



## Symptom as cause

The auto sales slump reflects a pervasive lack of demand

India's automobile industry is experiencing a snowballing crisis of demand that shows no signs of abating, leave alone reversing. Domestic sales across all vehicle categories slid 19% year-on-year in July, as passenger vehicle despatches plunged 31% to register the segment's steepest fall in almost 19 years. And with the wheels having come off both two-wheeler deliveries and commercial vehicle shipments, with the former contracting 17% and the latter slumping 26%, the picture is one of widespread gloom. The straightforward interpretation of the data is that demand has dried up in all corners and among all key consumer segments – urban, semi-urban and rural and personal and institutional. Nine straight months of contraction in passenger vehicle sales has also begun extracting a toll in terms of showroom closures and lay-offs at dealerships, component suppliers and vehicle makers themselves. While the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations recently warned of more jobs being at risk, on top of about two lakh positions that have already been shed, the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers admitted that the industry had laid off at least about 15,000 contract workers in the last three months. That the broader economy is experiencing a serious slowdown has been evident for some time now and the latest data from the auto sector only bears testament to it. And as the RBI acknowledged last week "private consumption, the mainstay of aggregate demand" remains sluggish.

While some of the factors currently bedeviling demand in the auto sector are well established – the liquidity crunch in the NBFC industry and the resultant tightening of credit availability to finance vehicle purchases, an increase in up front insurance costs and the 28% GST charged on cars, motorcycles and scooters – the fact that manufacturers overestimated demand when setting up capacity, especially of fossil-fuel powered vehicles, has largely been overlooked. For example, Maruti Suzuki, India's largest car maker, has announced plans to stop selling diesel cars from April 1 as demand has slumped. In 2012, the company decided to invest ₹1,700 crore in a new diesel engine plant in Gurugram, capacity that it now needs to repurpose or idle. Simultaneously, the ride-share industry has mushroomed in recent years, especially in urban areas where choked roads and lack of parking space have incentivised rapid adoption of app-based commuting. The outlook too, especially for the near term, looks far from hopeful. The RBI's July round of its Consumer Confidence Survey, which reflected a decline in consumer confidence in July, shows 63.8% of respondents expect discretionary spending will stay the same or shrink one year ahead. In June 2018, the comparable reading was 37.3%. The onus now lies on the government to urgently formulate policy interventions to address this sectoral crisis or risk wider contagion.

## Unethical actions

The mass defection of MLAs makes a mockery of democracy in Sikkim

The switching of sides by 10 MLAs from the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) to the Bharatiya Janata Party in Sikkim on Tuesday and later two others from the SDF to the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) brings a sense of déjà vu. The en masse shifts are reminiscent of what happened in Arunachal Pradesh in 2016, when rebel Congress MLAs joined the People's Party of Arunachal in order to get over the legal hurdles to defection. These actions have reduced the SDF, which ruled the State for 25 years with Pawan Kumar Chamling as the Chief Minister with the longest tenure in India, to just one MLA – Mr. Chamling himself. Such a shift might well have helped the former SDF legislators stay clear of the anti-defection law, which stipulates that a breakaway group must constitute at least two-thirds of the legislative party's strength and that it must merge with another party. But this was an unethical manoeuvre, as the elections to the Sikkim Legislative Assembly were held barely three months ago and the BJP had come a cropper without winning a single seat and just 1.6% of the overall vote. The BJP has shown no qualms – as seen elsewhere in Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh among others – about poaching legislators instead of winning over support organically through a democratic mandate. The Sikkim defections have added yet another chapter to the hollowing out of the anti-defection law. The SDF, which finished with 15 seats (two since vacated), was a National Democratic Alliance member, but has now been replaced by the 18-member SKM in the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance.

The SKM might have secured a clearer majority with the defection of two SDF MLAs to its fold, but a cloud of uncertainty hangs over its party leader and Chief Minister P.S. Goley alias Prem Singh Tamang. Mr. Goley was convicted in 2016 in a case of corruption and had served a sentence in prison for a year till August 2018. The People's Representation Act, 1951, mandates that a person convicted under the Prevention of Corruption Act cannot contest an election for six years after release. The fact that he is serving as the Chief Minister (he did not contest the Assembly polls) despite the conviction goes directly against a Supreme Court order in a similar case dealing with the eligibility of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha in 2001. The court had then said that the "appointment of a person to the office of Chief Minister who is not qualified to hold it should be struck down at the earliest". In line with the drastic change in the party composition in the Assembly due to the defections, the continuance of Mr. Goley as chief minister makes a mockery of democratic and legal principles. Something is rotten in the State of Sikkim.

