



@ieExplained

#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

## TELLING NUMBERS

## Why twin strikes on Saudi oil facilities matter worldwide



Satellite image shows smoke rising from Aramco's Abqaiq processing facility in Buqayq, Saudi Arabia. Planet Labs Inc via AP

ON SATURDAY, Houthi rebels from Yemen carried out drone attacks on two major oil facilities in Saudi Arabia, including the world's biggest petroleum processing facility run by state-owned Saudi Aramco. This has impacted Saudi Arabia's oil production and exports, and in turn the global oil market.

## 5 mn barrels/day

Reuters quoted Aramco as saying the attack has cut output by 5.7 million barrels per day. In another report, Reuters put the figure at 5 million barrels per day. That is close to half of the kingdom's output, and 5% of global oil supply. Saudi Arabia is the world's top oil exporter, ships more than 7 million barrels of oil to global destinations every day. Reuters said the output cut was expected to send oil prices up \$3-\$5 per barrel on Monday.

## 260.2 bn barrels

These are the liquid reserves of Aramco, in oil equivalent, as of 2017. These reserves, Reuters said, are larger than the combined reserves of Exxon

Mobil Corp, Chevron Corp, Royal Dutch Shell Plc, BP Plc and Total SA, and have an estimated reserve life of 54 years.

## 10.3 mn barrels/day

The quantity of crude produced by Aramco last year. Company documents cited by Reuters said this was produced at \$2.8 a barrel, which the company touted as the lowest cost in the world to produce crude. Aramco also produced 1.1 million barrels of natural gas liquids and 8.9 billion standard cubic feet per day of natural gas.

## 5.2 mn barrels/day

Quantity of Aramco crude delivered to customers in Asia last year, Reuters said. This was almost three-quarters of Aramco's total crude exports. The company believes demand will grow faster in Asia than elsewhere in the world - Asian buyers include China, India, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Its crude deliveries to North America reached more than 1 million barrels per day last year; to Europe, 864,000 barrels per day.

## THIS WORD MEANS

## LOVERS OF MODENA

A pair of skeletons, 1,600 years old, found holding hands in grave. It turns out that both were men.

IN 2009, two 1,600-year-old skeletons were unearthed at the ancient Ciro Menotti cemetery in Modena, Italy. Holding hands when buried, they sparked worldwide interest, and the assumption that they were a pair of lovers - the 'Lovers of Modena' as they came to be known. New analysis has now established that both were men. Researchers from the University of Bologna extracted proteins from dental enamels to complete the skeletons' biological profile, including their sex. Their findings have been published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.



Unearthed at an ancient cemetery in Modena, Italy. University of Bologna

Various skeleton pairs in the past have been found holding hands in areas such as Greece, Turkey and Siberia, but none of these so far have been established to be of the same sex. The new finding gives new insight about the funerary and burial practices in Late Antique Italy. The researchers hypothesise that the pair's burial "represents a voluntary expression of commitment between two individuals, rather

than a recurring cult practice of the Late Antiquity". The injuries on some of the other skeletons found in the cemetery suggest that they could have been war casualties and therefore, could have been "comrades" or "friends". Alternatively, they could have been cousins or brothers (given their similar ages) who shared the same grave because of familial bonds.

## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION &amp; ANSWER

## How waived loans impact states

In recent years, many state govts have waived farm loans. How did this impact their respective finances? Following a recent RBI report, a look at why state finances matter for India's macroeconomic stability

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

ON FRIDAY, the Reserve Bank of India shared the report of an Internal Working Group (IWG), which was set up in February to look at, among other things, the impact of farm loan waivers on state finances. The report has shown how farm loan waivers dented state finances and urged governments - both central and state - to avoid resorting to farm loan waivers.

Since 2014-15, many state governments have announced farm loan waivers. This was done for a variety of reasons including relieving distressed farmers struggling with lower incomes in the wake of repeated droughts and demonetisation. Also crucial in this regard was the timing of elections and several observers of the economy including the RBI warned against the use of farm loan waivers.

The latest report of RBI has concluded: "The IWG recommends that Gol and state governments should undertake a holistic review of the agricultural policies and their implementation, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of current subsidy policies with regard to agri inputs and credit in a manner which will improve the overall viability of agriculture in a sustainable manner. In view of the above stated, loan waivers should be avoided".

