as the Kisan Credit Cards (KCC), interest subsidies on farm loans, etc, targeted at the welfare of the farming community have remained confined to those cultivating crops till recently. The KCC scheme was launched in 1998 and this facility was extended to livestock and fish farmers in 2018—after a long gap of 20 years. Even the most recent Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) for providing income support of ₹6,000 is targeted at farmers who are engaged in cultivation of crops. The new ministry could work to extend these benefits even to those engaged exclusively in the allied sectors. The definition of the 'farmer' has to be relooked and the ministry can play a pivotal role in mainstreaming these allied or orphaned sub-sectors. It is expected that with the creation of the new ministry, both the departments under it will have significantly higher budget allocations for existing and new schemes/programmes, as also investments and establishment of infrastructure in the value chain. Buffalo meat and inland/sea-fish exports having a huge share in our agri-exports basket are expected to get the required attention by the new ministry in coordination with the ministry of commerce.

There are, however, several challenges to deal with—and this is why we call the move 'potentially' welcome. Creation of a new ministry for livestock, dairying and fisheries has chances of further dissociating these from an integrally linked and rather mainstreamed activity of crop cultivation. The livestock production system is closely interwoven with crop sector in India. Usually a single-window system is preferred for better coordination, policy synchronisation and a general holistic approach. With the creation of a new ministry, the allied sectors coordination between departments is, especially with the growing emphasis on Blue Revolution in India. How research organisations, think tanks, donors and academia in general will align and coordinate their activities with other government and quasi-government organisations (such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research) that will have to be figured out in the coming days. We strongly feel that the current move should not lead to a similar bifurcation of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) into separate agencies of agriculture and veterinary/fisheries streams. The research ecosystem should not be equated with the governance structure of implementing departments.

While many speculate the move to have political undertones, if it can do the trick to shift the blinkered-focus of policymakers from crop cultivation to these emerging sectors, it will have well-served its purpose. Institutions once created tend to persist. It is, therefore, hoped that the objective behind the creation of this new ministry has been well-thought-through. Otherwise, it will just become another curious case of maximum government and minimum governance!

It's hoped that the objective behind the creation of the new ministry has been thought-out. Else, it will become a case of maximum government and minimum governance

# A billion healthy Indians

NK GANGULY

The author is former head, Indian Council of Medical Research

## Can National Essential Diagnostics List alone fight India's healthcare battles?

**P**ROTECTION OF PATIENTS, stronger regulations and right to healthcare were among the focus areas of general elections. With the new government in power, we are yet to see how many of these promises will be implemented. In the light of people's voracious appetite for better healthcare initiatives, it could be a step in this direction, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) collaborated with the ministry of health and family welfare and some experts to release the final draft of the National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL), in the coming months (according to sources). As the government plans to launch pathology labs at more than 500 Jan Aushadhi outlets, it appears we are inching closer to finalising NEDL.

What does it mean to the people? If all goes as planned, the government will make a set of quality diagnostic tests available at every healthcare centre, and the move could make more than 100 diagnostic tests accessible to people.

While the move is laudable, India has healthcare battles to win on many fronts, failing which NEDL could fall flat. We need a more structured approach to address the growing challenges of the healthcare industry.

### The skill development challenge

There is only one government allopathic doctor per 11,082 people—as per last year's data, India has about 10 lakh allopathy doctors to treat its entire population. Also, the number of clinicians to conduct tests falls short of requirement, and there is a lack of awareness on diagnostics. The access to diagnostics in remote areas and even in tier-2 and tier-3 cities is a challenge. NEDL caters to one side of the story, and accessibility to equipment cannot ensure better health unless there is an existing capacity of professionals who can perform these tests in a suitable infrastructure. The government should consider using NEDL to also mandate and ensure covering the gaps in this area.

Finding enough doctors and physicians to treat patients and training them well should be the first step before ensuring availability of products and services. Our hospitals are understaffed, overburdened and ill-equipped. For India to build better infrastructure, we not only need qualified doctors, but also high-quality equipment and trained professionals—microbiologists, pathologists, trained lab technicians. Without skilled professionals or advanced technology, achieving accurate diagnosis and effective prognosis will be a challenge. A step in this direction could be a partnership between the government and the medical device industry. Together, they can run diagnostic awareness campaigns and camps to support the cause, similar to what is being initiated in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

### Limping healthcare infrastructure

In 2018, the health ministry, under the National Health Profile, revealed there is one government hospital bed per 1,844 people and one state-run hospital for 55,591 people. When I think about what NEDL could possibly do for India, my first doubt is where are the hospitals for this equipment and where are the professionals?

A recent report noted that, of the 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) planned by 2022, only about 3,000 (2%) have been completed. Of these, 2,800 are in aspirational (economically backward) districts. This entails building at least 50,000 HWCs every year in the next three years.

If implemented in a phased manner, NEDL could potentially improve access to safe and effective diagnostic tests for patients. However, this needs a streamlined approach in synchrony with other changes being proposed, such as revision of Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS), HWCs and free diagnostic service initiative of the government. (IPHS are a set of standards for health facilities, covering the quality of health care provided in hospitals, primary health centres, etc.) India has 100,000 HWCs as claims by political parties seem reassuring, we cannot first achieve anything unless the challenges of skill building and infrastructure are met. Without the provision of Health necessities like laboratory capacity, these ideas will crumble. With elections under the heavy veil of a green horizon, hoping for a future where the new economic vision will have a clear focus on health and health facilities, providing lower level of care in the country. States have a major role to play in both financing and implementing these, and, in the process, realising the health financing goal.

At a time when India is experiencing growth and job pangs, voices from private healthcare industry are getting shriller. The industry is making a case for higher public health spending as well as extending incentives. Healthcare is known to be a human resource-intensive sector and is also a major contributor to India's GDP growth. But not all levels of health service delivery contribute equally to jobs and GDP growth. The government needs to adopt a graded strategy—one that requires a sound understanding of what constitutes investment and consumption in healthcare. This is particularly challenging when India is also aspiring to emerge as a destination for medical tourism.

As the government steps up spending to meet health financing goals, it's important not to lose sight of the consumption versus investment distinction. Health expenditure that is mostly consumption in nature can be slippery slope because

# HEALTHCARE

SPENDING

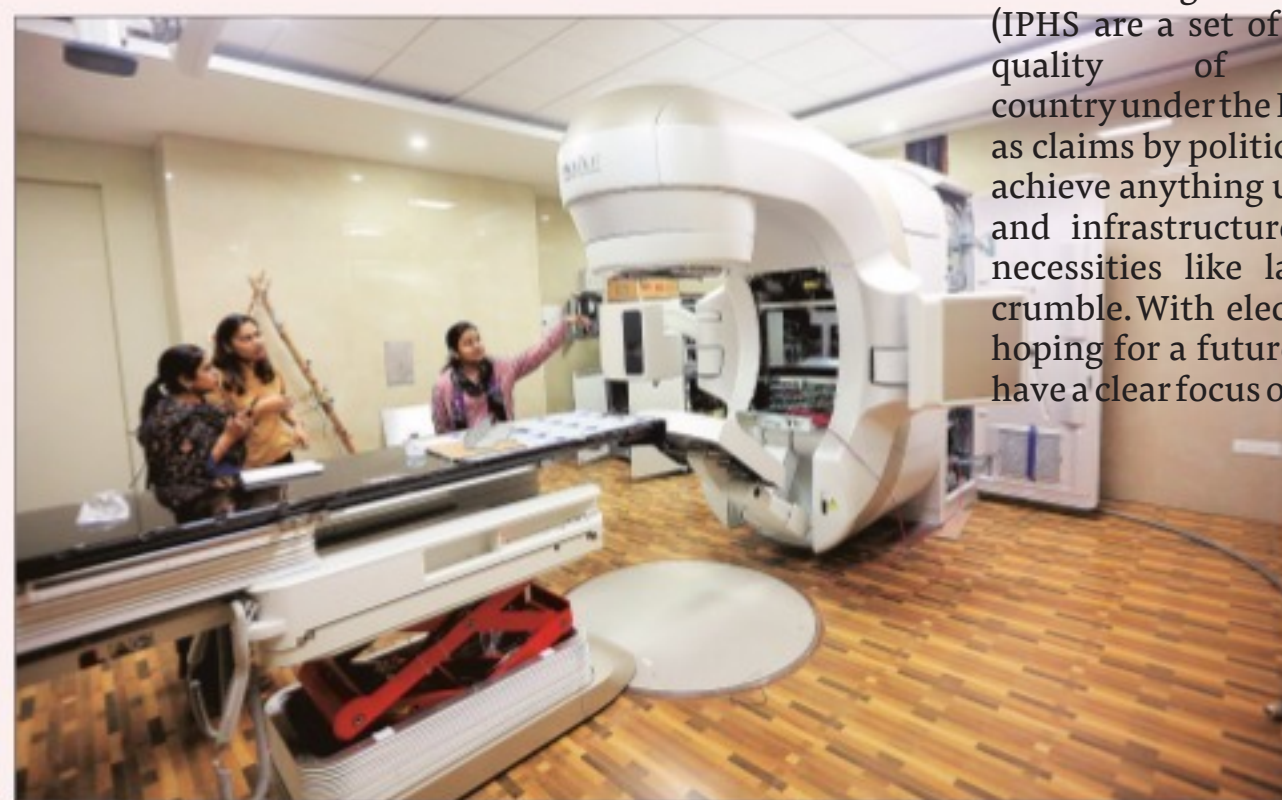
## Is it investment or consumption?

The rationale for giving health sector a boost calls for a sharper distinction between consumption and investment

**RAJEEV AHUJA**



Author is a development economist, formerly with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank



is investment, while public health spending can be consumption or investment. Health spending by not-for-profit firms, too, can be consumption or investment.

Of course, these generalisations hold at the macro level. At the micro level, healthcare expenditures can mean a very different thing. For example, expenditure on healthcare of an elderly may be considered investment by a family if the elderly is regarded as a source of enormous moral strength. By this logic, expenditure on maintaining the health of a young person suffering from a terminal illness may be considered investment. So, you see, the classification of healthcare expenditure as consumption or investment is not that straightforward. So, how does it matter?

whether healthcare expenditure is consumption or investment, if a person needs healthcare, he/she should be able to access it without experiencing financial hardships. This is the spirit behind the concept of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) that has become the priority objective of the WHO. But for developing countries like India, UHC cannot be achieved all at once. Instead, it is about defining a pathway to progressively achieving UHC, as greater resources become available. This implies prioritisation of services to be provided and of the people who are to be covered along the path to UHC. This is where the distinction between consumption and investment comes handy in prioritising expenditures that are investments as a country marches towards UHC. Hence the

notion of 'best buys' that is so common in the health sector—spending on nutrition, on health promotion to reduce non-communicable diseases, on birth attendants, on childhood immunisation are examples of 'best buys'. People who advocate 'right to healthcare' miss this central point of affordability and prioritisation.

In their worldview, they overlook the fact that health is first and foremost an individual's own responsibility, then of his/her family, thereafter of the local governments for ensuring public goods such as clean surroundings, clean drinking water and so on. Surely, the government can't be caring about the

people themselves indulge in unhealthy behaviour? Talking of behaviour change, much of it lies outside of the health sector. Asking for healthcare is perhaps as important as asking for redressal of determinants of health such as clean air, hygienic public spaces, safer roads. Expenditures on these are mostly investment in nature.

**Giving health sector a boost:** At 1.3% of GDP, public health spending in India pales in comparison to peers such as Vietnam that spends close to 3% of its GDP. But the good news is that the Narendra Modi government is committed to raising this share to 2.5% of GDP by 2025.

The principal vehicles for stepping up government health spending are Ayush-Mission Bharat and National Health Mission.

**T**HE ECONOMIC SURVEY 2018-19 has projected the number of elderly population (60 years and above) to increase to 239.4 million in 2018, from 201.1 million in 2011. So, the need for making 'investments' in healthcare for the elderly is one of the two policy prescriptions noted in the Survey (the other being raising retirement age).

Is healthcare spending a consumption expenditure or an investment expenditure? The answer is not as black and white. It depends on the kind of health spending one is talking about, from whose perspective, for what population, and who the funding agency is. The Indian context adds another layer of complexity to this.

Generally, health expenditure on preventive and primary care is investment, while hospitalisation expenditure is consumption in nature. Because primary healthcare expenditure helps avert disease escalation, it is considered investment, while hospital expenditure because of its 'avoidable' nature is regarded as consumption. By this logic, all expenditure on yoga—because of its role in promotion of health and well-being—is investment. Healthcare expenditures can be looked at through other lenses, too. For example, through the lens of human life cycle, expenditure on women and child health-care and nutrition is considered investment, while expenditure on elderly health-care is considered consumption





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## TELLING NUMBERS

### Over 140 are killed every day on national highways, expressways

Year	Number of accidents on NHs/expressways	Number of deaths on NHs/expressways
2015	1,42,268	51,204
2016	1,42,359	52,075
2017	1,41,466	53,181

Source: Reply to Lok Sabha question

UTTAR PRADESH and Madhya Pradesh, where the death toll from road accidents is among the highest in the country, were also among the 10-odd states where the number of people killed on the roads had, at last count, increased over the previous year.

UP, India's most populous state, saw 20,124 people killed on the roads in 2017, as compared to the 19,320 deaths in 2016. The corresponding numbers for MP, another large state, were 10,177 and 9,646, according to data provided to Lok Sabha by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways last week.

Roads in Maharashtra, the second most populous state, however, seemed to be getting safer, the data show. The state saw 12,264 fatalities in 2017,

fewer than the 12,935 in 2016, and the 13,212 in 2015. The 2017 number for Tamil Nadu, 16,157, was the second highest (after UP) that year, but lower than the state's 2016 number of 17,218.

Across India, 51,204, 52,075, and 53,181 people were killed on National Highways (including expressways) in 2015, 2016, and 2017, as per information received from police departments of all States/UTs, the Ministry said in its reply. This works out to 140-145 deaths on India's National Highways and expressways every day during the three years for which the data was presented.

The number of accidents on NHs and expressways in those years were 1,42,268, 1,42,359, and 1,41,466 respectively.

## FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

### CCD FOUNDER LEFT A PURPORTED SUICIDE NOTE. WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

MOHAMED THAYER  
MUMBAI, JULY 31

A LETTER purportedly written by V G Siddhartha to the board of directors of Cafe Coffee Day before he apparently took his life, accuses lenders of exerting "tremendous pressure" on him, and the Income-Tax Department of "a lot of harassment". While I-T said it had acted in accordance with the law and procedures, the Congress Wednesday attacked the government for unleashing "tax terror" on businesses.

Can the letter purportedly left behind by Siddhartha, if established to be genuine, be considered a "suicide note"?

**SUICIDE NOTE:** Any document where a person has specifically mentioned that he is planning to end his life, can be considered a suicide note. If the contents demonstrate that the person had been pushed to commit suicide by someone, police can conduct an inquiry to see if charges can be pressed under Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code.

**SECTION 306 IPC:** The section, 'Abetment of Suicide', says: "If any person commits suicide, whoever abets the commission of such suicide, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine".

Section 306 is applicable only if the deceased specifically holds a person responsible for the suicide. It is usually considered to be a difficult Section to prove in a court of law. In her suicide note, Dr Payal Tadvi, the gynaecology department stu-

dent at Mumbai's Nair Hospital who hanged herself on May 22, named three seniors whose "torture" she said she could no longer bear. The three individuals have been arrested and charged with abetment to suicide.

**HOW SERIOUS:** The appearance of an individual's name in a suicide note does not automatically lead to the filing of an FIR. It must be established that the person was deliberately harassing the deceased. For example, the I-T officer whom Siddhartha has referred to in his letter cannot be held responsible if the officer is found to have been merely carrying out his duty as per the law.

The registering of an FIR under IPC Section 306 is not necessarily followed by prosecution. Police may register an FIR if members of the deceased's family insist, but may not file a chargesheet if their investigation shows there is not enough evidence to establish abetment. An FIR under Section 306 was registered after musician Karan Joseph killed himself in Mumbai in September 2017, but no one has been chargesheeted.

**PROCEDURE:** Normally, police initially register an Accidental Death Report (ADR). If there appears to be no foul play after the autopsy — meaning it was not a murder trying to be passed off as suicide — police can, under Section 174 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, conduct an inquiry without registering an FIR. If allegations in the suicide note, or those made by the family, *prima facie* appear to have merit, police register an FIR under Section 306 IPC.

## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

# New debate on defence funding

The Centre has asked the 15th Finance Commission to examine whether a separate mechanism for funding of defence and internal security should be set up. What are the implications for the finances of the states?

ISHAN BAKSHI  
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

EARLIER THIS MONTH, the Union Cabinet amended the terms of reference (ToR) of the 15th Finance Commission (FC) to widen their scope. Through the change, the government has requested the FC to look into the possibility of a separate mechanism for the funding of defence and internal security. Critics of the decision have questioned the addition to the FC's ToR on the ground that it would undermine the federal structure of Indian polity.

### What is the FC and what is its mandate?

The Finance Commission is a constitutional body that owes its existence to Article 280 of the Indian Constitution. Its mandate is to determine the distribution of tax revenues between the Centre and the states, and amongst the states themselves. The FC has a five-year term; the 15th FC was constituted in November 2017 and its recommendations will apply from 2020 to 2025. In the past, FCs have also dwelt on the distribution of central grants to states, as well as the flow of resources to the third tier of governance — the panchayats and the municipalities.

In a federal structure such as India's, powers and responsibilities are divided between the Centre and the states. While the Union collects a majority of the tax revenue, states have a greater responsibility for the delivery of public goods.

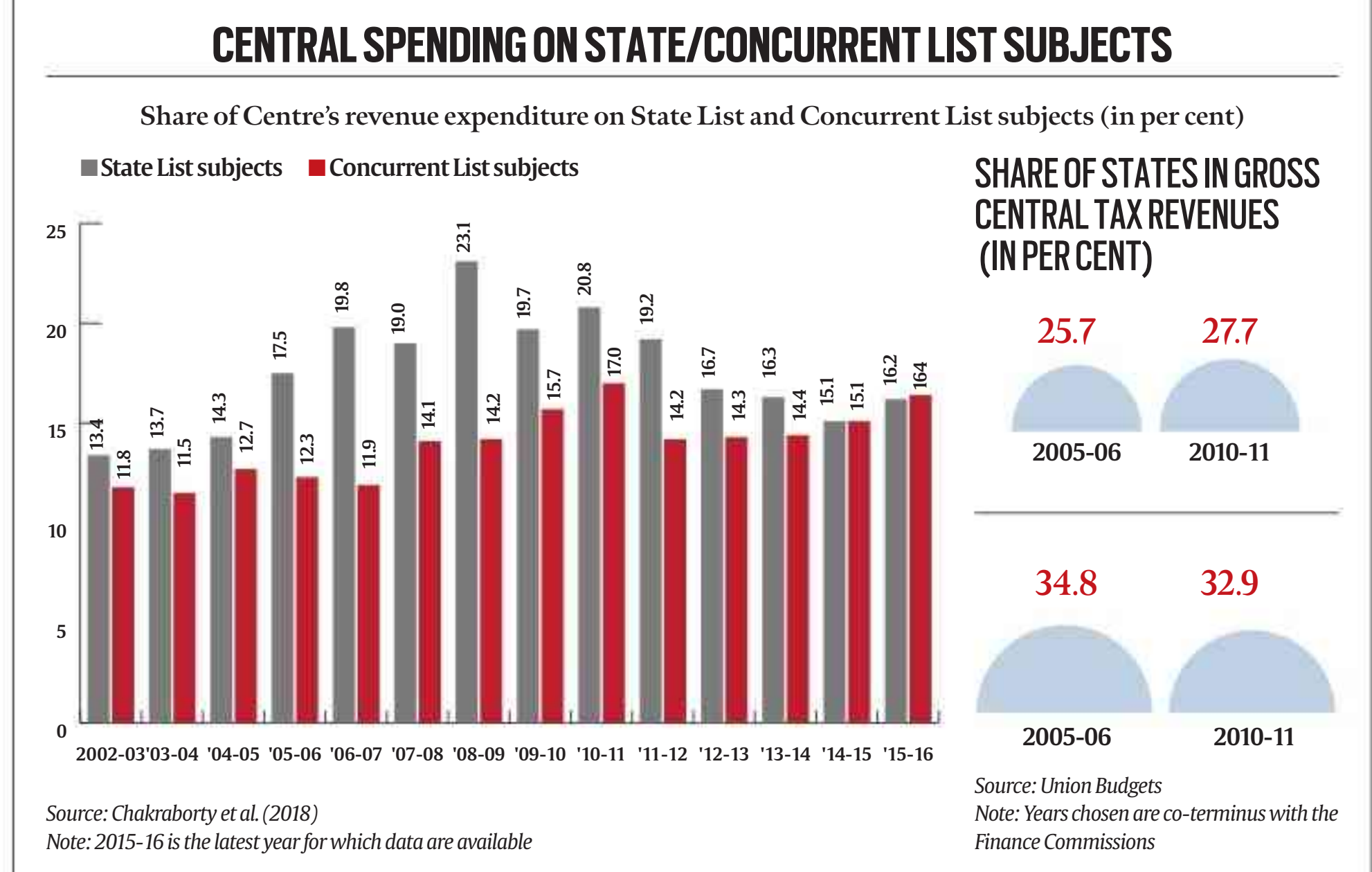
Thus, FCs aim to do two types of adjustments. One, to address the vertical imbalance between the taxation powers of the Centre and the expenditure priorities of the states.

Two, to allay the horizontal imbalances between the states themselves with the objective of ensuring balanced regional development.

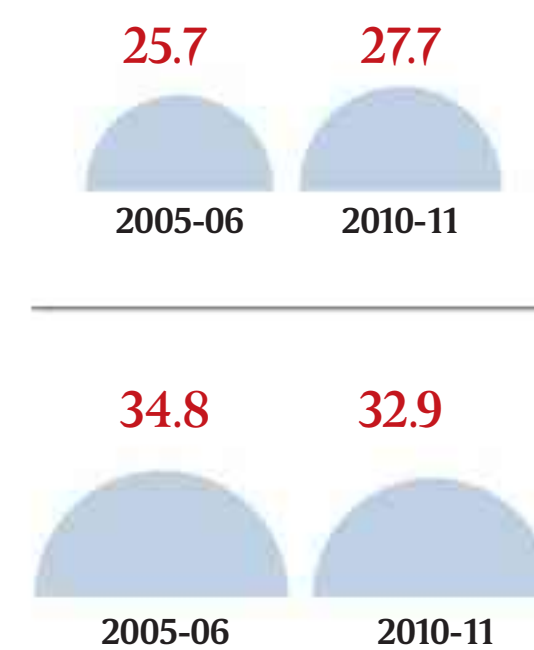
### What is the role of the ToR, and why is the latest tweak being criticised?

One of the reasons why FCs are reconstituted every five years is to ensure that they can take into account the changing dynamics of the political and fiscal landscape. Even though the ToRs are essentially in the nature of guidelines to the FC, yet a change in ToRs over the years has reflected the changing needs of India's overall development.

Any changes in ToRs can, and often do, have their critics. For instance, several



### SHARE OF STATES IN GROSS CENTRAL TAX REVENUES (IN PER CENT)



Source: Union Budgets  
Note: Years chosen are co-terminus with the Finance Commissions

southern states had protested against the 15th FC ToR last year because of apprehensions that it would lead to a reduction in their share of tax revenues.

The latest addition to the 15th FC's ToR calls for the FC to examine the possibility of allocation of adequate, secure and non-lapsable funds for defence and internal security of India. In other words, the Centre has requested the FC to examine whether a separate mechanism for funding of defence and internal security ought to be set up, and how such a mechanism could be operationalised.

With capital spending on defence continuing to fall short of requirements, it is difficult to contest the basic premise that spending on defence needs to be bolstered.

However, sequestering funds for defence from the Centre's gross tax revenues means a reduction in the overall tax pool that is shared with states. This is likely to be protested by the states, several of whom are arguing for an increase in their share in taxes collected to 50 per cent from the current 42 per cent. This request by the Centre also raises questions over the fiscal space at its disposal to finance spending

on items in the Union list.

The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution lists the separate (Union List and State List) and joint (Concurrent List) responsibilities of the Centre and the states. Defence is in the Union List. The Centre's request to the FC for greater resources means that it has limited ability to ramp up expenditure on items in the Union List.

This is partly because the Centre's expenditure on items in the State and Concurrent Lists has been increasing over the years. Research has shown that the share of the Centre's revenue expenditure on items in the State List has broadly grown over the years; it went up from 13.4 per cent in 2002-03 to 23.1 per cent in 2008-09, before declining to 16.2 per cent in 2015-16.

Similarly, the Centre spent 16.4 per cent of its revenue expenditure on Concurrent List subjects in 2015-16, up from 11.8 per cent in 2002-03 (see chart). This increase in spending by the Centre on items in the State and the Concurrent Lists has led to a reduction in its spending on items in the Union List.

### Are states being squeezed out of funding?

The added fiscal pressures of the Centre and the requirement of having to share tax revenues with states has left the Centre in a peculiar position.

To shore up its revenues, the Centre has, over the years, begun to rely more on cesses and surcharges. In the recent Union Budget, too, it increased the special additional excise duty and road and infrastructure cess on petrol and diesel by one rupee each.

But the revenue from cesses and surcharges is not part of the divisible tax pool that is shared with the states. It is kept by the Centre. This implies that states receive a lower share of the Centre's gross tax revenue collections.

For instance, the states' share in central taxes has been pegged at Rs 8.09 lakh crore in 2019-20. This works out to around 33 per cent of the gross tax revenues. In comparison, post the government accepting the recommendations of the 14th FC, states' share in central taxes rose to 42 per cent from the 32 per cent earlier.

# What the Bill to curb Ponzi schemes says

RUDRA MANI TRIPATHI  
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

ON July 29, Rajya Sabha passed The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019; it had been passed by Lok Sabha five days previously. The Bill aims to protect investors from fraudulent investment schemes, such as Ponzi schemes.

The Bill covers existing gaps in legislation that had been exploited by various parties to siphon large amounts of money away from small investors. In particular, it amends three laws, i.e., The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, The Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992 and The Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 2002.

According to an analysis by PRS India, under the Bill, deposit-taking schemes are defined as 'unregulated' if they are undertaken for business purposes, and additionally, are not registered with one of the nine regula-

tory authorities mentioned in the Bill.

A common type of scam involving unregulated deposits is the Ponzi scheme, a type of investment fraud wherein one party promises high returns on an investment with little to no risk. The early investors in a Ponzi scheme are repaid by the scheme acquiring new investors, and so on. Once there are no longer enough people to secure a new round of investments, the scheme collapses and the investors lose their money. This was the classic pattern seen in the Saradha case in West Bengal, in which politicians of the ruling party have been accused.

The nine authorities charged with the oversight and regulation of deposit-taking schemes include the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), and state and Union Territory governments. Each authority oversees different types of deposit-taking schemes, with the RBI overseeing deposits taken by non-bank-

ing financial companies (NBFCs), and Sebi overseeing mutual funds. Any deposit-taking scheme must be registered with the relevant authority, based on the category it falls under, and only then is its operation legal.

The Bill provides for the appointment of a "competent authority", with a rank not below Secretary to the state or central government, with the power to provisionally attach the property of the deposit-taker, and all the deposits received by them. The Bill also allows the competent authority to summon and examine people to obtain evidence, and order records to be produced.

The Bill provides for the formation of designated courts in specific areas. The central government will additionally designate an authority to establish an online database with information on various deposit-takers. The database will be used to ascertain which deposit-takers are regulated, and which are not. Deposit-takers will be required to inform the authority in charge of the database about

their actions and the state of their business.

Three kinds of offences are delineated under this Bill: running unregulated deposit-taking schemes (which includes advertising, operating, and accepting money for such schemes), fraudulently defaulting on the deposits made under a regulated deposit-taking scheme, and prompting investors to invest in unregulated deposit schemes by knowingly falsifying facts.

The first kind of offence has been made punishable by two to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 3 lakh to Rs 10 lakh.

The second kind of offence is punishable by imprisonment for three to 10 years, and fines ranging from Rs 2 lakh to double the amount collected from depositors. Repeat offenders may be punished by a five- to 10-year stint in prison, and fined between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 5 crore.

(The writer is a student of Ashoka University and an intern with The Indian Express)

# What's at stake in India's biggest ever trial of tuberculosis vaccines

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS  
PUNE, JULY 31

ON JULY 15, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) launched India's first large-scale trial for two new tuberculosis (TB) vaccines. As per the 2018 annual report of the Central TB division of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the incidence of TB was nearly 2.8 million annually, and the incidence of multidrug-resistant TB was 1,47,000 per year. The total number of deaths because of TB (excluding HIV) was 4,23,000, and the incidence of HIV-TB was 87,000 per year. India contributes to 27 per cent of the global TB burden; the highest share globally. That is why, in 2017, the central government had committed itself to eliminating TB by 2025.

The new vaccines that are being put through the trials offer a chance to contain the accelerating spread of multi-drug resistant TB. Treating TB requires a multi-drug

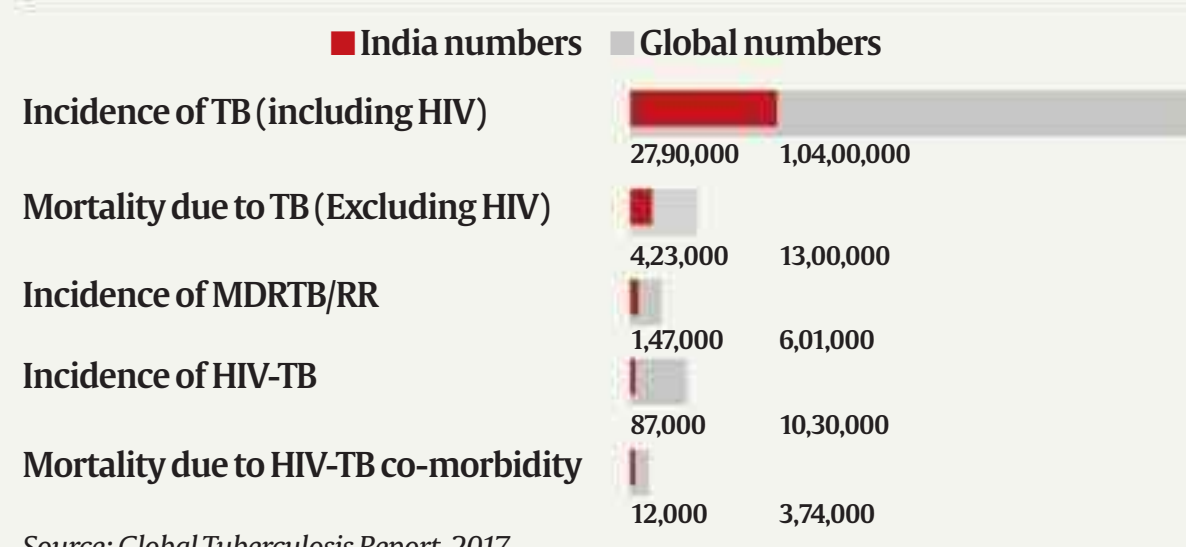
course of treatment lasting six months; longer still for treating drug-resistant TB. Treatment failure and recurrence can have devastating consequences.

### Why new vaccines

Scientists at the Indian Council of Medical Research have felt a critical need for new TB vaccines that are more effective than the Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine. The BCG vaccine is used in the routine Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) in countries across the world. It is generally given at birth or in the first year. The vaccine is over 100 years old and, while it has been partially effective in protecting infants and young children, particularly from the most severe forms of TB, it provides poor protection against pulmonary disease in adolescents and adults.

It is for these reasons a need was felt to develop more effective preventive TB vaccines, Dr Balram Bhargava, Director General of ICMR, said.

### ESTIMATES OF TB BURDEN IN INDIA AND THE WORLD



### Which vaccines

There are two vaccines being tested in the latest trial: Immuvac (also known as *Mycobacterium indicus pranii* or MIP), which is manufactured by Cadila

Pharmaceuticals in Ahmedabad, and VPM1002 manufactured by Serum Institute of India in Pune. There are seven main centres with six subsites where the trial will be conducted.





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I BUY CIVILISATION.  
— OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES JR.