# Assam's humanitarian conundrum

Neither Delhi nor Dispur has been working on a proper plan for those who will soon be declared stateless



UDAYON MISRA

With the final date for publication of the National Register of Citizens drawing near, the dividing lines are becoming sharper. While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been expressing doubts about an "error-free" (read Bangladeshi free) NRC, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and minority organisations such as the All Assam Minority Students' Union, the Assam State Jamiat Ulama and the All India United Democratic Front have welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to observe the August 31 deadline.

### The two sides

The stand by the leading minority organisations points to their viewing the NRC as an instrument to remove the "Bangladeshi tag" from lakhs of Bengali Muslims. For the AASU and other ethnic organisations, the final register will be a closure of sorts to a long struggle against foreign influx and demographic change. Therefore, given their support extended to the NRC process, apprehensions of wide-scale social unrest on the final day could be incorrect.

However, what is worrying in the long run is that neither political parties and student organisations nor civil society groups seem seriously engaged with the major humanitarian crisis that is about to unfold as large numbers of people would be declared foreign nationals by the Foreigners Tribunals

(FTs) following their exclusion from the NRC.

Although there have been vague assurances from the Central and State governments that the question of immediate detention and scrapping of rights does not arise with avenues of appeal being open to them, it is disturbing that neither Delhi nor Dispur has been working on any well-thought out humanitarian plan for those who will soon be declared as stateless people. This becomes grave especially when there is awareness of there being errors in an exercise of such a scale.

### Status before tribunals

On the contrary, statements from some BJP leaders that the country would be finally rid of the "termites" and that every single illegal infiltrator would be thrown out have only added to the overall panic and confusion. The resolution of the cases of these undocumented stateless people passing through the FTs, then the High Court and finally the Supreme Court would, naturally, take years, even if the final number of those left out runs into a few lakhs after all claims and objections are met.

Assam has 100 FTs, of which 70 may be said to be functional. The State has pledged to create 200 more FTs by September, but there is uncertainty over their being functional soon after. The Central government has approved 400 out of the 1,000 FTs the State government has asked for. The State government is not in a position to further increase the number of FTs because of infrastructural and administrative issues. Thus the process of deciding on the citizenship status of those left out of the NRC would be cumbersome, long, and involve suffering.



RITIKA KONWAR

Finally, there would be lakhs of poor people without the means to seek judicial redress. For them, the decision of the FTs would be final and they would be sent to detention centres. Then, there are those who have already been declared ex-parte as foreigners but tagged as "untraced foreigners". Clearly, the government has no mechanism in place to keep track of them; a State government affidavit in the Supreme Court cites a figure of some 70,000 people. Assam's Parliamentary Affairs Minister recently said that FTs had identified as many as 1,17,164 persons till March 31. There is also the issue of 'Doubtful' or 'D' voters (some 1.2 lakh people) who would be left out of the NRC till the courts resolve their cases.

### Legal issues

In addition to this is the yet unresolved issue of the children of those deemed non-citizens. Recently, there was a government notification on the basis of a Supreme Court order (based on Sections 3(l)(b) and (c) of the Citizenship Act of 1955) that births up to December 3, 2004 would be eligible for citizenship if either one parent was an Indian citizen. However, in the case of those born after December 3, 2004, the Supreme Court, on Tuesday, while categorically ruling out reopening or re-

verification of the NRC, held that children born after December 3, 2004 would not be eligible for inclusion in the NRC if either parent is a DV (Doubtful Voter), DF (Declared Foreigner) or PFT (persons with cases pending at the FTs). This would virtually leave out those born within the last 15 years to those parents, either one of whose citizenship is in doubt.

Legal issues apart, it is absolutely critical that the government, in due consultation with political parties and civil society groups, draws up a viable plan to deal with those who would be declared stateless. The State government has limited its exercise to the setting up of more detention centres to house all those declared as foreigners by the FTs. The plight of detainees – some are to be released on certain conditions – has been made worse as they are not covered by the jail manuals which are supposed to ensure the minimum standard of dignified living. A full-fledged detention centre with a capacity to hold 3,000 detainees is under construction at Matia in Goalpara at a cost of approximately ₹45 crore; the State government has already sent a proposal to the Central government to build 10 more such centres.