## What has been the impact on state finances?

Chart 1 from the RBI report details the impact on state finances in successive years. Typically, once announced, farm loans waivers are staggered over three to five years. Between 2014-15 and 2018-19, the total farm loan waiver announced by different state governments was Rs 2.36 trillion. Of this, Rs 1.5 trillion has already been waived. For perspective, the last big farm loan waiver was announced by the UPA government in 2008-09 and it was Rs 0.72 trillion. Of this, actual waivers were only Rs 0.53 trillion - staggered between 2008-09 and 2011-12.

In other words, in the past five years, just a handful of states have already waived three-times the amount waived by the central government in 2008-09. The actual waivers peaked in 2017-18 - in the wake of demonetisation and its adverse impact on farm incomes - and amounted to almost 12 per cent of the states' fiscal deficit.

## What is the impact on economic growth, interest rates and job creation?

In essence, a farm loan waiver by the government implies that the government settles the private debt that a farmer owes to a bank. But doing so eats into the government's resources, which, in turn, leads to one of following two things: either the concerned government's fiscal deficit (or, in other words, total borrowing from the market) goes up or it has to cut down its expenditure.

A higher fiscal deficit, even if it is at the state level, implies that the amount of money available for lending to private businesses - both big and small - will be lower. It also

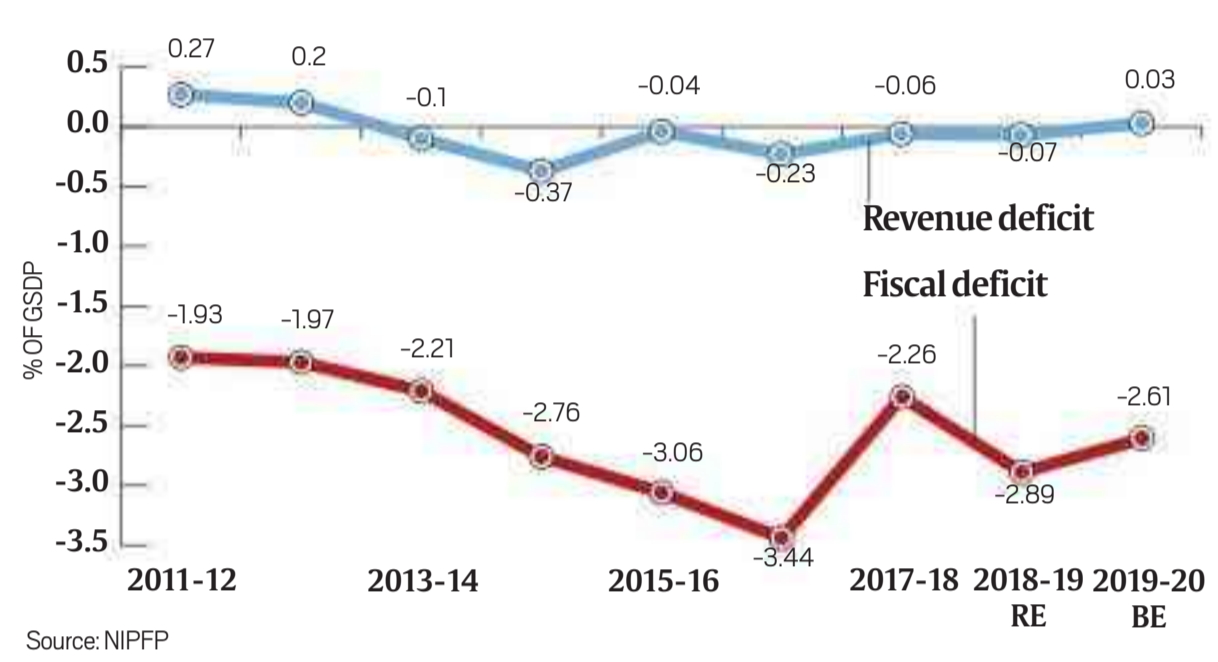
## CHART 1: FISCAL IMPACT OF STATES' FARM LOAN WAIVERS (in ₹ billion)