## The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Reading 1919 in 2019



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

What does it mean to be in politics? Weber asked this question — its answer lies in questions that find an echo today

## SHORTCHANGED BY LAW

Triple talaq bill was passed without legislative scrutiny it required. Both government and Opposition must take blame

NEARLY TWO YEARS after the Supreme Court declared instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat as unconstitutional, Parliament has passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, outlawing the practice. In its nearly year-and-a-half long sojourn in Parliament, searching questions have been asked of the Bill's provisions. As a result of these deliberations, the legislation passed by the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday is somewhat different from the one introduced in the lower House in December 2017. The question, however, is: Has the government allayed all the major apprehensions about the Bill? Last year, it did introduce amendments to dilute the Bill's most contentious section — the criminality provision. "An offence punishable under this Act shall be cognisable, if information relating to the commission of the offence is given to an officer in charge of a police station by the married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced or any person related to her by blood or marriage," reads Clause 7 of the Bill — a climbdown from the original clause, which allowed anyone to file a complaint. Yet, the question remains: Why deem what is essentially a civil wrong as a criminal act? The government has failed to give a convincing response to the Opposition's criticism that a three-year prison term for a husband who pronounces triple talaq would end up doing the estranged wife more harm than good.

The government has deployed the argument of women's empowerment to counter every objection to the Bill. The imperative of gender justice is, indeed, compelling. It is also true that the Supreme Court judgment had recognised the discriminatory nature of triple talaq. However, the 3-2 verdict also spoke of the complexity of the issue and its fraught political milieu. In laying out the intertwined aspects — gender equality, freedom of religion and personal laws — the five-judge bench had put forth a language of reform without being oblivious of or disrespectful to the apprehensions and insecurities of the minority community. Evidently, however, the government did not take its cue from this landmark verdict. It did not make any attempt to strike a conversation with the minority community or put to rest fears that the bill is another ruse for majoritarian assertion — not even after Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his second stint in office by announcing "sabka vishwas" as his government's credo. In fact, in the current Monsoon Session of Parliament, the government used the weight of its numbers to ride roughshod over the Opposition's demand that the Bill be sent to a select committee.

The Opposition's conduct has also left much to be desired. After failing to offer substantive criticism when the Bill was first moved, it did close ranks. But developments on Tuesday indicate that it has lost its appetite for a fight — as many as 23 Opposition members were not present in the House. The triple talaq law required thorough legislative scrutiny. Both the government and the Opposition failed to provide it.

## GST RED FLAGS

Government must address issues raised by Comptroller and Auditor General, review indirect tax regime

THE SHIFT TO the goods and services tax (GST) regime marked a significant step towards the creation of a common national market. But the transition to this new indirect tax regime has been marred by implementation glitches. The compliance burden has not significantly eased, nor have revenue collections met expectations. These and many more issues have been dealt with in great detail by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in its audit report on indirect taxes. This careful report warrants a comprehensive review of the country's new indirect tax regime.

The audit report affirms the shortfall in government revenues post the shift to GST. It estimates that the Centre's revenues from goods and services (excluding central excise on petroleum and tobacco) fell by 10 per cent in 2017-18, as compared to the revenue of taxes subsumed under GST in 2016-17. It was hoped that over time, as the system stabilises, compliance levels would rise. But, as the audit finds out, there has been no improvement in filing of GSTR-3B returns. This needs further investigation. The avoidable physical interface with tax officials continues, as invoice matching — which is essentially matching sales and purchases of buyers and sellers — is still not operational, suggesting that the hope of an IT-based interface remains a distant dream. This has also left the system prone to input tax credit (ITC) frauds. The report has also flagged issues with regard to settlement of claims. It notes that the manner in which the government devolved Rs 67,998 crore under integrated GST to states was "against the provisions of Constitution of India." It has highlighted the issues of transitional credit (the carry forward of credit from the old tax regime to GST) which could have impacted central GST collections. But the issues don't end here. The IT audit of the goods and services tax network (GSTN) also points towards several shortcomings, not only in the GST registration but also in the payment module. Inexplicably, even the CAG's access to data, during its audit, was curtailed.

Part of the problem can be traced to the lack of co-ordination between stakeholders. There was also a failure to test the systems before rolling them out. While these system-related issues need to be addressed quickly, tinkering at the margins is unlikely to address the deeper, structural issues raised by the audit report. As the report points out, there are "serious systemic deficiencies that need to be addressed".

## STUFF AND NONSENSE

The world is mad at Richard Branson for rubbishing the material basis of happiness while being a tycoon

THE BEATLES SANG "money can't buy me love" and hit the top of the charts in 1964. Thirty-five years later, Paul McCartney had admitted to an interviewer that it should have read "can buy me love". The world awaits a similar correction from Richard Branson, who is being pilloried for blogging: "I truly believe that 'stuff' really does not bring happiness." The lightning conductors for joy, he declares, are "family, friends, good health and the satisfaction that comes from making a positive difference." It is a statement guaranteed to irritate people who are short on some of these attributes, and short on money, too.

Such pious homilies are generally deployed by religions and cults, to prevent the flock from feeling totally cheated by life. But to be fair, Branson is not suggesting that we must be glad in rags. He has been offering free happiness advice for a while, and has generally said that money is not a valid metric for success. He inverts traditional logic to suggest that happiness is the springboard for finding success and making money, and that nothing can be achieved without a sense of fun.

For a nation that once controlled half the world, the English are surprisingly fascinated by money, and the lack thereof. British reality TV programming generally has something running on the theme. The most recent show is *Rich House, Poor House*, in which economically unlike people swap homes for a while. The best-known is *Famous, Rich and Homeless*, where the prosperous rough it out. The idea is to highlight what the poor are deprived of, but these programmes invite the charge of being patronising. Which is exactly the charge that Branson has attracted, by devaluing the importance of money while swimming in the "stuff".

EXACTLY ONE HUNDRED years ago, Max Weber published what curiously still remains one of the few ruminations that touch on the subject: 'Politics as a Vocation'. Though published in July 1919, the lecture was delivered in January to Free Students Union at the University of Munich, against the backdrop of immense political upheaval: Germany's defeat in World War I, the spectre of Bolshevism, political assassinations and deep scepticism about parliamentary democracy. This was a companion piece to Weber's famous essay, 'Science as a Vocation'. Both essays had a common thread: What does it mean to invest a vocation with meaning in an age characterised by disenchantment and rationalisation? What does it mean to take "politics" or "science" both as a profession and as something deeper, a calling? What ethical commitments and character traits do they draw upon?

The lecture is a typical Weber performance that manages to combine clarity, ambivalence and disillusionment all at once. He begins by telling his audience that the lecture "will necessarily disappoint you." But the sense in which he is about to "disappoint" has various dimensions. Those coming to look for instructions were going to be disappointed. Instead of instruction, what Weber offers is thinking: Thinking about how politics functions as a human activity. In formal terms, it is an autonomous domain in its own right that cannot be reduced either to pure ethics or purely the necessity of economic interest.

Its specificity comes from the fact that it can never avoid the question of power and violence. In the course of delineating the specific nature of politics, and the circumstances under which it functions, Weber invents many of the categories of modern political sociology, including the definition of the state as the institution that strives to monopolise the means of legitimate violence. He, then, in typical fashion, delineates the various forms of political authority: Traditional, rational, legal and charismatic; the ambiguities of politics in an era of parties and patronage; the infirmities of parliamentarianism and so on. This consideration of the circumstances under which politics operates was meant to be a bath of sociological cold wa-

ter over the hot romanticism of politics. But Weber was offering a deeper sense, one that gives the lecture its unique pathos. For one, Weber seeks to use Karl Lowith's description, "tear down all veils from desirable objects." He stands against revolution, a form of politics blind to the immorality of means, and to the self-defeating nature of the political project. He stands against pacifism for making war more likely. Both the revolutionary and the pacifist have a hyper moralism in common. The revolutionary is guilty of two aspects of moralism: That the ends can justify any means, and he operates on the delusion that the world can and ought to exactly mirror one ideal. The pacifist is a hyper moralist in the reverse direction: A moralism that pays no heed to consequences. Then there are the typical tensions Weber has to navigate. Weber is a thoroughgoing value pluralist, who nevertheless has to explain how we can, in a world of diverse values, act as if ours actually mattered.

Weber is frustrated with social democrats, assorted parliamentarians and centrists, for their indecision and pettiness. He is a thorough nationalist, one of the early ones to see it as an ideology that confers meaning in a disenchanted world in a way that is unrivalled. But he also sees how delusional nationalism can become. He is an ambivalent liberal, who sees how anaemic it can become in some circumstances, to almost invite charismatic disruption. He sees the psychological attractions of demagoguery; but is also the most prescient about its dangers. "The mere 'power politician', a type whom an energetically promoted cult is seeking to glorify here in Germany as elsewhere, may give the impression of strength, but in fact his actions merely lead into emptiness and absurdity." He describes the ideal politician as combining passion, responsibility and judgement; yet, at the same time, no one recognises the internal tensions between the three qualities more acutely than Weber.

But there is an even deeper "disappointment" in the essay. For his immediate audience, of course, he offers no consolation, "not the flowering of summer but a polar night of icy darkness and hardness." The power of the essay a hundred years later is in conveying the sense in which the ordinary political agent can feel a sense of suffocation. Politics can often oscillate between the routine power grabs of patronage politics on the one hand, or the romantic delusions on the other. It can oscillate between the expectation that it attends to routine and mundane tasks; on the other hand, it also should provide the thrill and vicariousness that lift us out of our ordinary existence. It is exactly a world that makes moderation, responsibility and judgement so rare and fragile.

The world Weber described was, in some respects, not too far from the world we inhabit: What is the form of political action available, when constitutional forms are decimated, when the application of brute force becomes the norm, when the purpose of politics is a periodic diversion, to keep us in thrall of vicarious excitement? To what 'ends' do we attach ourselves? To what forms of organising power do we hitch our star, when even organisations like parties are dead? What forms of collective action are possible when unity in the face of big challenges either flounders on the shoals of an impossible goal of unanimity, or is subverted by reducing politics to mere short-term interest?



SHAZIA ILMI

## TAKING DOWN PATRIARCHY

The Narendra Modi government has finally succeeded in abolishing triple talaq

THE CONSTITUTION OF India, inspired by the lofty ideals of the wise women and men who made it, clearly mentions that there will be no discrimination on the basis of gender. The Fundamental Duties highlight the need to renounce practices that are derogatory to the dignity of women.

Yet, for 72 long years since we began to breathe the air of freedom, the practice of triple talaq remained in our system, an ugly aberration and a living testimony to the power of fundamentalism over rationality. By and large, previous governments accepted this as a part of faith and refused to correct this wrong. Recently, the Supreme Court of India made important observations on triple talaq as well.

It took a determined push by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure that this archaic practice is finally abolished in India. PM Modi is perhaps amongst the only leaders in the last several decades to publicly talk about ending triple talaq. He did so during his years as Gujarat chief minister but this stand became stronger after he assumed office: He used his 2018 Red Fort address to assure Muslim women that this practice would become history.

The manner in which Modi has ensured this practice is abolished provides a lesson

or two in political will, statesmanship and bipartisanship. Many leaders espouse many causes but during the journey from ideation to implementation, there lie huge gaps.

The potential setbacks Modi faced since he actively began talking about ending triple talaq were many. Critics saw his utterances only as election-related. Initial attempts to clear the Bill in the Rajya Sabha were not successful and the conservative Muslim elements had a field day in branding Modi as "anti-Muslim". Yet, he did not lose will and persisted till the very end: This was a personal commitment and he would not accept inability as a way out.

For Modi to use so much of his political capital for a community perceived to be hostile to him manifests a welcome spirit of statesmanship. After all, vote bank politics can be a deadly pill. The manner in which Rajiv Gandhi pandered to conservative elements during the Shah Bano judgement is a masterclass of political cowardice and social indifference. He had a great opportunity to turn wrong into right but instead, he was more bothered about a handful of votes.

It must not be forgotten that all this while, the Modi government and the PM himself, have been talking about ending triple talaq

knowing fully well that the numbers in the Rajya Sabha are not in their favour. On previous occasions, the Bill could not even be introduced in the Rajya Sabha. However, the vote in the Upper House on July 30 gives valuable lessons in floor management and consensus building. Parties not with the NDA were roped in as well and the Bill was passed.

The bankrupt politics of the Opposition, especially the Congress, came to the fore once again during the Rajya Sabha debate. Frivolous issues were invented to defend a medieval practice. From preventing the Bill from being introduced to filibustering, their antics stand exposed. They too, like the BJP today, had a strong majority in Parliament: But while they used it to defend patriarchy, the BJP went the extra mile to fight for gender justice.

When the history of our times is written, it will be said that just before India's 73rd Independence Day, the Narendra Modi government, powered by the zeal of the prime minister, gave real freedom to Muslim women who were subjugated to exploitation and terror for no fault of theirs. May this struggle inspire us to overcome many social evils and move towards a more progressive and gender sensitive society.

The writer is a spokesperson of the BJP



## AUGUST 1, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

**CWC MEET**  
THE CONGRESS WORKING Committee will meet on August 2 to discuss the proposal for calling a meeting of the pre-split AICC soon. It will also discuss the proposal for the merger of the Congress and the Janata (S). The first proposal has come from Devaraj Urs, the chief minister of Karnataka. He met Swaran Singh, Congress president. The second proposal was publicly announced by Raj Narain, Janata (S) chairman, in Karnataka Bhavan on July 28. Answering questions at the Press Club of India in Delhi yesterday, Urs said the Congress-Janata (S) merger proposal should be considered "very seriously".

**CRITIQUING AIR**  
ALL INDIA RADIO'S newsmen are in the dock. Their performance during the current political crisis is being subjected to a close scrutiny by the new Information and Broadcasting minister, Purshottam Kaushik. One of the first things Kaushik did on his first day in office was to call for an "analysis" of the coverage of political events by AIR's news services division in the last few days. Incidentally, submission of this "analysis" to the new minister was the last thing I P Tewari had to do as the director of news. He retired today. Kaushik gave a piece of his mind while addressing officers of the ministry today, emphasising that AIR should satisfy itself about

the veracity of news before putting it out.

**MNF PLAN EXPOSED**  
THE OUTLAWED MIZO National Front had planned to carry out a blitzkrieg on Aizawl, and other district headquarters towns on or around Independence day. The plot has come to light through the interrogation of the half-a-dozen men of the "special task force" of the Mizo National Army, who were captured at Melthum about 10 km from Aizawl and two other rebel hideouts on the outskirts of the capital. The special task force had also been assigned the job of liquidating some VIPs, including the Lt Governor, N P Mathur, and chief minister, Brigadier Sailo.



# Power, not justice

Criminalising triple divorce violates the first principles of criminal jurisprudence, will be counterproductive



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

THE MUCH TALKED about Triple Talaq Bill (TTB) has finally been passed by both Houses of Parliament. The Union law minister justified it as an issue of gender justice and admitted that there have been just 473 cases of triple divorce in the last two years. This admission proves two things: One, the incidence of triple divorce is negligible and the issue was blown out of proportion for political reasons and two, the penal provision in the ordinance had no deterrent effect. That Muslim countries too penalise triple divorce was the third justification for the law but this is factually incorrect — there is a distinction between an act being declared “invalid” and being made an “offence”. The Supreme Court declared triple divorce as invalid and did not ask the government to make it a penal offence.

In fact, the day the Lok Sabha passed this regressive law, newspapers reported that the former Malaysian king, who recently abandoned the throne, announced that he has given triple divorce to his Russian wife. Triple divorce has not gone out of use in the Muslim world. Can we say that since Indian law punishes murders and rapes, no murder or rape is committed in India?

Muslim countries serve as poor examples for gender-just laws. Unlike Muslim men, in almost all Muslim countries, women cannot marry Christians or Jews. In some, they have a duty to “obey their husband” and need his permission to work or go outside the home. Their testimony has half the value of that of men. In some countries, a rapist can escape punishment if he marries the victim. Even on the issue of custody of children and maintenance, laws in Muslim countries are regressive as mothers can get the custody of a son only till he attains the age of 10 and a daughter till she attains the age of 12. And she loses custody on her remarriage. They punish adultery and apostasy with death.

Every punishment which does not arise from absolute necessity, according to Montesquieu, is tyrannical. In fact, criminal law should be used only as a “last resort” (ultima ratio) and only for the “most reprehensible wrongs”. The TTB is an instance of the unnecessary invocation of criminal sanctions.