What would be the infrastructural costs involved in holding these prisoners with basic dignity in place? How long would these detentions last especially when the question of deportation to the country of origin does not arise? What would the fate of these people be after they are released on completion of the specified period?

Apart from losing their voting rights, would they also be shorn of their rights to land and property?

And will they be denied access to government welfare measures such as health and education both for themselves and their children? How would the state deal with those declared stateless but who already hold some cultivable land? There have been suggestions to declare those declared stateless not to be allowed to acquire landed property.

### Potential crisis

The idea of holding lakhs of people in detention centres is bound to be a self-defeating and disastrous one which would go against all fundamental humanitarian principles and international covenants involved in the treatment of migrants, even if they happen to be illegal ones. The State cannot absolve itself of its responsibility by declaring someone a foreigner, placing him or her in a detention camp for a certain period to begin with and, after that, just allow him or her to continue to live on with some restrictions and without most of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

There is a lot of speculation that after all the claims and objections are finally met, the final number of the excluded might touch 15 lakh people, which would include the four lakh out of the initial 40 lakh people excluded who did not file any claims. In addition to this figure would be the one lakh people left out in a recent revision as well as 'D' voters. However, this is just an estimate. It is obvious that the State of Assam would be faced with a humanitarian challenge of massive proportions, one for which it seems least prepared.

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# A playing field for political violence

History offers a narrative on why it is so entrenched in Bengal, irrespective of political affiliations



SUVOJIT BAGCHI

Why Bengal witnesses large-scale political violence is a question that is often asked. The answer is complex and multi-layered. The people in Bengal, mainly the poor, developed a sense of entitlement, largely as a result of the Left's long rule. Many argue that such entitlement is what shaped people to express their opinion vociferously.

For example, Amala Naiya, 65, a domestic worker in a south Kolkata neighbourhood, said that she felt "hugely empowered" after the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) came to power. She said, "They told us to report to [the] party office on [an] employer's [act of] misconduct. It was a relief." This "relief" that the working class experienced taught people to dissent; this is perhaps why Bengal witnessed protests recently when a doctor was manhandled in comparison to the silence that has greeted the killing of tribals in Sonbhadra, Uttar Pradesh.

Bengal's protests, which have often been violent, go back in its history, where as tribals to Nawabs, peasants, ascetics, fakirs (musician mendicants) to underground revolutionaries often chal-

lenged the British in what was its largest Presidency. When the Congress was dislodged in 1967 and 1977, the State witnessed intense violence. The quelling of the Naxalbari uprising witnessed unprecedented State repression, while an unknown number of citizens were killed when the Left was dislodged by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 2011. Thus, the thread of violence compounded by British policies ended up damaging the economy.

### Economy and violence

Undivided Bengal – the Bengal Subah – flourished under the Nawabs as Hooghly and Murshidabad attracted investors from overseas centuries ago. Problems began under British rule as a result of multiple factors. British revenue collection was "higher" in the year of the famine (1769-73) than in previous years, if one is to go by Prasanann Parthasarathi's book, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*. In addition, anti-peasant regulations and Winston Churchill's policy to block food import in the 1940s triggered another famine, crippling the economy even further. Partition sounded the death knell. After Independence, big capital did not engage in the region like it had done in west India to pull the State out of its crisis. This is partly owing to the State's reduced size and population growth due to in-migration. Till 2001, the Census recorded the State as having had the highest



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population density among the big States. This increased pressure on land accentuated by small holdings making it difficult for industry to acquire land. In addition, the post-Independence policies of the Congress government debilitated the economy. Thus growth of capital, other than in trading was stunted, resulting in peoples' extreme dependence on political parties and their local 'satraps'.

As Amitava Gupta, a columnist, has argued in a recent article, "The biggest industry in West Bengal is politics and [the] biggest employer is [the] Trinamool Congress." Such dependence turned realpolitik violent as people are often required to defend their employer (the political party of the day), in turn boosting polarisation. However, physical violence, a factor to reckon with even today, is deeply political in Bengal rather than being driven by caste violence. Religious communalism has had a different story behind it.

Communal riots were common especially in the areas north of Kolkata from the late 19th century due to a rise in settlements of "up-

country men... the Hindi or Urdu speaking migrant workers", as Dipesh Chakravarty says in his paper, *Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill-Hands in the 1890s*. Communal violence escalated during Partition but ebbed during Left rule; there has been a revival recently. The key explanation of recent episodes of communal violence is not difficult to understand.