STATE	YEAR OF ANNOUNCEMENT	AMOUNT	AMOUNT ACTUALLY PROVIDED IN THE BUDGET					
			2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19*	2019-20**
Andhra	2014-15	240	40	7	35	36	9	1
Telangana	2014-15	170	43	43	30	30		
Tamil Nadu	2016-17	53			17	19	9	8
Maharashtra	2017-18	340				152	68	35
Uttar Pradesh	2017-18	364				211	55	6
Punjab	2017-18	100				4	43	30
Karnataka	2018-19	440				39	120	126
Rajasthan	2018-19	180					30	32
MP	2018-19	365					50	80
Chhattisgarh	2018-19	61					42	
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,365</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>309</b>
As a percentage of state gov't gross fiscal deficit			2.5	1.2	1.6	11.9	7.7	6.6

\*RE \*\*BE

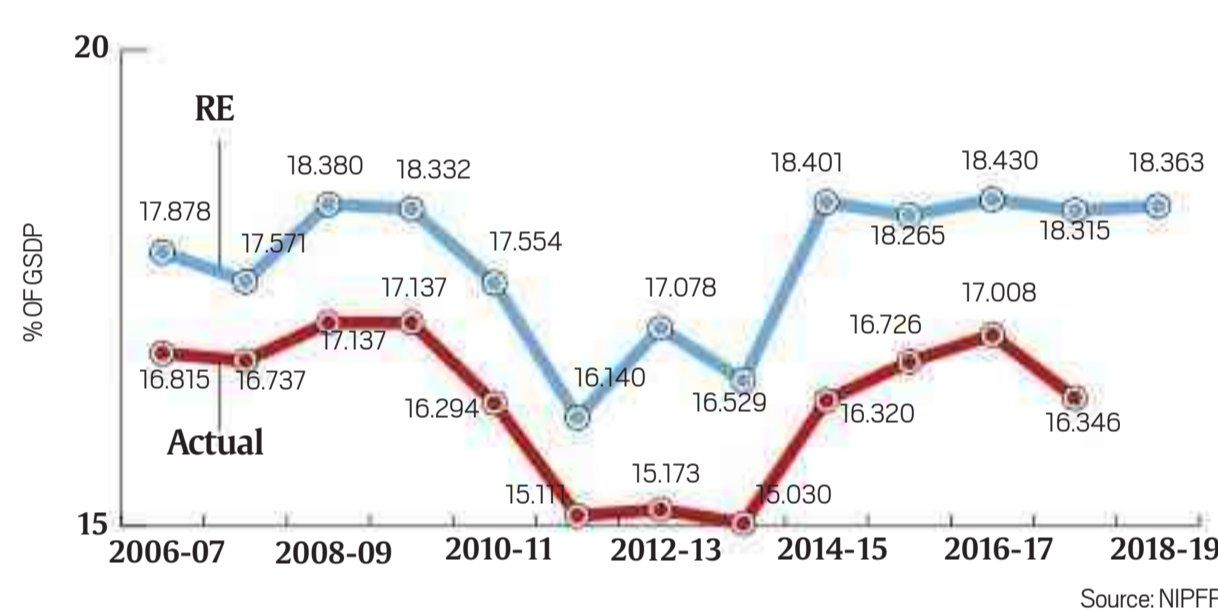
Source: Budget documents of state governments

## CHART 2: STATES LARGELY MEET THEIR DEFICIT TARGETS



Source: NIPFP

## CHART 3: STATES CUT EXPENDITURE TO MEET DEFICIT TARGETS



Source: NIPFP

## CHART 4: NET BORROWINGS FROM THE MARKET (in ₹ billion)



Source: RBI

means the cost at which this money would be lent (or the interest rate) would be higher. If fresh credit is costly, there will be fewer new companies, and less job creation.

If the state government doesn't want to borrow the money from the market and wants to stick to its fiscal deficit target, it will be forced to accommodate by cutting expenditure. More often than not, states choose to cut capital expenditure - that is the kind of expenditure which would have led to the creation of productive assets such as more roads, buildings, schools etc - instead of the revenue expenditure, which is in the form of committed expenditure such as staff salaries and pensions. But cutting capital expenditure also undermines the ability to produce and grow in the future.