Consider three current debates in our criminal justice system: One, we have decriminalised breaches of matrimonial faith in the form of adultery. Two, we decriminalised homosexuality though it has been punishable for centuries in all religions and legal systems. Three, we are not able to criminalise “marital rape” despite our revulsion to it. If something is a “sin”, let God punish the sinner. A civilised legal system should not enforce religious morality. The Wolfenden Committee Report (1957) in England clearly said that “unless a deliberate attempt is to be made by society, acting through the agency of the law, to equate the sphere of crime with that of sin, there must remain a realm of private morality and immorality which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law’s business.”

The fact that triple divorce is a “sin” under Islamic law was admitted even by the Narendra Modi government in its affidavit in the *Shayara Bano* case. Yet, we are set to penalise this breach of religious morality through the instrumentality of criminal law. BJP MPs did argue during the debate on the



Suvajit Dey

TTB that since triple talaq is sinful, it can be penalised. Are we going in the direction of religious theocracy?

From another angle, too, triple divorce is a unique case where the law is dictating to the orthodox Hanafi Muslim woman to continue in a relationship she considers sinful. If she thinks that as per her sect, her marriage has come to an end, forcing the continuance of sexual relations is nothing but tyranny unleashed by the law, which seriously undermines individual choice and autonomy. On the one hand, we have the bogey of so-called “love jihad” deployed to curtail the freedom to marry a person of one’s choice and on the other hand, Muslim women are forced to continue with same abusive husband who has given them instant triple divorce. We cannot say that the issue of women’s entry into the Sabarimala temple is a question of faith and triple divorce is an issue of gender justice. This is hypocrisy of the highest order. Moreover, instant triple divorce should not be a crime when it is pronounced at the request of the wife. We should not curtail this right of Muslim women.

Unfortunately, “crimes” originate in government policy and, therefore, criminal law reflects the idea of “power” rather than “justice”. This was evident in the recent amendments to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The state in its discretion deems certain acts as crimes as per its own electoral or other needs. The state may decide to criminalise and decriminalise almost anything.

A crime consists of wrongdoing which directly and to a serious degree threatens the security or well being of society, and because it is not safe to redress it only by compensation to the injured party. The purpose of criminal law is to forbid and prevent conduct that unjustifiably and inexcusably inflicts or threatens substantial harm to individual or public interests. Since the Supreme Court has set aside triple divorce, it can no longer dissolve marriages and thus causes no harm at all. It no longer threatens the security and well-being of the society. Mukhtar Abbas

From another angle, too, triple divorce is a unique case where the law is dictating to the orthodox Hanafi Muslim woman to continue in a relationship she considers sinful. If she thinks that as per her sect, her marriage has come to an end, forcing the continuance of sexual relations is nothing but tyranny unleashed by the law, which seriously undermines individual choice and autonomy. On the one hand, we have the bogey of so-called ‘love jihad’ deployed to curtail the freedom to marry a person of one’s choice and on the other hand, Muslim women are forced to continue with same abusive husband who has given them instant triple divorce.

Naqvi, in his speech in the Lok Sabha, said that government has now made it a bailable offence. He is wrong. A bailable offence is one where bail is a right and cannot be denied. Under the TT Bill, bail is at the discretion of the judge and thus, it is non-bailable. Moreover, we have restricted even this judicial discretion by laying down that it can be exercised by the judge only after hearing the wife on whom talaq has been pronounced.

Criminal law should not be used if it may not be effective in controlling the act in question. The triple divorce law is bound to fail, especially in cases of oral triple divorce given by husbands when no one other than the couple was present, as discharging the burden of proof will be a Himalayan task for the prosecution. We are doing a huge disservice to Muslim women as no husband on his return from jail is likely to retain the wife on whose complaint he had gone to prison. The Bill will lead to more divorces and abandonment. The remedy to tackle triple divorce is thus worse than the disease. Ideally, the marriage contract must lay down that a husband can give divorce only with the consent of the wife and if he gives three unilateral divorces in one go, the dowry amount will be increased to five times. In case of non-payment, a prison term would be justifiable as under civil law, non-payment of debt does lead to imprisonment.

A punishment, to be just, should have only that degree of severity which is sufficient to deter others. Punishments invariably exceed the crime and this, in the ultimate analysis, harms the state. Three years’ imprisonment in the new Bill is excessive and is disproportionate. The Indian Penal Code provides far lesser sentences for graver crimes. The TTB obliterates the distinction between “minor” and “major” crimes.

Criminal law’s promise of safety is matched by its power to destroy. Let us hope the Bill will not be misused.

The writer is vice-chancellor, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. Views are personal

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The tactics employed by the state to neutralise the capacity of Pakistan-based militant groups to wreak mayhem are becoming more finely tuned and comprehensive.”

—DAWN

## A familiar despair

Karnataka drama carries a sense of déjà vu — people are betrayed again by the politicians



SHASHI DESHPANDE

WATCHING THE end of the drama in the Karnataka Assembly, I had a sense of déjà vu. Hadn’t we seen this same picture last year, the same flashing V-for-victory signs by some, the same slinking out in silence by others? Now, yet again, one set of actors have exited the stage and another troupe is preparing to step in. But the same play goes on. Will it make any difference to the voters?

Since this battle between the ruling parties and the Opposition began, and the “rebels” retreated to a place where they could not be reached, it has been clear that this is a coup, a well-planned and well-executed coup, perhaps part of a Great Plan. The coup has accomplished what it set out to do: The fall of the Congress-JDS coalition government. Karnataka is no stranger to the toppling of governments. In fact, only three chief ministers have completed their five years in office. Each time this tussle for power happens, all parties bandy the word “democracy”, they speak of the will of the people. Each time there are “rebels” who are pawns in the game of toppling, pawns who are in it for what they can get. In fact, the word “rebel” is a total misnomer. Rebels fight for a cause, they suffer for their cause. Whereas, these “rebels” safely ensconced themselves in a luxury hotel with the local government acting as their guardian angel. No army of medieval times living in a heavily guarded fortress could have been more secure. And when they came to Bengaluru to hand in their resignations, they came on a chartered flight. Who paid for all these things? Perhaps the more fitting word for these men is “turncoats”.

In the last few days, the people of Karnataka have witnessed the most unedifying spectacle of thoroughly unprincipled behaviour by all politicians. This is not new. Each time it happens we think, this is the worst, they can’t go lower than this. But they do. Horse trading is another word being much used. Horse traders, I am sure, were more honourable men; they were open about their profession, they did not claim that what they were doing was for the good of the people. And it is unfair to bring horses into this ugly game: Horses are beautiful, noble animals. They don’t cheat, they run their hearts out for the men and women who ride them.

In his brilliant short story, ‘A Piece of the Wall’, Kannada writer Bolwar Mahammad Kunhi has a poor old woman worshipping the then-chief minister Devaraj Urs as a god, because it was during his tenure that she got a piece of land. God he certainly was not, but he was responsible for a number of reforms, including land reforms which

benefited the poor. There have been chief ministers like K Hanumanthaiah, S Nijalingappa, Veerendra Patil and Ramakrishna Hegde who brought dignity to the post of chief minister. After Hegde, S M Krishna’s government was the only one which gave the people a sense of a government that worked. Since then, it has only been a tussle for power, either within the ruling party, or with the Opposition party. The last few years have been the most dismal. Almost nothing has been done. While the government was fire-fighting, the opposition gloating, and the rebels in their safe space, the people of Bengaluru went to work as usual, braving the terrible chaotic traffic, negotiating through pot-hole-pitted roads. It is no longer a city in which it is a pleasure to live. Garbage piles up on roads, five-star hospitals and posh residential schools are mushrooming. And the middle-class and the poor struggle to give their children a reasonably-priced education, or to get good medical care without bankrupting themselves. And this is Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka, the richest city in the state. What can one say about the rest of the state? Recently, a meeting was held in the city’s Freedom Park, to express total disgust at the politicians in the state, where a novel, if rather crude way of showing contempt for politicians was adopted. Yet, amazingly, politicians seem to be totally oblivious to voters’ feelings. H D Kumaraswamy, after he was defeated, spoke of continuing to work for the poor, Yediyurappa called it a victory for democracy. Whom are they fooling? Dystopia, we now know, is not tomorrow, or in the distant future; it is now, here, today.

This is a shameful time for the people of Karnataka. We, the voters, are ashamed. After all, we voted these people into power. But what choice did we have? The main problem is: How do we punish those who changed sides for money? How do we make sure the brazenly corrupt find no place in politics? How do we channel our anger, our despair into something that will make an impact on the system, since politicians have shown themselves to be as thick-skinned as buffaloes? All that people ask for is good honest governance. This seems to have become the lowest priority in a politician’s agenda. How do we fight them? Or have we become so blasé, so cynical, that we accept things the way they are?

In *After Blenheim*, a poem by Robert Southey, an old man tells his grandson that a famous battle was fought on the ground where they now live. Why was the battle fought? I don’t know, he tells the child, but they say it was a famous victory.

Victory, or what kind of victory, we have to wait and see. The drama is not yet over; there is still another act, or perhaps more than one to follow. If it is a victory, it will be an infamous, rather than a famous one. But for us, the voters, the question remains: Whom do we vote for in the next elections?

Deshpande is a Bengaluru-based writer

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### UNNAO QUESTIONS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Unnao indictment’ (IE, July 19). The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh, which was expected to go beyond electoral politics, looks to be a replica of other governments on the issue of law and order. Why did Yogi Adityanath not take cognisance of the seriousness of the issue when the victim tried to immolate herself? Why did the BJP not find it fit to expel the MLA after his highly questionable conduct and merely suspended him? The UP government must realise that if it is serious about slogans like “Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao” — put forth by its own party at the Centre — it should take upon itself to create an atmosphere where women can live with dignity.

Anupama Goswami, Mumbai

### ERUDITE ORATOR

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘A true liberal’ (IE, July 30). The late Jaipal Reddy, besides being a prominent and long-term parliamentarian, was an erudite orator. He had knowledge of diverse subjects and his speeches would always enrich the quality of the debate in Parliament.

B K Kamboj, Gurugram

### DOPING BAN

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘Podium protests’ (IE, July 30). Chinese swimmer Sun Yang was allowed to compete in the FINA World Championships although he was served a suspension for doping in 2014. Should someone who has once doped be banned for life from competing? Recent research suggests that an athlete who consumes muscle-building substances, such as steroids and testosterone, could retain

### 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](mailto: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.

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the benefits of their use throughout his/her career. In the mid-’90s, Anders Eriksson of Umea University, Sweden, established that the effects of muscle-building steroids are long-lasting or even irreversible.

Subhamay Ray, Kolkata

### GETTING HOT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Cool down’ (IE, July 30). The editorial is smart and funny. But the ability of Indians to adapt to heatwaves could only be a boon in the short term. We should be focussing on controlling global warming and climate change. Because I’m afraid that after some time, even *dhotis* and *gamchas* will not serve any purpose.

Divyam Khandelwal, Jaipur



ABHISHEK KULKARNI

## Aiming for the moon

Instead of counselling fiscal prudence, let’s ask for more funds for space projects

SPACE IS the final frontier for mankind’s thirst of exploration and adventure. For all the anti-adventurists and killjoys, there are some obvious real-world applications in agriculture, telecom, weather forecasting, defence, medicine, natural resources and rare elements. Humans could become a space-faring species in another 30 years, perhaps even before if Elon Musk gets his way.

After the Apollo missions were completed, the world somehow lost interest in lunar missions. Scientists and space enthusiasts were still hopeful but public support faded away. For the next 50 years or so, a large number of the rocket launches made by the space organisations of the world were to put satellites in lower earth orbits, basically for communications and, let’s face it, for snooping on other countries. A relatively smaller number of missions were academically motivated.

The remarkable feats achieved by ISRO on July 22 and in other previous missions have made all Indians proud. Mostly because of two reasons: First, the critical parts of this mission — cryogenics, the orbiter, lander and the rover — are all indigenously developed. And second, the estimated cost of this project is Rs 978 crore only. I know putting “only” after that figure will surely raise eyebrows but

do a Google search and compare it with what other space agencies have spent to achieve similar successes. Fun fact: The last Avengers movie was made at a cost of Rs 2,443 crore. It is in this context that I disagree with your editorial, ‘Another giant leap’ (IE, July 23) which counsels fiscal prudence on space missions.

Chandrayaan 2 was scheduled as early as 2011-12 in collaboration with Roskosmos. Failure in their Mars mission and following delays in the delivery of the lander forced the Russians to back out from the agreement signed on November 12, 2007. This led ISRO to develop the mission entirely in-house, which they did in a very short time. On July 15, the snag during the final countdown and the temporary cancellation of the launch may have given a reason to the international media and other space agencies to second-guess India’s capabilities. But within a week, with a successful launch and that too with a very narrow launch window, ISRO made a statement, not with just words but with action.

### DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A fortnightly column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of ‘The Indian Express’

Another example of the genius of our scientists was emphasised when they had to test the in-house made rover on a moon-like surface. The moon’s surface is covered with craters, rocks and dust and its soil is of a different texture as compared to the earth’s. Importing lunar soil-like substance from the US was costly, hence ISRO decided to get “anorthosite” rocks from a couple of Tamil Nadu villages. They then crushed these rocks to the desired specifications and sent it to a test facility at Bengaluru, which resulted in huge savings. Scientists from NIT Tiruchirappalli, Periyar University, Salem and IISc Bengaluru worked on this project.

The remarkable part, however, is not the lower costs of these missions but the efficiency and the rate of success of these missions.

Though Chandrayaan 2 has been splendidly covered by *The Indian Express*, the conclusion of the editorial is somewhat discouraging from a scientist’s point of view.

Government spending on flagship pro-

grammes has increased several times during the past couple of decades, while their return on investment both monetarily and in terms of standard of living is sub-par. On the other hand, there are certain expenditures for which the real motivation is the misguided notion of patriotism. For example, the Statue of Unity has an estimated cost of Rs 2,966 crore and the proposed Shivaji statue is estimated to cost Rs 3,600 crore. I am not against the commemoration of our national heroes, but can we not make their memorials less extravagant and give rest of the money to institutions like ISRO, DRDO and NDMA?

In India, where most government institutions eventually end up spending more than what was initially proposed, ISRO is an exception. Immediately after this success, rather than pivoting the zeitgeist towards supporting the organisation through more funding and resources, we are cautioning the agency to set its priorities right and have asked it to show fiscal prudence. That does not seem fair.

So yes, Dear Editor, I disagree with the conclusion of your editorial.

The writer is an Aurangabad, Maharashtra-based engineer and a space research enthusiast





## Beyond talaq

India needs a non-sectarian, gender-neutral law that addresses desertion of spouses

Both Houses of Parliament have passed a Bill making instant triple talaq a criminal offence, amidst persistent doubts whether it ought to be treated as a crime or just a civil case. It is true that the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019, is a diluted version of the Bill as it was originally conceived. Earlier, it did not specify who could set the law in motion. Now the offence is cognisable only if the affected wife, or one related to her by blood or marriage, files a police complaint. A man arrested under this law may get bail, after the Magistrate grants a hearing to the wife. Thirdly, the offence is compoundable, that is, the parties may arrive at a compromise. The government says its main objective is to give effect to the Supreme Court's 2017 verdict declaring instant triple talaq illegal. It claims that despite the court ruling, several instances have been reported. Making it an offence, the government says, will deter further resort to triple talaq, and provide redress for women in the form of a subsistence allowance and custody of children, besides getting the erring husband arrested. However, the core question regarding the necessity to criminalise the practice of *talaq-e-biddat* has not been convincingly answered.

In the light of the Supreme Court ruling on its validity, there is really no need to declare instant triple talaq a criminal offence. The practice has no approval in Islamic tenets, and is indeed considered abhorrent. Secondly, once it has been declared illegal, pronouncing talaq obviously does not have the effect of "instantaneous and irrevocable divorce" as this Bill claims in its definition of 'talaq'. The provisions that allow a woman to claim a subsistence allowance from the man and seek custody of her children can be implemented in the event of the husband abandoning her, even without the man's arrest. If triple talaq, in any form, is void, how the questions of children's custody and subsistence allowance arise while the marriage subsists, is not clear. And then, there is the practical question of how a man can provide a subsistence allowance while he is imprisoned. It has been argued by the Bill's proponents that dowry harassment and cruelty towards wives are treated as criminal offences even while the marriage subsists. It is a patently wrong comparison, as those acts involve violence and cruelty and are rightly treated as criminal offences. The same cannot be said of a man invoking a prohibited form of divorce. The BJP projects the passage of the Bill as a historic milestone in the quest for gender justice. Such a claim will be valid only if there is a non-sectarian law that addresses abandonment and desertion of spouses as a common problem instead of focusing on a practice, which is no more legally valid, among Muslims.