### 'A sense of power'

Almost always, the depressed castes such as homegrown Dalits or Dalit refugees from Bangladesh, and unemployed youth from other States (who continue to live in extreme poverty) are engaged in violent fights against equally poor Muslims. Till recently these communities were solidly with the TMC. Bhagnu, a retrenched jute mill worker turned rickshaw puller in Kakinara, an area witnessing communal violence, argued succinctly why he shifted allegiance from the TMC to the Bharatiya Janata Party: "What has secularism given me?"

He did not deny that he participated in orchestrating attacks against the minorities and made it clear that protecting Bengal's secular fabric or the Constitution was not his priority given his tough life. While secularism or the Constitution failed him, Hindutva, he admitted, gave him "a sense of power".

"Having a gun," as political philosopher Frantz Fanon observed,

is often "the only chance... of giving a meaning to your death." The story of the rickshaw puller who lives without any social security, underscores why a set of the poor is attacking another set of the poor in the name of political or religious ideology in Bengal.

From Amala Naiya's "relief" during Left rule to Bhagnu's "sense of power" during the Right's rise, Bengal's politics has always had one narrative: empower the poor (rather than the rich) politically and rule. The BJP has realised that poverty, which is real, combined with religion is the ideal formula to have the TMC on the defensive. The West Bengal Chief Minister was expected to imbibed this well, combating the Left with "a pro-peasant narrative... borrowed from the Left". But she could not drive a fresh political narrative against the Right and instead focused more on soft Hindutva. It worked till the 2016 Assembly election, but the script has changed since 2019.

The faster the Chief Minister invents a political narrative that promises to empower people the better her chances of a fightback. But can a party invent a new narrative out of the blue? Whatever happens, the violence will not reduce. But the bottomline is this: whether the TMC gains ground or the BJP, political violence is entrenched in the history of Bengalis – in Bangladesh and in West Bengal.

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## 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.

### Legislative business

The recent Budget session of Parliament not only transacted a high volume of legislative business but also remained free of noisy disruptions (Editorial, "Deliberate, don't disrupt", August 14). This is a welcome development that should become the norm rather than an exception. However, Parliament's productivity cannot be merely measured by the number of bills passed. Legislative oversight of the political executive must not only be carried out but also seen to be in place through debates, amendments to bills and enlisting the services of committees to scrutinise important bills. Although the presiding officers of the two Houses ensured that the Opposition's voice was heard in the discussions, the general perception seems to be that many bills

sailed through without adequate scrutiny. Therefore, the model code of conduct for legislators proposed by the Vice President, while formalising the rules for parliamentary behaviour should also scaffold the privilege of the executive to propose new bills within a framework of guidelines – like, for example, formulating a legislative calendar. The bottomline is there should be a minimum time between the introduction of bills and their voting so that members can examine the proposals and come up with reasoned responses.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,  
Thiruvananthapuram

■ Some time ago, "logjam", "deadlock", "disruption" and "boycott" were the usual phrases readers came across when Parliament was in session. If Parliament was

most productive in this session, the credit should go to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. Our representatives should create the perception that they are serious about debating the country's problems by maximum optimisation of parliamentary proceedings.

R. KRISHNAMACHARY,  
Chennai

■ There is no doubt that the quality of parliamentary work has fallen precipitously over the years. Apart from the "model code of conduct", it might be helpful to have a rule that no law should be passed without participation of a certain percentage of the total number of legislators of the House in the debate on the bill under consideration. Every bill should also be vetted by a select committee before passing it into a law. For this, the Parliament may have to be in session for

longer periods. So be it.  
KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,  
Hyderabad

### Unrest in Hong Kong

With pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong remaining firm in their demands, the city appears to be sitting on a ticking time bomb which could affect its status as a leading financial hub. There is every likelihood of strong and decisive action using force against protesters. China with its rising super power status could be flexible and promise more autonomy to Hong Kong.

M. JEVARAM,  
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

### Medical education

It was a surprise to read that the ratio of doctors in urban and rural areas is 3.8:1, with less than 27,000 doctors to serve about 650,000 villages (Editorial page, "Writing out a clean Bill on health",

August 14). Some facts. In my batch of 250 medical students only four or so hail from a rural background. After we graduate we want to go back to our hometowns and start practice. So why are there so few students from the rural areas? The answer is the NEET-UG, which favours urban students; 90% of students in medical colleges have attended coaching institutes, which also charge exorbitant

fees. It is time the NEET-UG is made more rural student friendly. The government should also provide quality and free preparatory materials to students from a rural background. More quality medical colleges and hospitals are needed in rural India, as a chunk of the population lives here.