As such, farm loan waivers are not considered prudent because they hurt overall economic growth apart from ruining the credit culture in the economy since they incentivise defaulters and penalise those who pay back their loans.

## So, are the states increasing their fiscal deficits or cutting capital expenditure?

There is no ready answer about specific states mentioned in Chart 1. However, an analysis of the latest state Budgets by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), released last month, shows that, on the whole, notwithstanding farm loan waivers etc., state governments stick to their fiscal deficit targets. In other words, state governments are not as profligate as they are made out to be. As Chart 2 shows, states barring the episode (in 2015-16) when they had to absorb the losses of state discoms (power distribution companies) under the Ujjwal Discom Assurance Yojana (or UDAY), have stayed true to restricting their revenue deficit to zero and fiscal deficit to three per cent of their GDP.

But this relieving picture has a flip side. The way states meet their deficit targets is not by raising more revenues but by cutting expenditure. Chart 3 shows how, each year, the actual expenditure is considerably lower than the Revised Estimates (RE) presented in the budget. And within expenditure, as Manish Gupta of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) points out, capital expenditure is cut relatively more than revenue expenditure.

## How much do state finances matter for India's macroeconomic stability?

Far too often, analyses of the Indian economy focuses on the Union government's finances alone. But the ground realities are fast changing. The NIPFP study of state finances reveals that all the states, collectively, now spend 30 per cent more than the central government. Moreover, as Chart 4 shows, since 2014, state governments have increasingly borrowed money from the market. In 2016-17, for instance, total net borrowings by all the states were almost equal (roughly 86 per cent) of the amount that the Centre borrowed.

In other words, state-level finances are just as important as the central government finances for India's macroeconomic stability and future economic growth.

## Is a new interstellar object visiting Solar System?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

IN OCTOBER 2017, the Haleakala Observatory in Hawaii spotted a strange, spaceship-shaped object passing through the Solar System. Later named 'Oumuamua, it became the subject of speculation whether it was really an alien spaceship, but was eventually declared by scientists to be an interstellar object - the first such known visitor to the Solar System.

Now, it appears that a second interstellar object is paying a visit. On August 30, the MARGO observatory in Crimea spotted a

comet which, astronomers believe, is likely to have originated from outside the Solar System, although the official confirmation has not been made yet.

The comet has been designated C/2019 Q4 (Borisov). It is still inbound toward the Sun. It will remain farther from Earth than the orbit of Mars - it will approach no closer to Earth than about 300 million km, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) said in a statement.

After the initial detections of the comet, JPL's Scout system automatically flagged the object as possibly being interstellar. Scientists at NASA's Center for Near-Earth Object Studies at JPL, European Space Agency's

Near-Earth Object Coordination Centre, and the NASA-sponsored Minor Planet Center in Massachusetts estimated the comet's precise trajectory and determine whether it originated within the Solar System or came from elsewhere in the galaxy.

"The comet's current velocity is high, about 150,000 kph, which is well above the typical velocities of objects orbiting the Sun at that distance. The high velocity indicates not only that the object likely originated from outside our Solar System, but also that it will leave and head back to interstellar space," David Farnocchia of NASA's Center for Near-Earth Object Studies said in the JPL statement.

As of Thursday, the comet was 420 million km from the Sun. It is heading toward the inner Solar System. On October 26, it will pass through the ecliptic plane - the plane in which Earth and the other planets orbit the Sun - from above at roughly a 40° angle. The comet will reach its closest point to Earth, or perihelion, on December 8.

C/2019 Q4 can be seen with professional telescopes for months to come. "The object will peak in brightness in mid-December and continue to be observable with moderate-size telescopes until April 2020. After that, it will only be observable with larger professional telescopes through October 2020," Farnocchia said.

## Reading the HC order that allows two MPs to meet Abdullahs, with conditions

SOFIAHSAN

SRINAGAR, SEPTEMBER 15

LAST WEEK, the Srinagar Bench of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir allowed two National Conference MPs to hold separate meetings with their party president Dr Farooq Abdullah and vice president Omar Abdullah, who have been in detention since the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5. However, the single-judge Bench barred the two Lok Sabha MPs - one of whom is a retired judge of the same High Court - from speaking to the media regarding the meeting, and imposed restrictions on the nature of the meeting.