## Logged out

Brazil must recognise that the Amazon rainforest is a universal treasure

It is a matter of global concern that deforestation in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil is increasing rapidly since January, when Jair Bolsonaro took office as President. Satellite images show that about 4,200 sq km of forests have been destroyed up to July 24 under the new government. While most nations tend to view their land and forests through the narrow prism of short-term economic gain, climate science data show that they play a larger environmental role. The Amazon basin, spread across millions of hectares in multiple countries, hosts massive sinks of sequestered carbon, and the forests are a key factor in regulating monsoon systems. The rainforests harbour rich biodiversity and about 400 known indigenous groups whose presence has prevented commercial interests from overrunning the lands. Much of the Amazon has survived, despite relentless pressure to convert forests into farmlands, pastures and gold mines, and to build roads. That fragile legacy is now imperilled, as Mr. Bolsonaro has spoken in favour of "reasonable" exploitation of these lands. Although the forest code has not been changed, his comments have emboldened illegal expansion into forests. Armed gold-hunting gangs have reached tribal areas and the leader of one tribe has been murdered in Amapa in an incursion. These are depressing developments, and the Brazilian leader's criticism of satellite data and denial of the violence are not convincing at all.

As the custodian of forests in about 5 million sq km of Amazon land, Brazil has everything to gain by engaging with the international community on meeting the opportunity cost of leaving the Amazon undisturbed. Mr. Bolsonaro lost a valuable opportunity to seek higher funding for forest protection by refusing to host the annual convention of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change this year, but he has been wise not to exit the Paris Agreement. Abandoning that pact would jeopardise Brazil's access to the important European Union market. Globally, there is tremendous momentum to save the Amazon forests. Brazil must welcome initiatives such as the billion-dollar Amazon Fund backed by Norway and Germany, which has been operating for over a decade, instead of trying to shut them down. Remedial funding, accounting for the value of environmental services, is the most productive approach, because forest removal has not helped agriculture everywhere due to soil and other factors. One estimate by the World Bank some years ago noted that 15 million hectares had been abandoned due to degradation. Brazil's President must recognise that rainforests are universal treasures, and the rights of indigenous communities to their lands are inalienable. The international community must use diplomacy to convince Mr. Bolsonaro that no other formulation is acceptable.

# In hate crime fight, a voice still feeble

Taking the cue from the U.S., the Indian Parliament needs to recognise hate killings as an act of terror



HARSH MANDER

At a time when India is reeling under hate lynching, it is sobering to remember that it took the United States Senate 100 years to approve a bill to make lynching a federal crime. Over 200 anti-lynching bills were introduced in the U.S. Congress since 1918, but all were voted down until the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act of 2018 introduced by three Senators of African-American descent including Kamala Harris was approved unanimously in the winter of 2018.

The U.S. bill describes lynching as "the ultimate expression of racism in the United States". Senator Cory Booker said the bill recognised lynching for what it is: "a bias-motivated act of terror". When will Parliament here recognise, similarly, that lynching is "a bias-motivated act of terror" and "the ultimate expression of communal hatred in India"?

### Tool of fear

Some may dispute this description, citing the relatively small numbers of such mob crimes. They miss the point that hate lynching is designed as an act to terrorise an entire community. The number of lynch murders in the U.S. mentioned in the bill averages around 55 annually, but despite these small numbers, these performative acts of violence succeeded in instilling intense fear among all African-Americans for decades.

The same purpose is being served by lynching in India; again performative acts of hate violence, but now using modern technology, video-graphing of mob lynching, widely circulating these images through social media, and

celebrating these as acts of nationalist valour. These have similarly instilled a pervasive sense of everyday normalised fear in the hearts of every Indian from the targeted minority community. It is this which indeed makes lynching an ultimate act of terror.

The Supreme Court of India recently asked the Union government and all the major States to explain what action has been taken to prevent these growing incidents of lynching, including passing a special law to instil a sense of fear for law amongst vigilantes and mobsters. Kunwar Danish Ali, a first term Bahujan Samaj Party MP from Amroha, raised the same question in Parliament, describing mob lynching as "an assault on democracy". His inquiry was met with noisy disruptions, but he got no answer.

### Significant statutes

The Uttar Pradesh Law Commission (UPLC) earlier last month took the initiative, unprompted by the Uttar Pradesh government, to recommend a draft anti-lynching law. It commends a law which closely follows in almost every major detail the first law against lynching passed in this country, a remarkable ordinance introduced by the Manipur government late last year, indeed the most significant statute against religious hate crimes in the country.

A noteworthy observation in the text of the United States bill is that it records that at least 4,742 people were lynched in the U.S. between 1882 and 1968, but 99% of all perpetrators remain unpunished. It is significant to remember that the first anti-lynching legislation proposed as far back as in 1918 in the U.S. targeted state officials for failing to provide equal protection under the laws to anyone victimised by a mob. Impunity characterises lynching in India as well. Addressing this squarely, both the Manipur statute and the UPLC draft create a new crime of dereliction of duty by police offi-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

cials, holding a police officer guilty of this crime if he or she "omits to exercise lawful authority vested in them under law, without reasonable cause, and thereby fails to prevent lynching". Dereliction also includes the failure to provide protection to a victim of lynching; failure to act upon apprehended lynching; and refusing to record any information relating to the commission of lynching. This crime carries the penalty of one to three years and a fine. The UPLC goes further to include also a new crime of dereliction of duty by District Magistrates.

The creation of this new crime was also the key recommendation of the Prevention of Communal & Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, proposed by the National Advisory Council of the erstwhile United Progressive Alliance government (full disclosure: Farah Naqvi and I were co-convenors of the working group which drafted this proposed bill, which however was never even introduced in Parliament). We were convinced that it is only the creation of such a crime that will compel public officials to perform their duty with fairness, in conformity with their constitutional and legal duties, to ensure equal protection to all persons, regardless of their faith and caste.

### Some recommendations

Both the Manipur law and UPLC recommendations also lay down elaborate duties of police officials in the event of lynching. These include taking all reasonable steps to prevent any act of lynching including its incitement and commis-

sion; to that end making all possible efforts to identify instances of dissemination of offensive material or any other means employed in order to incite or promote lynching of a particular person or group of persons; and making all possible efforts to prevent the creation of a hostile environment against a person or group of persons.

Both sensitively and expansively lay down official duties to protect victims and witnesses. They state that a victim shall have the right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any court proceeding and shall be entitled to be heard at any proceeding in respect of bail, discharge, release, parole, conviction or sentence of an accused, and to file written submissions on conviction, acquittal or sentencing. They also explicitly require the Superintendent of Police to inform the victim in writing of the progress in the investigation. The victim shall have the right to receive a copy of any statement of the witness recorded during investigation or inquiry and a copy of all statements and documents.

Where the UPLC goes further than the Manipur statute is in laying down the right to compensation. It places the duty squarely on the Chief Secretary to provide compensation to victims of lynching within 30 days of the incident. It states that while computing compensation, the State government must give due regard to bodily, psychological and material injuries and loss of earnings, including loss of opportunity of employment and education, expenses incurred on account of legal and medical assistance. It also lays down a floor of ₹25 lakh in case lynching causes death.

The Congress government of Madhya Pradesh has announced its resolve to pass legal provisions against lynching. It chooses curiously not to do this by an anti-lynching law, but instead by amendments to the Madhya Pradesh Cow Progeny Slaughter Pre-

vention Act 2004 (which would effectively limit its scope only to cow-related lynching, and not lynching triggered by other charges).

Its proposed amendments do not include any provisions to punish dereliction of duty, protect victim rights or secure compensation. All that it proposes is punishment for any act by a mob which indulges in violence in the name of cow vigilantism from six months to three years of imprisonment and a fine. It is unclear what deterrence such amendments would instil, since existing laws contain much greater punishments for murder and aggravated attacks. In its present form, it appears a weak, half-hearted and poorly thought-out measure. The Ashok Gehlot-led government in Rajasthan has also tabled an anti-lynching bill. This prescribes higher punishments, investigation by senior police officers, and mandatory compensation but not the critical elements of dereliction of duty or victim rights. Without these, they will make little difference on the ground.

Home Minister Amit Shah now heads a committee to propose action against lynching. The question remains: do we expect Mr. Shah, or indeed Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to propose a law against lynching which punishes public officials who fail in their duties, protects victims and witnesses, and ensures comprehensive reparation, as proposed by the UPLC and provided in the Manipur statute?

"Someone is finally recognising our pain," said the great-granddaughter of Anthony Crawford, an African American, who was lynched in 1916. I wonder how long survivors of lynching who lost their loved ones to merciless mob hate in India will have to wait for a government which will recognise their pain.

Harsh Mander is a human rights worker, writer and teacher

# Fortifying the Africa outreach

There is a disconnect between India's developmental assistance to and economic engagement with the continent



MAHESH SACHDEV

This week two important Indian dignitaries began their respective visits to Africa. President Ram Nath Kovind commenced his seven-day state visit to Benin, Gambia and Guinea-Conakry (July 28 to August 3) and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh arrived in Maputo on a three-day visit (July 28 to July 30) to Mozambique. The simultaneity of the two visits may be a coincidence, but it also indicates enhanced priority to Africa. This should be welcomed.

### Economic links

During the past five years, Indian leaders have paid 29 visits to African countries. Forty-one African leaders participated in the last India-Africa Forum Summit in 2015, where India agreed to provide concessional credit worth \$10 billion during the next five years. By 2017, India had cumulatively extended 152 Lines of Credit worth \$8 billion to 44 African countries. India has also unilaterally provided free access to its market for the exports of 33 least developed African countries. These sizeable ef-

forts are also noteworthy for being countercyclical: India escalated its commitments to Africa in an era of low-commodity prices when most other partners, including China, have scaled back theirs.

India has substantive economic engagement with Africa. Its trade with Africa totalled \$63.3 billion in 2018-19. India was ranked the third largest trading partner of Africa having edged past the United States during the year. The figures for Indians' investments (estimated at \$50 billion) and Indian diaspora (approximately three million) are a bit imprecise but are also substantive when put in the continental perspective. Although these statistics are impressive, they are well below the potential for India-African economic synergy and are often dwarfed by the corresponding Chinese data.

There seems to be a conspicuous disconnect between Indian developmental assistance to and India's economic engagement with Africa. The time has now come to integrate these two axes for a more comprehensive and sustainable engagement. It would also facilitate aided pilot projects being scaled up seamlessly into commercially viable joint ventures.

Any objective cost-benefit analysis of India's development assistance to Africa is unlikely to impress. From the demand to



remove the statues of Mahatma Gandhi in Ghana to the travails of Indian investors in Africa, from occasional demonisation of the long-standing Indian community to the non-recognition of Indian academic degrees, India's large developmental footprint in Africa does not produce commensurate empathy. India's aid being unconditional, the recipients often take it as an entitlement.

But India is neither a rich country nor has its hands been tainted by a history of slavery, colonisation and the exploitation of Africa. In fact, it is a developing country with similar domestic challenges of poverty, infrastructure deficit and underdevelopment. India's funds committed and seats in our prestigious academic institutions offered to Africa are at the expense of the tax-paying Indians. India's aid to Africa should be reciprocated by acknowledgement and quid pro quo in terms of goodwill (beyond the easy-flowing official rhetoric), and institutional preference. India cannot simply be a

cash cow for Africa, particularly when its own economy is slowing down.

### Steps forward

We need to ask ourselves these: for all the development billions spent, how many mega-projects did Indian companies get and how many natural resources does India have access to in Africa? We should reorient our developmental profile to be more economically productive.

To this end, a number of steps can be considered: First, we need to take direct control of our development programme instead of handing our funds to intermediaries such as the African Union, the African Development Bank Group and the Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement (TEAM 9), whose priorities are often different from India's. To make an impact, our aid should be disbursed bilaterally and aligned with national priorities of the recipient state, which should be a substantial stakeholder and co-investor in schemes and projects from initiation to operation.

Second, India's development assistance should prefer the countries with its substantial interests, both existing and potential. For instance, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Ghana, Angola and Algeria are India's top six trading partners in Africa, accounting for nearly

two-thirds of its trade and half its exports to the continent; yet, they do not figure commensurately in India's developmental pecking order. India's own needs for raw materials, commodities and markets should be factored in its aid calculus. Third, we ought to prefer aiding countries which are willing to help us - from access to their natural resources to using our generics. Fourth, the aided project selected should be compatible with local requirements. They should be cost-effective, scalable, future ready and commercially replicable. Fifth, for greater transparency, India should prefer its public sector to implement the aid projects. Sixth, the Indian Head of Mission in the recipient African state must be an integral part of the aid stream including project selection, co-ordination and implementation. Apart from empowering our diplomacy, this would ensure better harmonisation between our aid and economic objectives.

Finally, the aforementioned should not distract us from our duty to provide the needed humanitarian assistance to Africa: to be rendered promptly and with sensitivity, but without noise.

Mahesh Sachdev was the Indian High Commissioner to Nigeria and the Ambassador to Algeria. He is the author of 'Nigeria: A Business Manual'

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

**An entrepreneur dies**  
V.G. Siddhartha's journey, from being a management trainee at a firm to owning India's largest retail coffee chain, was phenomenal (Front page, "Coffee Day's Siddhartha goes missing," July 31). People of Karnataka's Malnad region fondly remember him as he expanded the market for the coffee grown there. Further, he provided employment to thousands of youngsters. His entrepreneurial flair, vision and humility would inspire budding entrepreneurs.

MITHUN H.N.,  
Chikkamangalur

■ I fully agree with the story, "It is not easy to do business in India" (Business page, July 31). For a General

Practitioner like me, running a clinic in an urban area requires several regulatory permissions. To begin with, we need to obtain a Corporation Trade Licence, then get a private medical establishment licence, then a clearance from the Pollution Control Board for waste disposal, then get commercial electricity and water connections and so on. We also have to bribe the local officials. Governments have failed to make transparent the process to start an enterprise.

Dr. MOHAN,  
Bengaluru

### Call for justice

While the entire nation is praying for a speedy recovery of the Unnao rape survivor, we are also

outraged at the manner in which the case, where a ruling party MLA is an accused, has been handled by the Yogi Adityanath government. Questions have been raised about whether the truck-car collision was an accident or a conspiracy to eliminate the survivor and others. Factors like the smudging of the truck's registration plate have only strengthened such suspicions. What is even more disturbing is that her family members were pressurised to withdraw the case. That the Bharatiya Janata Party has not expelled the legislator, Kuldeep Sengar, speaks volumes about the clout he still enjoys. This is a fit case for a Supreme Court-monitored investigation ("Protest over

Unnao accident rocks LS," July 31).

S.K. CHOUDHURY,  
Bengaluru

### Remembering icons

The Yediyurappa government's first 'momentous' decision has been to cancel Tipu Jayanti. While there is a case for cancellation of the many 'jayantis' celebrated with a holiday, which cause an enormous loss of productive work hours, it looks blatantly unfair and communal to single out Tipu, who heroically fought against the British rule ("Yediyurappa govt. scraps Tipu Jayanti," July 31). Nonetheless, holidays associated with many of these jayantis, whose sole aim seems to be to appease

certain sections, can be cancelled. There can be a token one-hour event to remember the great men and then we can return to the more important nation-building activities.

K.M. SRINIVASA GOWD,  
Bengaluru

### Triple Talaq Bill

With the Triple Talaq Bill clearing the final hurdle, the Narendra Modi government can heave a sigh of relief. It has finally managed to criminalise instant divorce - a practice prevalent mostly among the poorer sections of the Muslim society ("Triple

Talaq Bill sails through Rajya Sabha," July 31). However, to vindicate its stand that it is really a well-wisher of the minority community, the government should enact with equal alacrity, laws to deal with mob lynchings. Further, the need of the hour is also to take stock of the stark educational and economic backwardness among the minorities and their dismal representation in government and private services.