SHRILA G.,  
Navi Mumbai

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www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Wrong headline: "Six killed in HP landslides" read a headline (some editions, Aug. 13, 2019) while the text was about Uttarakhand and not Himachal Pradesh.

A sentence in the story headlined "No harmful chemicals in PET bottles, finds CSIR study" (Aug. 13, 2019) that read "BPA is a synthetic organic compound and used in the manufacture of PET bottles but is now phased out after research found a link between the presence of BPA and the disruption of hormone regulation, as well as breast cancer" is wrong. It should have been polycarbonate and not PET bottles.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 855 & 866 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

# Envisioning Ladakh's future as UT

Will a greater centralisation of decision-making help the region's already-fragile terrain?



ASHISH KOTHARI

Amidst the babble of voices on the sudden abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)'s special constitutional status, the simultaneous transformation of Ladakh into a Union Territory (UT) has not received much attention. During last week's parliamentary debate on this decision, Ladakh's Member of Parliament Jamyang Tsering Namgyal argued powerfully that Ladakhis had been demanding UT status for the region for many decades. Finally achieving it, he said, will enable the region to achieve its full development potential. But are the prospects for his constituency that clear?

For decades, a substantial part of Ladakh (specifically, Leh district) was felt stifled or alienated by J&K's decision-making apparatus, which was centred in Srinagar. The J&K government has often been insensitive to the region's ecological and cultural uniqueness, whose incredible beauty masks the extreme fragility of its cold desert ecosystems and the highly adaptive traditional livelihoods of its people. These are so unlike the topography of the rest of India that people from other parts of the country cannot even understand them.

## Pressure on ecology

This landscape has found it difficult to weather the pressure being put by the infrastructure projects, the presence of armed forces and excessive tourism. Further, these activities, and the inappropriate educational systems foisted on Ladakhis, have disrupted the lifestyles of the region's traditional ethnic groups. The bifurcation of Ladakh, which was once a single district, into Leh and Kargil, clearly on religious grounds, has also been seen by many local people to have driven an unnecessarily divisive wedge between Buddhist and Muslim populations.

Given the above factors, the demand to make Ladakh a UT appears to have been backed by strong reasoning. One can wonder, though, why the demand was not for a sepa-



The Chang La pass in Ladakh in a 2012 photo. • GETTY IMAGES

rate State, or at least, for a territory having its own legislature, for there is little evidence to suggest that coming under the direct control of the Central government will signal greater autonomy for the region. The way New Delhi has treated Andaman and Nicobar Islands, largely ignoring its ecological fragility and the sensitivities of its indigenous peoples, does not inspire much confidence. Moreover, the aggressive Hindu nationalist agenda of the current Central regime could only pose more challenges to Ladakh.

Being home to enormous mineral reserves and tourism sites, Ladakh could easily find itself getting exploited by commercial interests even more once its economy is opened. This would only put greater pressure on its already fragile ecosystem, and consequently impact the mores of its pastoral and agricultural communities that are dependent on it. The region has already been facing environmental issues due to landslides, soil erosion, accumulation of solid waste, disturbances to its wildlife population and diversion of commons for development projects.

## More infrastructure projects

However, the J&K government's financial and administrative ability to scale such activities up was extremely limited. The Central government, not constrained by such fetters, may

press ahead with more hydropower, mining and road construction programmes, making sensitive areas more vulnerable.

The third danger to the region will possibly come from an increased presence of the armed forces. Given the importance the present government attaches to threats, real and perceived, coming from China and Pakistan, the likelihood of more personnel getting stationed is high. Thousands of hectares of pasture land have already been occupied by the forces, with disruptive consequences for wildlife and local communities. The Army is yet to give us an accurate figure on how much of the region's land has been diverted for use by its personnel.

Ladakh has had its own Autonomous Hill Development Council for more than two decades. However, during a study trip in March this year, we learned from political functionaries, activists and civil society members that there was, on the ground, no true autonomy. Decisions were mostly made from Srinagar and, to some extent, New Delhi.