What is the background of the incident, and the details of the case order?

## The NC MPs' petition

National Conference MPs Justice (retired) Hasnain Masoodi MP (Anantnag) and

Muhammad Akbar Lone (Baramulla) filed a writ petition on September 4, with a prayer for directions to permit their meeting with the two senior leaders under Article 226, an omnibus constitutional power allowing High Courts to exercise jurisdiction and pass directions in relation to their jurisdictional territory.

The petition, the first attempt by NC leaders for deliberations among themselves in the aftermath of the August 5 decision by the central government and its subsequent approval by Parliament, said the two Abdullahs had been under arrest since that day, and had not been allowed to meet any party workers, and even their relatives. Submitting that they too, were close friends of the leaders, the two MPs pleaded they were interested in knowing their wellbeing.

As per the High Court's order, Justice (retired) Masoodi also "claimed" that being a retired judge and a senior advocate, he was capable of rendering legal advice and assis-



Anantnag MP Justice (retired) Hasnain Masoodi (right) with Farooq and Omar Abdullah in New Delhi on August 1. The Abdullahs are now under detention; Masoodi has HC's permission to visit them. Renuka Puri

tance to the leaders, who were in detention for "undisclosed" reasons.

On September 6, during the initial hearing, Justice Sanjeev Kumar asked a government counsel, who was "incidentally" present in the court, to ascertain whether the two petitioners were "actually" prevented from meeting their party president and, if so, for what reasons. The hearing was adjourned until September 11.

## The HC's final order

In the order released on Thursday, Justice Kumar directed the Deputy Commissioner of Srinagar to take steps to facilitate a meeting of Masoodi and Lone with the Abdullahs at the earliest. While Omar has been detained at Hari Niwas, Farooq has been detained at his own house in Srinagar's Gupkar area.

However, the Bench in the same order also directed the two MPs to "ensure" that the meetings were "restricted to a courtesy

call" only, and to know about the wellbeing of the two NC leaders. The Court also made it clear that Masoodi and Lone "shall not go to press/media regarding their meeting and deliberations with the aforesaid persons".

The direction to restrict their meeting to a courtesy call in effect rejected the argument made by Justice Masoodi's counsel that he (Masoodi) could provide legal advice to his party leaders regarding their detention.

In its submissions, the government does not seem to have pleaded for restrictions on the nature of the meetings, or for their contents to not be disclosed publicly. Counsel for the government, in a verbal response, is recorded to have stated that there "is no formal restriction" on the meeting of the two MPs with their party leaders, and that the state was not averse to the meeting. However, the counsel asserted that the MPs must ensure that they would not do anything aimed at "vitiating the peaceful atmosphere".

## The Yechury case

In their petition, the two MPs referred to a *habeas corpus* plea filed by CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury in the Supreme Court regarding the whereabouts of J&K party unit leader Mohd Yousuf Tarigami.

On August 28, the Supreme Court had allowed Yechury to travel to Kashmir to meet his colleague, but only to inquire about his health, and "for no other purpose". The court had warned that if Yechury was found "to be indulging in any other act, omission or commission save and except what has been indicated above i.e. to meet his friend and colleague and to enquire about his welfare and health condition, it will be construed to be a violation of this Court's order".

Counsel for Yechury was told that once his client returns to Delhi, he would have to "file a report supported by an affidavit in connection with the purpose of the visit as indicated in this order".



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## NO HALF MEASURES

Government needs to up public spending and investment in stalled projects to beat the slowdown

OVER THE WEEKEND, the government unveiled measures aimed at reviving the country's troubled housing industry and exports. These include a Rs 20,000-crore refund to help the completion of affordable and middle-income housing projects that are Non Performing Assets and are not before the bankruptcy court or the National Company Law Tribunal, and which face last mile funding problems. The government will contribute Rs 10,000 crore to this stress fund and other investors will contribute the rest. A professional team will manage the fund that is estimated to potentially benefit 3.5 lakh housing units across the country. This may seem like the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in the US in which the government provided funds to help avoid foreclosures by home buyers. In the absence of details on how many projects would qualify and the selection of such projects, considering that there are hundreds of projects promoted by developers in which thousands of crores of money pumped in by home buyers and banks are stuck, this and the package for the export sector appear to be half measures.