MOHAMMAD ABDUL HAKEEM,  
Hyderabad

### MORE LETTERS ONLINE:

www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

UPI stands for Unified Payment Interface - not United Payment Interface as the front-page story on Truecaller bot (July 31, 2019, some editions) said.

The Reader's Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in



# The perils of being a woman and a Muslim

Problematic narratives about Muslims make the present moment in Sri Lanka politics dangerous



NIYANTHINI KADIRGAMAR

As Sri Lanka struggles to bring itself together three months after the deadly Easter Sunday attacks, the country's Muslims continue to face constant scrutiny, with the security apparatus and reactionary forces turning their violent gaze on them.

The enhanced surveillance across the country since the bombings has disrupted the educational and economic life of Muslims. Chauvinist groups have repeatedly called for boycott of Muslim businesses and trade, even though Muslim communities have unequivocally condemned the Easter blasts attributed to a local hard-line Islamist group.

Sri Lanka's Muslim minority, constituting about 10% of the island's population, has faced several bouts of violence in the past. The LTTE evicted the Muslims en masse from the north in 1990 and carried out massacres against them in the east. In the years following the civil war, hate and violence have largely originated from Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinists, often led by influential saffron-robed monks. Over the last decade, Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism has primarily targeted Muslims, whereas previously Tamils earned their ire.

## Targeting Muslim women

In this context, there is an urgent need to resist efforts to alienate the Muslim community. Of greater concern is the systematic targeting of Muslim women through attempts to regulate their attire and mobility, in the name of security, as was seen in a circular of the Ministry of Public Administration. Discrimination began to manifest in every corner of the island following the blasts, as accounts by Muslim women at a recent forum on coexistence, in Jaffna, showed. They spoke of harassment in markets, government offices and hospitals, and their insights challenged reductive, patronising readings of "the plight of Muslim women".

These women pointed to a larger and deeper ideological attack unleashed on them. The onslaught had originated from different sources:



the global Islamophobic narrative, Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarian assertions, glaring economic rivalry and control of women's bodies.

The dialogue in Jaffna, which included religious leaders and progressive activists from across the country, helped identify the central challenge of confronting the powerful ideological attack on Muslims and the need to bust the many Islamophobic and misogynistic myths that would heighten discrimination.

While there appears to be a gradual softening of security measures, the myths built around "dangerous" Muslims continue to circulate. Almost no conversation is had without the mention of the "burqa", a term that is unfamiliar even among Muslims in Sri Lanka. Apart from claiming the attire to be a security threat, the attire is dissected for its suitability in terms of colour, material and shape, with men asking whether it was imposed or worn out of free will.

It is the construction of the Muslim woman as the subject of a supposed 'security concern' after the Easter attacks that is giving explicit, racialised speech a new level of permissibility. Engaging only with the objects of attack, like the burqa, or the halal certification trade, or Muslim personal law will not suffice in confronting the centres of power deploying this ideological assault.

The prevailing discourse about Muslims, who are widely perceived as prosperous and upwardly mobile, is related to Sri Lanka politics drifting towards right-wing xenophobia, exploiting the growing discontent among people due to the government's failure to revive the economy to benefit the majority and establish

democratic governance. The starkest manifestation of this is seen in the resurgent campaigns of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist forces that enjoyed tacit support by the previous Rajapaksa regime. They have again gained ground, with an obvious agenda of constructing Muslims as the new enemy for the 'Sinhala nation'. Again, they turn to Sinhala women implanting fears about threats to their reproductive ability, and thereby to the Sinhala race.

Spreading fabricated stories of forced sterilisation, making contorted claims about a declining Sinhala population and flagging unsubstantiated statistics on religious conversions – all unfailingly use a gendered discourse, focusing on Sinhala women's bodies. Such an attempt at consolidating a pure Sinhala Buddhist identity will repress not only Muslims and other minorities, but also those seen as dissidents within the Sinhala majority community.

With presidential elections expected this year, it is the contest for state power and those political forces seeking to gain electorally by riding on the anti-Muslim rhetoric that will likely intensify the attacks in the months to come. In this interregnum of forming new alliances, regressive Tamil and Hindu nationalist forces too will likely fuel protests against Muslims to gain political points.

## Complicity of liberals, the Left

It is not just the supporters of the Rajapaksa camp who are being swept by the troubling anti-Muslim sentiments. The complicity of liberal and Left groups in abetting the discourse makes an alternative politics a challenging task. Influenced by the global

discourse on Islamophobia and 'burka' bans in the West, these groups support similar reactions at home.

Invariably, Muslim women are made the pretext for any urgent calls for liberal reform of Muslim religious practices, laws, attire, educational institutions and curriculum in the post-Easter attacks scenario. There is little reflection on the discursive constructions of saving the 'oppressed Muslim woman' and how it might lead to more repression.

The underlying focus on women enables the ideological attack on Muslims to permeate via misogynistic forces deep into society. Even the male Muslim leadership prohibited women from attending Tarawih prayers in mosques this year, and responded mutely to face veil bans.

If chauvinist forces are attempting to demonise the entire Muslim community, Left and liberal actors are engaged in inculcating the Muslim citizen worthy of acceptance by Sri Lanka society. Liberals adopt a language of tolerance, where differences are permissible, only as long as they are acceptable to the mainstream and adhere to majoritarian governance. Their preferred image of a 'good' Muslim is one that is synonymous with elite middle-class Muslims, favouring a return to a romanticised past before the influence of 'Arabisation'. The liberals claim Muslim religion and lifestyle were Sri Lanka before working-class migrants returned from the Gulf. The classist liberal discourse attempts to alienate some Muslims while embracing others as Sri Lankans.

Convergence of different problematic narratives about Muslims is what makes the present moment in Sri Lanka politics dangerous and slippery. Muslim women are resisting these attacks by defying the restrictions placed on their mobility and confronting the myths being spread about their community. However, Muslims alone cannot take on the ideological onslaught. Only a collective struggle by progressive sections of society confronting the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist, global Islamophobic and misogynistic narratives building against Muslims can prevent the country from heading in the direction of a disastrous, possibly fascist, path.

Niyanthini Kadirgamar is a researcher and a member of the Jaffna People's Forum for Coexistence

# Transforming livelihoods through farm ponds

Ponds can be an effective tool for rainwater harvesting



NIIRMALYA CHOUDHURY & SACHIN TIWALE

With an increased variability of monsoons and rapidly depleting groundwater tables, large parts of India are reeling under water stress. A number of peninsular regions like Bundelkhand, Vidarbha and Marathwada have been facing recurring drought-like situations. Given the enormity of the crisis, at a recent NITI Aayog meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi explicated the need to implement innovative water management measures, stressing particularly the importance of rainwater harvesting both at the household and community levels. Here, one intervention that has been tried out in various States, and perhaps needs to be taken up on a bigger scale, is the construction of farm ponds.

Farm ponds can be cost-effective structures that transform rural livelihoods. They can help enhance water control, contribute to agriculture intensification and boost farm incomes. However, this is possible only if they act as rainwater harvesting structures and not as intermediate storage points for an increased extraction of groundwater or diversion of canal water. The latter will cause greater groundwater depletion and inequitable water distribution.

In a recent study on farm ponds in Jharkhand and West Bengal, we found that they aided in superior water control through the harvesting not just of rainfall but also of surface run-off and subsurface flows. Some of them functioned exclusively as recharge points, contributing to groundwater replenishment. They also helped in providing supplemental irrigation in the kharif season and an enhanced irrigation coverage in rabi. The yield of paddy, the most important crop in kharif, stabilised, thus contributing to greater food security.

## Retention of water

Farm ponds retained water for 8-10 months of the year; thus farmers could enhance cropping intensity and crop diversification within and across seasons. The area used to cultivate vegetables and other commercial crops also increased. Further, figures indicated that the ponds were also a financially viable proposition, with a fairly high Internal Rate of Return, of about 19%, over 15 years.

However, in parts of peninsular India, the idea of a farm pond as an *in-situ* rainwater harvesting structure has taken a complete U-turn. Here, some of them are benefiting farmers at an individual level, but not contributing to water conservation and recharge. They are being used as intermediate storage points, accelerating groundwater depletion and increasing evaporation losses as the groundwater is brought to the surface and stored in relatively shallow structures.

## Need for inlet, outlet provisions

In Maharashtra, the State government is promoting farm ponds under a flagship programme that aims to dig over one lakh structures by offering a subsidy of up to ₹50,000 per farmer. However, most of them are being constructed without inlet and outlet provisions and their walls are raised above the ground level by only a few feet. They cannot arrest the excess run-off as there is no inlet, and therefore they cannot be used effectively for rainwater harvesting. Further, farmers line them at the bottom with plastic, restricting seepage and converting the ponds into intermediate storage points.

Such farm ponds have an adverse impact on the water tables and accelerate water loss. The usual practice here is to lift water from a dug well and/or a borewell, store it in the pond and then draw it once again to irrigate the fields, often using micro-irrigation. While offering secure irrigation facility, this intensifies competition for extraction of groundwater from the aquifer, which is a common pool resource.

In such cases, in the command area of the irrigation project, farmers fill up their farm ponds first when the canal is in rotation and then take it from the pond to the field. This can impede circulation of water.

During canal rotation, the aquifer will get recharged because of the return flow of water coming from the irrigated fields. This return flow benefits all, as most of the farmers access water through wells in this command. But if canals fill up the farm ponds first, it restricts their benefits only to the pond owners and, in the long term, reduces the overall return flow at the system level.

Overall, farm ponds can act as effective harvesting structures and also yield healthy financial returns. But if they are promoted merely for on-farm storage of groundwater and canal water, they could accelerate, rather than reduce, the water crisis in the countryside.

Nirmalya Choudhury works with VikasAnvesh Foundation. Sachin Tiwale teaches at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

# Cauldron of sexual misconduct

So often do Indians encounter the horrific act in their consciousness that it has escaped their conscience

MADHURIKA SANKAR

As India boldly leaps into space and proudly increases its tiger population, feats deserving praise, foreign investors leave this increasingly disturbing landscape of cultural hegemony and faux-nationalistic fervour. I am drawn to understanding the connection, if it exists, between the current economic and sociopolitical landscape in India and the violence against women. Naysayers will argue that the sharp rise in statistics of violence against children in the last decade. As a young woman, she is in the most unsafe country in the world, according to a recent Thomson Reuters Foundation survey, which recorded around 40,000 rapes a year. She is subject to the routine threats of honour killing and trafficking. As a widow or single mother, she is ostracised in a patriarchal society. Indian women do the most unpaid domestic work of any country globally, next to Kazakhstan. The insensitivity, reluctance, and hostility of the police, legal and medical fraternity, coupled with the fact that most assaulters are known to the victim, creates an increasingly intimidating environment in which to move forward with justice. Courts in the country are severely backlogged.



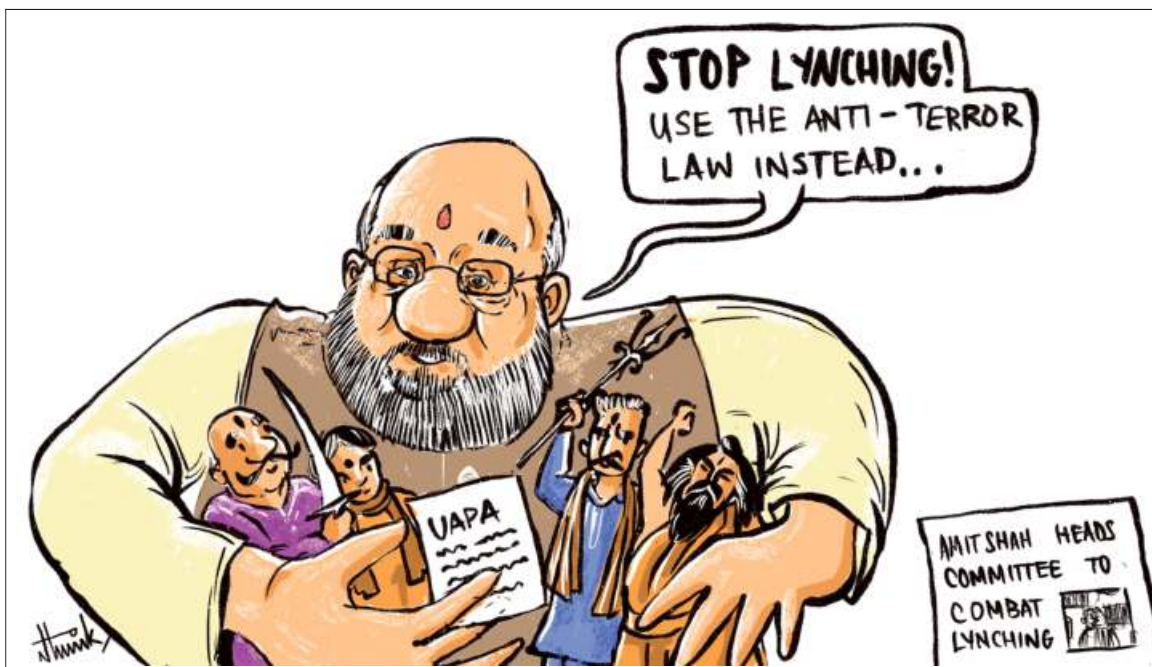
ical environment, one that pivots itself on the narratives of India's ancient texts and scriptures to exorcise women, that brings about their subjugation, for selfish gain.

## Cycle of violence

There is violence even before birth of a girl child. India has one of the highest incidences of female foeticide. Then, as a young child, a girl is part of an incontrovertible landscape where there has been a 336% rise in sexual crimes against children in the last decade. As a young woman, she is in the most unsafe country in the world, according to a recent Thomson Reuters Foundation survey, which recorded around 40,000 rapes a year. She is subject to the routine threats of honour killing and trafficking. As a widow or single mother, she is ostracised in a patriarchal society. Indian women do the most unpaid domestic work of any country globally, next to Kazakhstan. The insensitivity, reluctance, and hostility of the police, legal and medical fraternity, coupled with the fact that most assaulters are known to the victim, creates an increasingly intimidating environment in which to move forward with justice. Courts in the country are severely backlogged.

The worst narrative is perhaps what psychologists refer to as a kind of 'emotional contagion' for the rapist, where he sees others committing the crime and has become injured to it, thus, taking the leap towards crime. Similarly, we as a nation, have perhaps become injured by contagion, to sexual crimes against women. So often do we encounter the horrific act in our consciousness that it has escaped our conscience. Imparting healthy sex education in schools, providing means by which socially and emotionally marginalised men are given the opportunity to be identified and rehabilitate themselves, is paramount, before it leads to further tragedy.