This is not to say that had Ladakh been given greater autonomy, it would necessarily have chosen a different path; sections of the region's mainstream do aspire for greater 'development'. But we need to stress here that many sections of Ladakh's society also have a different vision

for its future. This includes civil society groups such as the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh; the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust; the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation; and the Ladakh Ecological Development Group. These groups have done innovative work on various fronts – including education; ecotourism; and arts. With power receding further away from the region and now firmly resting in New Delhi, their voices are likely to be heard even less.

## Need for a sensitive plan

A Ladakh 2025 Vision document, formulated in 2005 after substantial consultation, was shelved both because the Hill Council did not push it, and because Srinagar and New Delhi were not interested. The plan contained several innovative proposals to address the needs and aspirations of Ladakh's population, including by providing sustainable livelihoods for its rural people and youth. How will the state of affairs in Ladakh change now with its new constitutional status? Without its own legislature, the region will have only limited power; further, it is not clear if its Hill Council will continue. A lot will depend on what vision New Delhi and Leh can jointly come up with.

In March, when we met Mr. Namgyal, who was then heading the Hill Council, we found him sensitive to the ecological and cultural issues the region faces. He had just brought out a draft for a mission on ecological farming and sounded receptive towards an alternative vision I proposed through a presentation.

Will he and others around him, through whom New Delhi's decisions will be channelled, be willing and able to mould the proposals to suit the region's requirements? Will they revise the Vision 2025 document, updating it if necessary? Will Ladakh's farmers, pastoralists, women and youth get a more meaningful voice in the new dispensation than they have had so far within the Hill Council status, or will they be marginalised even further? And even if they do get a voice, will they opt for a sustainable, culturally rooted future? For the sake of one of the world's most remarkable bio-cultural landscapes, let us hope so.

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# A reality check on India's renewable energy capacity

It has not been able to make full use of reduction in costs



SHOUVIK CHAKRABORTY

Addressing the plenary session of the World Environment Day celebrations on June 5, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated, "We are engaged in a massive push towards renewable energy generation. We have targeted [the] generation of 175 GW of solar and wind energy by 2022. We are already the fifth-largest producer of solar energy in the world. Not only this, we are also the sixth largest producer of renewable energy." Along with Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, Mr. Modi also won the Champions of the Earth Award last year.

True, the expansion of renewable energy capacity in India is a step in the right direction. There are benefits not only from an environmental perspective but also in terms of generating more employment opportunities. However, the question is whether the government has put forth enough efforts to take advantage of the extremely favourable cost conditions on renewable energy, especially solar photovoltaics and onshore winds. The costs of electricity generation from these sources have declined at a rapid pace over the years and generating power from these renewables now costs more or less the same as fossil fuels.

Taking advantage of these lower costs, other developing economies like China and Brazil have performed much better than India in renewable energy generation. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, these countries currently rank the first and third respectively in terms of production of renewable energy.

## China way ahead

China is way ahead of India in its expansion. Over the 2014-17 period, China's addition to its renewable energy capacity (207.2 GW) was nearly six times India's (33.3 GW). Over the same period, China increased its installed capacity in solar energy by 105.5 GW, while India increased its capacity by only 14.3 GW – a mere one-seventh of the former. Advanced economies like the U.S. and Japan installed almost twice the amount of solar capacity over this period compared to India.

Despite the reduction in costs due to global technological advancement in the field of renewable energy, India has been unable to reap these benefits to their full extent. Furth-

er, the recent imposition of safeguard duty on imported solar photovoltaic cells, and the ongoing depreciation of the Indian rupee vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar, have only lessened some of these cost advantages. If the government is concerned enough about the deteriorating environment, there is an immediate need to spend more on the research and development of these renewable energy sources.

One of the primary objectives for advocating the use of renewable energy sources is to limit, and finally eliminate, the use of fossil fuels, especially coal. But, according to Reuters, India's annual coal demand rose by 9.1% to nearly one billion tonnes during the year ending March 2019. Coal features among the top five imports of India, with total imports rising from 166.9 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 235.24 million tonnes in 2018-19.

## More coal, more pollution

Coal is the dirtiest fuel – the carbon emissions from coal are almost double the emissions from natural gas, and also much higher than those from petroleum. A study by the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, shows that Indian coal-fired thermal power plants are considered the most inefficient and polluting in the world. More than 75% of these plants don't comply with governmental regulations. With the passage of the Coal Mines (Special Provision) Act, 2015 and the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015, the expansion of domestic coal usage for power-generation has only worsened the existing problems of pollution.