In the backdrop of sliding exports — the data for August shows a decline of 6.05 per cent compared to a year ago — the finance minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced a new export incentive scheme that will be WTO compliant, full electronic refund of GST to exporters by the end of this month, easier funding and annual mega shopping festivals in four cities by 2020, modelled perhaps on Dubai, and a faster turnaround time in airports and ports. These are not likely to help significantly reverse the trend in the near term given the escalating trade war and the global slowdown. Indeed, better infrastructure and a shift to zero rating of exports or levying of zero rate of tax on exports on the lines of countries which have implemented GST, thus easing the compliance burden, and unlocking capital that is locked up could provide a better boost competitiveness of Indian exports. Ultimately, countering the slowdown may hinge largely on the government stepping up public spending or investment in stalled projects. And at a time when revenue growth is far lower than projected so far this fiscal, it is also important that the GST Council also stand firm in rejecting the growing demand for a cut in GST to arrest the secular decline in auto sales.

Fiscal orthodoxy and the spectre of bond vigilantism may deter the government from stepping up public spending. But it is interesting that in the face of weakening growth, fiscal rules are being overturned in the West. Some days ago, both the European Central Bank President (ECB) Mario Draghi and his successor, Christine Lagarde, pitched for fiscal stimulus by European governments. Monetary policymakers in Europe want governments to ramp up public spending to boost growth with the ECB having stepped up its bond buying programme. These should provide enough cues for the government here too.

## LET THE FARMER CHOOSE

State may provide the cultivator with funds, but not incentivise untested technologies like zero budget natural farming

ZERO BUDGET NATURAL Farming (ZBNF) may have received endorsement from the NITI Aayog, the finance minister's budget speech and Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself. But that hasn't stopped the country's premier academy of agricultural scientists from coming out against an "unproven technology" that, they say, brings no incremental gain to either farmers or consumers. Since the mid-1960s, India's annual foodgrain output has risen from 80-85 million tonnes (mt) to 280 mt-plus, just as it has from about 20 mt to 176 mt for milk and by similar magnitudes in vegetables, fruits, poultry meat, eggs, sugarcane and cotton. A significant part of these increases have come from crossbreeding or improved varieties/hybrids responsive to chemical fertiliser application, and also crop protection chemicals to ensure that the resultant genetic yield gains aren't eaten away by insects, fungi or weeds. Today's millennials may have little connect with the Bengal Famine or the ship-to-mouth times hardly five decades ago. But they should know that without IR-8 rice, urea, chlorpyrifos or artificial insemination, the nation would simply not have been able to feed itself.

The basic idea of "zero budget" itself rests on very shaky scientific foundations. Its proponent Subhash Palekar Palekar, for instance, claims that nitrogen, the most important nutrient for plant growth, is available "free" from the air. Yes, nitrogen makes up 78 per cent of the atmosphere, but being in a non-reactive diatomic (N<sub>2</sub>) state, it has to be first "fixed" into a plant-usable form — which is what ammonia or urea are. Even maintaining indigenous cows and collecting their dung and urine — the main ingredients in Palekar's microbial, seed treatment and insect pest management solutions — entails labour cost. Simply put, agriculture can never be zero budget. Also, crop yields cannot go up beyond a point with just cow dung that has only around 3 per cent nitrogen (as against 46 per cent in urea), 2 per cent phosphorous (46 per cent in di-ammonium phosphate) and 1 per cent potassium (60 per cent in muriate of potash).

That said, there is a strong case for promoting techniques such as conservation tillage, trash mulching, green manuring and vermi-composting, apart from reducing use of chemical fertilisers and insecticides through integrated nutrient and pest management. The time has also come for eliminating fertiliser subsidies to encourage their judicious use. The government should give farmers a fixed sum of money per acre, which they can use to buy chemical-based inputs or to engage the extra labour necessary for organic agricultural practices. Discrimination must end; let the farmer choose between non-organic, organic or even ZBNF.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



## Banish the gloom

India's growth story is far from over. But government must incentivise household savings, spur consumption



SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

THERE HAS BEEN an enormous amount of writing on the Indian economy in the past few days. Most of it recommends the simple policy option of aggressive rate cuts to boost demand. But while rate cuts are welcome, they might not suffice in the current context.