Madhurika Sankar is a writer based in Chennai



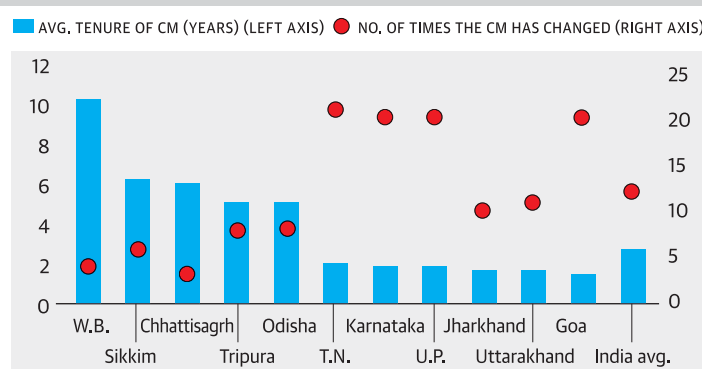
## DATA POINT

### Power equations

The BJP's B.S. Yediyurappa recently passed a floor test to become Chief Minister of Karnataka. The southern State has a relatively low average tenure for CMs (close to two years), as several of them didn't complete their terms. **Sumant Sen & Varun B. Krishnan** take a look at State-wise CM tenures since 1977

#### Stability factor

The average tenure for a Chief Minister in West Bengal is over 10 years, the highest among all States. Goa had the lowest average tenure of 1.5 years for a CM. The graph shows the tenure data for only outlier States



**Tamil Nadu:** CMs have changed in T.N. the highest no. of times due to imposition of President's rule in multiple instances, frequent shifts of power due to high anti-incumbency and a stand-in CM being sworn in because of legal troubles of the incumbent

**Karnataka:** CMs have changed 20 times in the period

**West Bengal:** The CPI(M) ruled West Bengal for over 30 years with just two CMs

#### Longest reigns

With five full terms in power, Pawan Kumar Chamling, former Sikkim CM, has been the longest-serving Chief Minister of a State since Independence. Jyoti Basu of West Bengal held the Chief Minister's post for 23 years

Chief Minister	State	Party	Cumulative years as CM
Pawan Kumar Chamling	Sikkim	SDF	24
Jyoti Basu	West Bengal	CPI(M)	23
Gegong Apang <sup>*</sup>	Arunachal	Congress	23
Lal Thanhawla	Mizoram	Congress	22
Manik Sarkar	Tripura	CPI(M)	20
Naveen Patnaik	Odisha	BJD	19
Okram Ibobi Singh	Manipur	Congress	15
Raman Singh	Chhattisgarh	BJP	15
Sheila Dikshit	Delhi	Congress	15
Tarun Gogoi	Assam	Congress	15

SDF: Sikkim Democratic Front, CPI(M): Communist Party of India (Marxist), BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party <sup>\*</sup>Apang served as CM of Arunachal Pradesh for 19 years as part of the Congress and four more years as leader of the Arunachal Congress, a party he formed

#### No CM at the helm

Jammu and Kashmir has recorded the highest cumulative period of President's rule or Governor's rule since 1977. The table lists the top five States with the most months without elected governments

State	Cumulative months of President's rule/Governor's rule
J&K	109
Punjab	83
Assam	35
Uttar Pradesh	33
Manipur	28

## The Hindu

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 1, 1969

#### Bengal policemen storm Assembly

Three thousand angry policemen in uniform, carrying the body of a constable who had been killed while on duty in a clash at Basanti in 24-Parganas, to-day [July 31] stormed the West Bengal Assembly which was in session, smashed furniture and beat up the members. They also gheraoed Mr. Jyoti Basu, Deputy Chief Minister who is in charge of Police portfolio, for over an hour demanding justice in the case of their colleague who, they said, had died at the hands of political elements. Mr. Basu expressed concern at the death of their colleague, but rebuked them for their disorderly behaviour. He took them around the Assembly premises and showed them the vandalism committed by them in their moment of anger. Mr. Basu succeeded in pacifying the demonstrators and their leader shook hands with him. The policemen later left the Assembly premises with the body of their colleague to the burning ghat. The policeman had been reportedly killed on Tuesday in a clash with the workers of the Socialist Unity Centre.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 1, 1919.

#### On Communal Representation.

In to-day's sitting of the Joint Committee [in London on July 28] Lord Southborough replying to Mr. Bennett said, he was of opinion that Bombay was probably ahead of other Provinces with regard to the franchise of women. Evidence was divided with regard to whether elections in Madras were entirely governed by caste considerations. He concluded that one of the reasons of the trouble in Madras was that a considerable body of intelligent political thought which was springing up found itself bumping up against Brahmins. Replying to Lord Sydenham, Lord Southborough said that, if they were to provide a constitution with an absolutely free hand, he would scout the principle of communal representation. He agreed that the non-Brahmins were not a homogenous community. Indian Christians were given three seats because they had no chance of election. There was a great deal to be said for Indian Christians, because they were more likely to break down caste restrictions than any other body. The Franchise Committee thought the proper way to deal with Indian Christians was to give them some representation so that they could make their views known.



## बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 142

### बीमा की कमियां

सरकार की बहुप्रचारित फसल बीमा योजना, प्रधानमंत्री फसल बीमा योजना (पीएमएफबीवाई) वर्ष 2016 में अपनी शुरुआत के बाद से ही अपेक्षाओं पर खरी नहीं उतर सकी है। एक तो इसमें कुछ अहम ढांचागत कमियां हैं और रही सही कसर क्रियान्वयन की चूक ने पूरी कर दी। हालांकि यह योजना सन 1970 के दशक से अब तक

कृषि क्षेत्र का जोखिम कम करने के लिए अपनाई गई तमाम योजनाओं से बेहतर है। दावों के देरी से निपटान की शिकायतें बढ़ती जा रही हैं और सबसे अहम बात, नुकसान की भरपाई की राशि बेहद कम है। किसान संगठनों और यहाँ तक कि राजनीतिक दलों खासकर शिवसेना ने यह चेतावनी दी है कि प्रतिकूल मौसम, कीटों के हमले, बीमारियों

और अन्य आपदाओं की स्थिति में यदि फसल खराब होती है और किसानों को अपर्याप्त मुआवजा मिलता है तो वह आंदोलन छेड़ेगी। मुरली मनोहर जोशी की अध्यक्षता वाली संसद की आकलन समिति ने दिसंबर 2018 में प्रस्तुत अपनी 30वीं रिपोर्ट में यह स्वीकार किया था कि पीएमएफबीवाई में कई दिक्कतें हैं जिनकी वजह से किसानों का भरोसा डगमगाया है। नुकसान के आकलन में देरी, दावों का भुगतान न होना या देर से होना तथा पारदर्शिता की कमी आदि कुछ ऐसी कमियां हैं जिनका जिक्र समिति ने किया।

योजना में किसानों की घटती रुचि का अंदाजा इस बात से लगाया जा सकता है कि 2016-17 में जहां 5.72 करोड़ हेक्टेयर रकबे का बीमा हुआ था, वहीं 2017-18 में यह

घटकर 4.75 करोड़ हेक्टेयर अथवा कुल रकबे का महज 24 फीसदी रह गया। अनुमान है कि 2018-19 में रकबे में और कमी आई है। हालांकि अभी अंतिम आंकड़े सामने नहीं आए हैं। गत वर्ष के खरीफ और रबी सत्र के दावों का भी पूरा भुगतान नहीं हुआ है। सरकार कुल रकबे का 50 फीसदी पीएमएफबीवाई के तहत लाना चाहती है। यह तब तक संभव नहीं है जब तक कि योजना में जरूरी सुधार न किए जाएं और इसे किसानों के लिए आकर्षक न बनाया जाए। चूंकि 85 फीसदी किसान छोटे और सीमांत हैं इसलिए उनमें नुकसान सहने की क्षमता नहीं होती। स्पष्ट है कि उन्हें जोखिम रहित योजना की आवश्यकता है।

इस नजरिये से देखा जाए तो

पीएमएफबीवाई की तारीफ की जा सकती है कि यह तमाम प्रमुख फसलों को कवर करती है और किसानों को बहुत मामूली प्रीमियम चुकाना होता है। यह योजना बुआई न हो पाने से लेकर फसल कटने के बाद के नुकसान तक किसानों को बहुत व्यापक बचाव उपलब्ध कराती है। बहरहाल, राज्यों को व्यय में 50 फीसदी का साझेदार बनाना और कर्ज लेने वाले किसानों के मामलों में बैंक को शामिल करना कुछ प्रमुख गलतियां हैं। दावों के निपटान में देरी के लिए अक्सर राज्यों को जवाबदेह ठहराया जाता है और कहा जाता है कि वे बीमा कंपनियों को अपनी हिस्सेदारी में नाकाम रहे। इसके अलावा नुकसान आकलन के लिए आंकड़ों के संचार में देरी की भी वजह बताया जाता है। दूसरी ओर बैंकों को शामिल करने

से किसानों और बीमा कंपनियों के बीच प्रत्यक्ष संपर्क रुक जाता है। किसान अक्सर नीतिगत दस्तावेजों या उनकी ओर से चुकाए गए प्रीमियम की रसीद को देख नहीं पाते हैं। अब सरकार कर्जग्रस्त किसानों के लिए फसल बीमा को अनिवार्य के बजाय स्वैच्छिक बना रही है। ज्यादा प्रीमियम वाली फसलों को इसके दायरे से बाहर किया जा रहा है और राज्यों को किसानों के नुकसान की भरपाई के लिए अपने मॉडल तैयार करने की छूट दी जा रही है। यदि ऐसा होता है तो योजना की कई कमियां दूर हो जाएंगी। परंतु ड्रॉन और सैटेलाइट इमेजरी जैसी तकनीक के इस्तेमाल से नुकसान के आकलन की गति तेज हो सकती है और दावों का जल्द तथा बेहतर निपटान सुनिश्चित होगा।



विनय सिन्हा

# अफगान शांति प्रक्रिया में भारत की दुविधा

लंबे समय से हिंसा एवं अशांति का शिकार रहे अफगानिस्तान में शांति स्थापना प्रक्रिया में भारत को अधिक सक्रिय भूमिका निभानी चाहिए। इसकी अहमियत बता रहे हैं हर्ष वी पंत

अफगानिस्तान में मेलमिलाप की चर्चाएं तेज होने के साथ हिंसा की घटनाओं में भी तेजी देखने को मिली है। इससे पता चलता है कि वहां कितना कुछ दांव पर लगा हुआ है? अफगानिस्तान के लिए नियुक्त अमेरिका के विशेष दूत जालमे खलिलजाद 18 वर्षों से चला आ रहा हिंसा का दौर खत्म करने के लिए उपद्रवियों के साथ 1 सितंबर तक एक समझौता कराने की कोशिश में लगे हुए हैं। दरअसल अमेरिकी जनता अफगानिस्तान में जल्द शांति स्थापना की पक्षधर है और डॉनल्ड ट्रंप के चुनाव अभियान में यह एक अहम वादा भी था।

अमेरिका और तालिबान के बीच पिछले साल अक्टूबर से अब तक सात दौर की सीधी बातचीत हो चुकी है। इस बातचीत का बुनियादी मकसद अफगानिस्तान से अमेरिकी सेना की सुरक्षित वापसी के साथ ही तालिबान से यह गारंटी भी लेनी है कि अफगान धरती का इस्तेमाल विदेशी आतंकी नहीं करेंगे ताकि बाकी दुनिया के लिए कोई खतरा न पैदा हो। दोहा में संपन्न आठवें दौर की बातचीत को सबसे उपयोगी माना गया और कई महीनों के गतिरोध के बाद इस वार्ता में एक नई ऊर्जा नजर आई। अमेरिका का इस पर जोर रहा है कि वह एक 'समग्र शांति समझौते के पक्ष में' है, न कि एक वापसी समझौता चाहता है। हालांकि उसके इस दावे को स्वीकार करने वाले लोग कम ही हैं।

इस समझौते की शुरुआत में अमेरिका ने

चीन, रूस और पाकिस्तान के साथ एक साझा बयान जारी किया था जिसमें तालिबान से संघर्ष-विराम पर सहमत होने और निर्वाचित अफगान सरकार के साथ बातचीत शुरू करने की अपील की गई थी ताकि लंबे युद्ध से बेहाल देश में शांति एवं स्थिरता का युग लौट सके। शांति स्थापना प्रक्रिया में 'तालिबान के मुख्य प्रायोजक' पाकिस्तान की भागीदारी का स्वागत होना अमेरिका के उस रवैये से नाटकीय भटकाव दिखाता है जिसमें पाकिस्तान को अलग-थलग रखा जाता था। इस बीच पाकिस्तान ट्रंप प्रशासन के साथ अपने ठंडे पड़े रिश्तों में थोड़ी गरमाहट लाने को बेकरार है। उसे उम्मीद है कि अफगानिस्तान में शांति समझौते के लिए तालिबान पर दबाव डालने में अमेरिका की मदद कर वह लगातार विरोधी होते जा रहे ट्रंप प्रशासन के सुर को थोड़ा नरम कर सकता है। अफगानिस्तान में नई शुरुआत को लेकर पाकिस्तान एक बार फिर केंद्रीय भूमिका में उभरा है। पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान को अमेरिकी यात्रा के लिए न्योता दिए जाने को इसी संदर्भ में देखा जाना चाहिए।

भारत इस घटनाक्रम पर पूरे चौकन्नेपन के साथ नजर रखता रहा है क्योंकि अभी तक अमेरिका ने भारत को इस प्रकरण से सीधे तौर पर नहीं जोड़ा है। भारत की तरफ से आपत्ति जताए जाने के बाद हाल ही में अमेरिकी अधिकारियों ने भारत को अफगानिस्तान संबंधी घटनाओं से अलग कराना शुरू किया है। तालिबान के साथ कोई

लेना-देना नहीं होने का भारत का रुख अब अस्वीकार्य हो चुका है। पिछले साल नवंबर में जाकर भारत ने अपने दो पूर्व राजनयिकों को मॉस्को दौर की वार्ता में शामिल होने के लिए 'गैर-आधिकारिक' तौर पर भेजा था। भारत ने तालिबान के साथ बातचीत के सफल होने के लिए जरूरी लगने वाली कुछ खास परिस्थितियों का हाल ही में जिक्र किया है। अफगानिस्तान की मौजूदा सरकार में लगे अपने दांव के मद्देनजर भारत ने अफगानी देश के सभी तबकों को समाहित करने के लिए सभी पहलुओं एवं प्रक्रियाओं का आह्वान किया है। भारत को डर है कि अशरफ गनी सरकार का कमजोर होना इस अशांत देश में लोकतांत्रिक तरीके से सामान्य स्थिति बहाल करने की दिशा में दो दशकों में किए गए तमाम अंतरराष्ट्रीय प्रयासों के खाम्बे का इशारा होगा। यह पहल भारत को तालिबान के साथ औपचारिक संपर्क करने की सुविधा भी देती है।

भारत ने इस बात पर भी जोर दिया है कि शांति स्थापना की 'किसी भी प्रक्रिया को संवैधानिक विरासत एवं राजनीतिक जनादेश का सम्मान करना चाहिए'। यह इसलिए अहम है कि तालिबान व्यापक लोकतांत्रिक प्रक्रिया एवं महिला अधिकार जैसे प्रमुख पहलुओं को लेकर प्रतिबद्धता जताने से हिचक रहा है। इसके बजाय वह अब भी शरीया कानून की अपनी व्याख्या पर ही टिके रहना चाहता है। आखिर में, भारत के लिए यह खासा अहम है कि अफगानिस्तान में

कोई भी प्रक्रिया ऐसी न हो जो आतंकवादियों एवं उसके हमराहियों के लिए शरणगाह बनने लायक जगह की गुंजाइश छोड़े। पिछली बार अफगानिस्तान से जाते समय अमेरिका ने पाकिस्तान को खुली छूट दे दी थी। इसके चलते कश्मीर में आतंकवाद एवं कट्टरपंथ का उभार होने से भारत के सुरक्षा हितों को गहरा आघात लगा।

हालांकि यह पूरी तरह साफ नहीं है कि भारत अपने कितने उद्देश्यों को हासिल कर पाएगा क्योंकि अमेरिका अफगानिस्तान से निकलने की जल्दबाजी में है। भारत का अफगानिस्तान में किया गया आर्थिक एवं सांस्कृतिक निवेश नगण्य हो जाएगा, अगर वह तत्काल अपनी राह दुरुस्त नहीं करता है। गत दिनों मोदी सरकार ने अफगानिस्तान के लिए 5.8 करोड़ डॉलर की मदद राशि देने के साथ ही ईरान के चाबहार बंदरगाह के लिए अपना आवंटन भी 1.5 अरब डॉलर से घटाकर 65 लाख डॉलर कर दिया। यह अफगानिस्तान में बदलती जमीनी हकीकत की स्वीकारोक्ति है क्योंकि भारत को वहां अपनी भूमिका अनिश्चित नजर आ रही है।

भारत में कई लोग इस स्थिति का ठीकरा ट्रंप प्रशासन पर फोड़ने लगेंगे। लेकिन भारत को इस रूपक से बचना चाहिए। अफगानिस्तान में अमेरिका के अपने हित हैं और वह उन्हें सुरक्षित रखने की कोशिश कर रहा है। असल में, ऐसी संभावना है कि इस प्रक्रिया में वह कुछ भारतीय हितों को भी सुरक्षित बनाए रखेगा क्योंकि हिंद-प्रशांत क्षेत्र में अनुकूल शक्ति संतुलन बनाए रखने के लिए अमेरिका को भारत की जरूरत है। लेकिन अफगानिस्तान के प्रति भारत का रवैया शुरू से ही दूसरों पर उपकार करने वाला रहा है। भारत लगातार इस बात पर जोर देता रहा कि वह अफगानिस्तान में केवल अपनी नरम ताकत ही लगाना चाहता है लेकिन सच यह है कि अमेरिकी सुरक्षा आवरण में रहने से ही वह सफल हो पाया। भारत ने अफगानिस्तान में कुछ शानदार काम किए हैं। वह बड़े दानदाता देशों में है, सांस्कृतिक प्रभाव का अहम जरिया है, उभरते लोकतांत्रिक शासन के विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में क्षमता विकसित करने और सुरक्षाबलों के प्रशिक्षण में सक्रिय रहा है। लेकिन जब मामला मुश्किल हालात का आता है तो उसे अपने नागरिकों पर हमले की स्थिति में भी सशक्त दिखने के लिए दूसरों पर निर्भर होना पड़ा।