A report published by the Centre for Financial Accountability in June 2018 showed that out of a total lending of ₹83,680 crore for 72 energy projects, 12 coal-fired power plants with a combined capacity of 17 GW obtained loans of ₹60,767 crore. The 60 renewable energy projects, with a combined capacity of 4.5 GW, were able to mobilise only ₹22,913 crore. The report also added that eight out of the top 10 lenders to these coal-fired power plants were public sector banks. Most of these coal-fired plants have been around for sometime, while the renewable plants are predominantly new and need more financial assistance. This apparent favouring of coal-fired plants is highly problematic; if the use of coal continues to expand, then even with an expansion of renewable energy sources, the increasing emission levels cannot be controlled.

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# The story of India's integration

The coming together of a fifth of all mankind into a single nation is one of the great events in history

## UDAY BALAKRISHNAN

India barely found the inclination to celebrate its independence from Britain on August 15, 1947. Communal riots and a massive influx of refugees following Partition threatened to fragment the fledgling country. Broke and traumatised, it had nothing like the Marshall Plan to cope with the challenges it faced, despite significantly contributing to the Allied victory in the Second World War.

It was in such bleak conditions that India took up the task of convincing the heads of hundreds of princely states to accede to it. That it succeeded in doing so in less than two years after Independence was no miracle. The 'integration project' was the personal achievement of two remarkable men – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first Home Minister and Deputy-Prime Minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet; and his efficient confidant V.P. Menon.

Together, they persuaded the rulers of one princely state after another – nearly 600 in all – to sign the Instruments of Accession to the Indian state. It helped that India, as the successor state to British India, maintained a tenuous control over the princely states to, as Menon explained, "protect their territories against external aggression and to preserve peace and order throughout the country."

## Largely peaceful

India's integration, historian Ian Colpland observed "represented a major watershed. It swelled the area of the new Indian state by over half a million square miles and its population by nearly 90 million people, redraw the political map of the subcontinent and overthrew an entire governing order." The process was largely peaceful with a few exceptions, the most prominent being Jammu and Kashmir and Hyderabad.

In his book, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, Menon urged us not think of the project "only in terms of the consolidation of the country," but also "pause to consider the toils and anxieties that had to be

undergone till, step by step, the edifice of a consolidated India was enshrined in the Constitution." The coming together of a fifth of all mankind, relatively peacefully, into a single state is one of the great events in history and one which we have sadly all but forgotten. Unlike many European universities with centres that study European integration, we have none to look at our own.

India's successful integration holds significant lessons for the rest of the world, especially to the countries of Europe and their fitful efforts at coming together. It took the nations of Western Europe thirteen years following the Second World War to start on their process of integration. This led to the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1958, and later, the European Union (EU) in 1993. However, the EU remains a tentative and inconclusive experiment, with one of its largest members – the United Kingdom – about to exit it. A European political union, which looked very possible a decade back, is not being discussed even as a possibility today. Contrast this with India, which achieved both an economic and a political union within a few years of gaining freedom, giving its people what Winston Churchill expected Europeans to achieve but so far have not – "a sense of enlarged patriotism and common citizenship."

Integrating a land and a people of immense diversities to form one country was no mean task. That this was achieved without the mass murders, show trials and executions which accompanied the rise of the Soviet Union and China makes the story of India's coming together quite the grandest one of the 20th century. The 72nd anniversary of our Independence also marks the time when the integration of Indian states commenced in earnest. It is a fine time for us to reflect on this achievement and savour the moment.