First, the current slowdown is mostly consumption led, a by-product of the slow income growth in recent times (rural and urban wages have grown by 1-2 per cent in real terms). However, even though private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) has declined by Rs 1.5 lakh crore in Q1 FY20, it is still higher by Rs 1.65 lakh crore over the same period last year. Thus, while we should be worried, we must not be overtly despondent and write obituaries of the India's growth story just yet. Unfortunately, the markets are currently soaking in trepidation, anticipating an uncertain future that the data still does not suggest.

What could be an ideal policy option in the current context? The high inflation and high interest rates in the 1970s generated a revolution in macroeconomic thinking, policy and institutions. The theory of real business cycles, propounding the ineffectiveness of any policy response and the subsequent theory of market imperfections, opened a new vista in economics literature of how to deal with growth conundrums. In similar vein, the low inflation, interest rate and stagnation of the last decade in the developed economies deserves an equal response.

What could be that response? The contemporary issue for macroeconomists is to kickstart aggregate demand. We believe that monetary policy can only act to some extent — we have been in an era of low interest rates for a decade but that has done little to boost aggregate demand, but increase household debt (household debt in the US has increased from \$12.5 trillion in Q1 FY08 to \$13.9 trillion in Q2 FY19). Rather, fiscal policy needs to be the major focus thrust, especially given what low or negative interest rates mean for the sustainability of deficits.

Let us fast forward to the Indian context. The total financial liabilities of households have jumped by a massive 58 per cent in FY18 to Rs 74 lakh crores (there was a 22 per cent jump in FY17) and may have also jumped in FY19. In fact, while household leverage has

jumped two times in the last five years, disposable income has jumped by only 1.5 times, thereby putting pressure on savings. Even though the jump is not as much as in FY07 (when it jumped by 2.3 times over FY05), such a large jump is a matter of concern. The good thing is that gross household financial savings have jumped by a sharp 1.5 times over the same period (though it could be largely because of remonetisation).

Given such a large jump in household leverage, monetary policy is unlikely to retain the effectiveness through large rate cuts in the current scenario. Only a counter cyclical fiscal response might address the core of the current problem. But, before we discuss that, let us for a moment digress to some of the common market fallacies for the reasons behind the decline in household savings.

First, since FY12, gross savings (as a percentage of GDP) have declined from 34.6 per cent to 30.5 per cent in FY18. This decline was entirely due to the decline in household savings (by 6.4 percentage points). Interestingly, most of this decline is in physical savings of households, with only a marginal decline in financial savings.

Second, the decline in household savings is because of a change in definition. Unincorporated entities, which were a part of the household sector, now get counted as corporate savings. This is visible in the data since FY12 when private corporate savings jumped by 2.1 per cent.

Third, the decline in household savings also has to do with high real interest rates. Our empirical analysis suggests that the long-run effect of real interest rates on the savings rate is negative and is statistically significant at 1 per cent level.

Coming back to the policy options, data on household savings clearly suggests that the benefits of a fiscal push could be significant in the current context. First, the argument of huge government borrowings eating up a significant part of household financial savings only tells a part of the story. Incremental claims of government borrowings on households increased by only Rs 60,000 crore for the 2-year period ended FY17. During the same period, the move to incentivise household savings by increasing the ceiling of section 80C resulted in an incremental Rs 1.8 lakh crore of household savings flowing into tax saving instruments.

During the same period, the move to incentivise household savings by increasing the

ceiling of section 80C resulted in an incremental Rs 1.8 lakh crore of household savings flowing into tax saving instruments. Our estimates show that the savings incentivisation multiplier is at least five times higher than the revenue foregone by the government through such tax incentives.

Capital gains tax can be abolished. The total assets under management (equity) of mutual funds jumped by only two per cent since January 2018, while they had risen by 68 per cent between November 2016 and January 2018. Such measures are stunting household savings in shares and debentures.