एक अग्रणी वैश्विक शक्ति के तौर पर पहचान बनाने की मंशा रखने वाले एक राष्ट्र के लिए ऐसी स्थिति में होना बहुत सुविधाजनक नहीं है। विदेश नीति में जोखिम से बहुत परहेज रखने की अपनी कीमत भी होती है। काफी कुछ दांव पर है और भारत की शांति प्रक्रिया में अधिक सक्रियता दिखानी चाहिए और अपनी ही खींची सीमारेखा से संकोच नहीं करना चाहिए। आखिरकार, अपने हितों को नजरअंदाज किए जाने पर भारत विध्वंसक की भूमिका भी निभा सकता है। यह भारतीय हितों के साथ ही आम अफगानियों की आशाओं एवं आकांक्षाओं को चकनाचूर होने से बचाने के लिए भी जरूरी है। भारत सरकार को यह साफ करना चाहिए कि अखंड लोगों का हमेशा आखिर में ही रहना जरूरी नहीं है।

(लेखक लंदन स्थित किंग्स कॉलेज में प्राध्यापक हैं)

## उपभोक्ताओं से भावनात्मक संबंध कंपनियों की बुनियादी जरूरत

विपणन यानी मार्केटिंग में संबंधों के इस्तेमाल में कुछ भी नया नहीं है। सन 1983 में लियोनार्ड बेरी द्वारा दिये गए इस जुमले का अर्थ यह है कि कारोबारों को अपने मौजूदा ग्राहकों की सेवा करने पर अधिक ध्यान देना चाहिए। बेरी की मूल चिंता यह थी कि कंपनियां अगर यह सोचती हैं कि मार्केटिंग का संबंध नए ग्राहक बनाने से है तो वे गलत हैं। इसका संबंध ग्राहकों को अपने साथ जोड़े रखने से भी है। दुनिया भर की तमाम कंपनियां शुरुआत से ही ग्राहकों के साथ रिश्ता बरकरार रखती आई हैं और उन्हें सफलता भी मिली है। परंतु मार्केटिंग गुरु जगदीश सेठ का कहना है कि इस अवधारणा में बदलाव लाने की आवश्यकता है।

सेठ का उपभोक्ता व्यवहार, संबंध आधारित विपणन, प्रतिस्पर्धी, नीति और भूराजनैतिक विश्लेषण में अच्छा अध्ययन है। भारत के अल्पकालिक दौर पर आए प्रोफेसर सेठ कहते हैं कि कई कंपनियां मार्केटिंग के जुनून में संबंधों को भुला चुकी हैं। उन्होंने कहा कि कंपनियों को उपभोक्ताओं की जेब के बजाय उनके दिल पर कब्जा करने की दिशा में आगे बढ़ना होगा।

उन्होंने कहा कि प्रोग्राम, समर्पित पेशकश और व्यक्तिगत सेवाओं का स्तर इतना व्यापक हो चुका है कि इनमें भेद नहीं किया जा सकता। सेठ कहते हैं कि ग्राहक के साथ जुड़ाव की बात करें तो दिल का रिश्ता आर्थिक पेशकश पर हमेशा भारी पड़ता है। वह कहते हैं कि यह रिश्ता कारोबारी रिश्ते से आगे बढ़कर मित्रता में तब्दील होना चाहिए। वह उदाहरण देकर बताते हैं कि कैसे कारोबारी जगत के प्रसिद्ध नाम डिजिटलीकरण के दौर में ग्राहकों के साथ रिश्ता कायम करने का बुनियादी नियम भूला बैठे हैं। सेठ कम से कम तीन शीर्ष विमानन कंपनियों का जिक्र करते हैं जिन्होंने उन्हें फोन करके यह तक पूछना जरूरी नहीं समझा कि उन्होंने निरंतर यात्रा के दौरान जो बोनस फ्लाइट अर्जित किए थे, उनका इस्तेमाल करना उन्होंने क्यों बंद कर दिया। अगर उनमें से किसी एक ने एक बार भी फोन किया होता तो शायद उन्हें लगता कि वे बतौर मूल्यवान ग्राहक उनकी कदर करते हैं। चूंकि उन कंपनियों ने परवाह नहीं की इसलिए सेठ ने भी दूसरी विमानन



इंसानी पहलू

श्यामल मजूमदार

ग्राहक के साथ भावनात्मक रिश्ता कायम करने के लिए राह आश्चर्यक है कि कंपनी ईमानदार हो और संवाद में उसकी संवेदनशीलता उजागर हो जाने से भी उसे कोई घबराहट नहीं होती हो

कंपनियों का रुख कर लिया। रिश्तों पर आधारित मार्केटिंग में केवल आंकड़ों से काम नहीं चलता क्योंकि आखिरकार आपको इंसानों और उनकी भावनाओं से काम पड़ता है। संबंधों पर आधारित मार्केटिंग, लेनदेन की पारंपरिक मार्केटिंग के विपरीत होती है जो केवल बिक्री बढ़ाने पर जोर देती है। हालांकि इसके अहमियत को भी कम करके नहीं आंका जा सकता है लेकिन समस्या यह है कि किसी ग्राहक को एक बार ब्रांड पसंद करने के लिए प्रेरित किया जा सकता है लेकिन बिना मजबूत संबंध आधारित मार्केटिंग नीति के वह दोबारा उस ब्रांड के पास लौटकर शायद ही आए।

ग्राहक के साथ भावनात्मक रिश्ता कायम करने के लिए यह आवश्यक है कि कंपनी ईमानदार हो और संवाद में उसकी संवेदनशीलता उजागर हो जाने से भी उसे कोई घबराहट नहीं होती हो। उदाहरण के लिए डोमिनोज ने बहुत प्रभावी तरीके से इसे अंजाम दिया। उसने ग्राहकों को नकारात्मक समीक्षा को लगातार सामने रखा, डोमिनोज के संचालक इसे पढ़ते और एक

बेहतर और सुधरे हुए पिज्जा का वादा करते। अपनी गलतियों को स्वीकार कर डोमिनोज ने अपने ब्रांड को पारदर्शी और ईमानदार साबित किया।

कुछ कंपनियां इसके लिए अनूठेपन या दुर्लभता का सिद्धांत अपनाते हैं। उदाहरण के लिए विमानन कंपनियां और उनके टिकट बेचने वाले एग्रीगेटर अक्सर यह दर्शाते हैं कि इस कीमत पर केवल तीन सीटें उपलब्ध हैं। यह सीधे-सीधे मांग और आपूर्ति के सिद्धांत की तरह काम करता है। अक्सर जितना कम होगा, विषयवस्तु या उत्पाद, ग्राहक के लिए उतना ही महंगा होगा। कुछ अन्य ब्रांड आत्मगौरव का इस्तेमाल करते हैं जो मैसलो के आवश्यकताओं के पदसोपान में सबसे ऊपर है। लोग चाहते हैं कि उन्हें तबज्जो दी जाए। यही कारण है कि कुछ विज्ञापन कहते हैं कि उनके उत्पाद सबके लिए नहीं हैं।

यह सही है कि हर गुजरता दिन ग्राहक के साथ भावनात्मक रिश्ते को कठिन बनाता जा रहा है क्योंकि तकनीक का प्रभाव बढ़ रहा है और कंपनियों को इस दिशा में अतिरिक्त प्रयास करने की जरूरत है। उदाहरण के लिए कंपनियां एक परिवार की आवश्यकता के अनुसार संबद्धता की नीति का इस्तेमाल कर सकती हैं। यह काम हो रहा है क्योंकि सेठ के मुताबिक अब परिवजनों का स्थान रूमाबिक यानी साथ रहने वाले ले रहे हैं। पहले परिवार साथ में भोजन करते थे और मिलजुल कर काम करते थे। अब ऐसा नहीं है। लोगों में वैयक्तिकता बढ़ रही है। यानी एक परिवार के भीतर भी ब्रांड को लेकर लोगों की अलग-अलग पसंद है।

ऐसे में मार्केटिंग की संभावनाओं का काफी विस्तार हुआ है। परंतु अब चुनौती यह है कि परिवार के ऐसे हर सदस्य के साथ रिश्ता कायम करना होगा, जिसकी व्यक्तिगत ब्रांड प्राथमिकता है। मोबाइल फोन ने यह काम आसान किया है, कंपनियों को भी यह अंजाम हुआ है कि उन्हें ग्राहक की जरूरत के मुताबिक चीजें तैयार करनी होंगी। यह काम केवल तकनीक से नहीं होगा बल्कि तकनीक के साथ भावनात्मक रिश्ता कायम करने में करना होगा ताकि वे बार-बार उनके पास लौट कर आएं।

## कानाफूसी

संसद में कुर्सी की साझेदारी

कांग्रेस के राज्यसभा सदस्य राजीव गौड़ा सोमवार को संसद परिसर में स्थित सांसदों की कैंटीन में अपना दोपहर भोज करने के लिए कुर्सी की प्रतीक्षा करते देखे गए। उस समय भोजन कर रहे भाजपा सांसद अल्फांस कन्ननतनम ने गौड़ा से कहा कि अगर वे तीन तलाक विधेयक पर उनकी पार्टी का समर्थन करने को तैयार हो जाएं तो वह अपनी सीट उनके लिए खाली कर सकते हैं। वहीं एक अन्य स्थान पर एक केंद्रीय मंत्री ने पत्रकारों से अनौपचारिक चर्चा की। चूंकि कमरे में कुर्सियां कम पड़ गईं तो मंत्री ने अपने कार्यलयीन सहयोगियों से कहा कि वे पड़ोस में स्थित एक कांग्रेस नेता के कमरे से कुर्सियां मांगें। उन्होंने आगे कहा कि कांग्रेस के सांसद मित्र को शायद इतनी कुर्सियों की आवश्यकता भी नहीं होगी क्योंकि उनके सांसदों की तादाद पहले की कम है।

हमें भी बचाओ

एक ओर जहां देश में बाघों की बढ़ती आबादी के लिए सरकार को तारीफ मिल रही है, वहीं एक जानवर ऐसा भी है जो सरकार से नाखुश है। वह जानवर है सांड यानी शेरय बाजार का प्रतीक चिह्न। शेरय बाजार में लगातार गिरावट के बीच कुछ कारोबारियों और निवेशकों ने ट्रिवटर पर सेव द बुल नामक हैशटैग चलाने की कोशिश की। एक शेरय बाजार कारोबारी ने अपने ट्वीट में लिखा कि भारत में 2,967 बाघ हैं। यह गिनती पिछली बार से 33 फीसदी अधिक है। परंतु अब हमारे देश में बुल यानी सांड बहुत कम रहे गए हैं। इसकी तादाद पिछली बार की तुलना में 2.05 करोड़ कम हो गई है। मानो इतना ही काफी नहीं था कि इस बीच डिस्कवरी टीवी ने मैं वसंत वाइल्ड कार्यक्रम का एक प्रमो जारी किया जिसमें प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी रोमांचक और साहसिक कारनामे करने वाले बेयर गिल्लस के साथ नजर आ रहे हैं। इस पर एक और दिलचस्प मीम देखने को मिला कि प्रधानमंत्री और बेयर मिलकर बाजार में बचे हुए बुल का शिकार करने का प्रयास कर रहे हैं।



## आपका पक्ष

बीएसएनएल को सही कमान की जरूरत

नकदी की समस्या से जूझ रहा देश का दूरसंचार विभाग भारत संचार निगम लिमिटेड (बीएसएनएल) और महानगर टेलीफोन निगम लिमिटेड (एमटीएनएल) के विलय के बारे में सोच रहा है। बीएसएनएल को अपने कर्मचारियों को वेतन देने में परेशानी का सामना करना पड़ा था। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार बीएसएनएल के कर्मचारियों की संख्या 1,65,179 है तथा वर्ष 2018-19 में इसका घाटा 14,202 करोड़ रुपये पहुंच गया है। इस अर्वाधि में कंपनी का राजस्व 19,308 करोड़ रुपये रहा। कंपनी की कुल आमदनी में से कर्मचारियों के वेतन भुगतान की लागत 75 प्रतिशत बैठती है। यह बात गौर करने वाली है कि अधिकतर सरकारी कंपनियां घाटे में ही चलती हैं। इसके घाटे में चलने का कारण आजतक पता नहीं चल पाया है। वहीं निजी संचार कंपनियों की बात की



जाए तो एयरटेल के कर्मचारियों की संख्या करीब 20,000 है और कर्मचारियों की लागत कंपनी की आय का मात्र 2.95 प्रतिशत है। वहीं वोडाफोन के कर्मचारियों की संख्या महज 9,883 है तथा कर्मचारियों की लागत उसकी आय का 5.59 प्रतिशत बैठती है। बीएसएनएल का नेटवर्क पूरे देश में सुदूरवर्ती क्षेत्रों तक फैला हुआ

बीएसएनएल को घाटे से उबारने के लिए सरकार को दोस कदम उठाने चाहिए

है। लेकिन निजी कंपनियों भी नेटवर्क में बीएसएनएल से पीछे नहीं है। बीएसएनएल के घाटे में चलने की वजह सरकारी उदासीनता को ठहराया जा सकता

है। बीएसएनएल को 4जी नेटवर्क नहीं देकर एक निजी कंपनी देना भी एक कारण हो सकता है। निजी कंपनियां बीएसएनएल से लीज लाइन लेकर अपनी कंपनियां चला रही हैं और खूब मुनाफा कमा रही हैं लेकिन बीएसएनएल आज डूबने के कगार पर पहुंच गया है। बीएसएनएल को घाटे से उबारने के लिए सरकार को इसे खुला नियंत्रण दे देना चाहिए। सरकारी हस्तक्षेप को भी इसके डूबने का बड़ा कारण माना जा सकता है।

रवि कुमार, नई दिल्ली

समाज में लिंगभेद आज भी कायम

हाल में मीडिया में उत्तराखंड में पिछले तीन महीनों में एक भी बच्ची के जन्म नहीं लेने की खबर सुर्खियों में आई थी। खबर के अनुसार उत्तरकाशी जिले में तीन महीने में

केवल 133 लड़कों का जन्म हुआ। एक भी बच्ची के जन्म नहीं लेने की खबर से कई कयास भी लगाए गए हैं। इसमें कयास भ्रूण हत्या के अंदेश से इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता है। आज भी देश में बेटे की चाहत को अधिक तवज्जो दी जाती है। सरकार ने भ्रूण परीक्षण पर पूरी तरह से रोक लगाई है लेकिन भ्रूण परीक्षण करने का आरोप कई डॉक्टरों पर भी लगा है। सरकार बेटे बचाओ, बेटे पढ़ाओ का नारा देकर पूरे देश में बेटे बचाओ अभियान चली रही है। बहरहाल उत्तराखंड सरकार ने कहा है कि इस अर्वाधि में 62 लड़कियां भी पैदा हुई हैं। देश में लिंग अनुपात में आज भी काफी अंतर है। पुरुषों के मुकाबले महिलाओं की संख्या कम है। इस अंतर को पाटने की जरूरत है। आज जमाना काफी बदल चुका है और लड़कियां लड़कों से कम नहीं रही हैं। हमें समाज में व्याप्त रूढ़िवादी सोच को बदलने की जरूरत है। इसके लिए नव युवकों तथा युवतियों को आगे आना होगा।

पाठक अपनी राय हमें इस पते पर भेज सकते हैं : संपादक, बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड लिमिटेड, 4, बहादुर शाह जफर मार्ग, नई दिल्ली - 110002. आप हमें ईमेल भी कर सकते हैं : lettershindi@bmail.in उस जगह का उल्लेख अवश्य करें, जहां से आप ईमेल कर रहे हैं।