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## DATA POINT

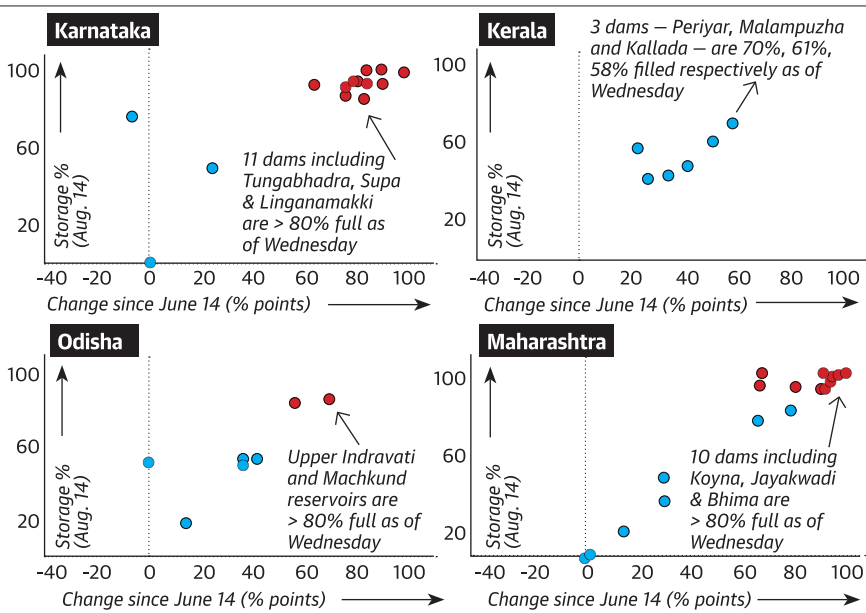
### In deep water

Water levels in 31 of the 91 major reservoirs monitored across India were 80%-100% full on August 14. Two months back, on June 14, just two of the dams had such levels. As on Wednesday, more than 200 people had died in four States due to floods and, in at least 13 sites, flood warning had been issued. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Tables list sites experiencing "above normal flood" (where water level has exceeded the warning mark (WM) but is less than the danger mark) or "severe flood" (where water level has exceeded danger mark (DM)) as on Wednesday at 4 p.m. Figures in metres

Severe flood	DM	Actual	Trend
Kachhlbridge, U.P.	162	162.11	Steady
Neamatighat, Assam	85.04	85.23	Steady
Baltara, Bihar	33.85	34.49	Steady
Runisaidpur, Bihar	53.73	53.75	Steady
Kurundwad, Maharashtra	535.5	538.95	Falling

Source: Central Water Commission



Above normal flood	WM	Actual	Trend
Araria, Bihar	46	46.14	Rising
Dumariaghat, Bihar	61.22	61.65	Steady
Fatehgarh, U.P.	136.6	136.72	Steady
Garhmukteshwar, U.P.	198.33	198.43	Steady
Mantralayam, A.P.	310	310.69	Falling
Mathani, Odisha	5	5.1	Rising
Samdoli, Maharashtra	541.95	542.37	Falling
Beki bridge, Assam	44.1	44.51	Rising

## The Hindu

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 15, 1969

#### Insulin's structure discovered

British Nobel prize winning scientist Dorothy Hodgkin yesterday [August 13] announced the discovery of the crystalline structure of insulin, the life saving drug used by diabetics. Dr. Hodgkin made her announcement at a Press conference held on the first day of a 10-day meeting of the Eighth International Congress of Crystallography at the State University of New York here [Stony Brook]. Scientists at the meeting believe the discovery could lead to an understanding and elimination of the side effects of insulin. It also could make possible the development of insulin by a synthetic process instead of the present costly production of the drug from natural elements. Since two Canadian scientists, Dr. Frederick Banting and Dr. Charles H. Best, isolated insulin in 1921 a search has been in progress to discover how the substance works in the body. "Biologists have a virtual blueprint for this search now that Dr. Hodgkin has discovered insulin's crystalline structure", Dr. Edwin Templeton, of the University of California at Berkeley said. Dr. Hodgkin said work on the discovery was carried out at research laboratories at Oxford University.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 15, 1919

#### Some Difficulties in Social Work.

The Hon. Mr. S. Sreenivasa Iyengar delivered a lecture yesterday evening [August 14 in Madras] at the Y. M.C.A., on "Some difficulties in social work". The Hon. Dewan Bahadur Justice T. Sadasiva Iyer took the chair. In the course of his address [Mr. Sreenivasa Iyengar] said that the caste system was no longer what it was. It was yet to some extent effective in the villages and in the more orthodox circles. It could not be at any rate said that the vast majority of the people still adhered to the caste system and enforced all the old terror of boycott and excommunication. In the place of the old social structure a new one with fresh ideals and a new programme of work should be built. The discovery of social formulae was yet incomplete. Attempts made in various directions had been unsuccessful. 'Till they discovered new formulae there would be discontent and restlessness. The second difficulty was the conventional work in social service. The feeling between the Brahmana and the Non-Brahmana showed that all did not end with intermingling. The next difficulty was the profound disharmony amongst the educated classes. Those disharmonies were bound to produce a bitter cleavage in the Hindu society.