Apart from such a push to savings, what could be the other fiscal policy options to spur consumption? To this end, the government must address the demand weakness by front-loading expenditure through the PM-KISAN and MGNREGA. Any attempt to cut back on expenditure, to balance the fiscal deficit at this time, will be severely detrimental to consumption growth. Another option is to continue aggressively with asset sales, pursue capital expenditure and use the additional fiscal space for infrastructure spending.

A consequence of an increase in spending that the government could be wary of is on the bond markets. In this context, the RBI could front-load a large rate cut in the October policy, while keeping liquidity in surplus mode. The government should also go ahead with the sovereign bond issuance. It could partly hedge its borrowings and decide to not bring back the dollar proceeds, instead keeping it at any of designated scheduled commercial banks (ASCBs) outside the country for import payments. This will take care of the problems of sterilisation and hedging.

The government could also introduce a performance linked compensation scheme for the banking sector employees as well as provide them operational flexibility to hire directly from the market. The wage agreement has been delayed for a long time and a quick announcement before the festive season would help improve sentiment significantly. Setting up a development finance institution could be another policy option.

The author is Group Chief Economic Advisor, State Bank of India. Views are personal

## THIS LAND OF MINE

Land, culture have multiple dimensions that human brain can't easily comprehend



KALYANI BINDU

LAND IS A place that never was, so say its wild incumbents.

Humans barely manage to engage in meaningful dialogues with their niche. They thrive on some autocratic understanding of their niche, instead. They think of land as cycling in and out of seasons, producing fruits and inflorescence they may reap. This utilitarian understanding of nature characterises farmers' perceptions — land running in near-identical cycles. Yet, what would it be like to think like nature (if it had some holistic consciousness)? Would it be as orchestrated as we claim it to be? Do these questions acknowledge the concept that is "land"?

Funnily enough, the concept of land in itself is a human construct. It could be thought of as a semantic human carryover of territoriality, material limits of existence. To animals and birds that defend territories, it is something that "provides" and promotes survival. Humans experience a more mentally palpable version of territoriality, a material emotion affecting perceptions and even designing timelines.

Land, in actuality, is a synthesis of biotic and abiotic factors. Humans would define land in terms of metaphors. Land grows like a twining, sun-fetching climber littered by pheromones of marching ants. It conjures lost ponds, insects and hills in people's dreams, migraines and constipations. Land returns like asthmatic memories. Unlike other creatures, humans download meaning out of land-associations that shape their mindscapes.



ONE OF  
800  
MILLION  
A VOICE, UNDER 35

Land and culture are multi-dimensional beings. This may make it difficult for the human brain to comprehend their complexity. The human brain may approximate them into patterns. Specifically, the understanding of land may be reduced into its periodicity and culture into an exercise of placing one's individual mental niche into a collective niche of shared themes.

Vishu marks the beginning of a new year in the Malayalam calendar. In the past, farmers sowed seeds and prayed for rain. The climatic cycle brought rain. Vishu marked the cycles of land — the blooming of yellow and golden cassia, migrating birds. To humans, periodicity is land's religion, defining its system of beliefs, feeding into their sense of territoriality.

Land evolves, accumulating changes. This year's Vishu will never be the same as the one before — hilltops give way to spiralling roads, ponds to chasms, peacocks shed feathers on doorsteps and nocturnal foxes barge into moonlit verandahs, cassia grows in brighter bunches, the honeycomb sees a coup led by a new queen. Nature changes sinuously. However, humans condone "trivial" changes that occur in the apparent "backdrop" of nature, due to their inability to understand concepts that traverse the dogma of "form". Human understanding stipulates approximations. Previous year's Vishu was an approximated version of the one before.

Human culture grows just as land grows and loses its incumbents. Our nostalgia of some native culture becomes an amnesiac's approximated picture. This record sets up a linearity that helps derive meaning.

Forging identities, too, is integral to human life. An infant, for instance, is an all-observing human for the first few months of her life: She sees, but sees no more in her mind. There is some unrecorded newness that sprouts but grows no more. This newness metamor-

phoses into matted thoughts as she unwittingly familiarises with her niche — family, cradle, the world around her. The placing of oneself as a participant in this milieu is a prerequisite to adapting to human culture. After this placing, her mind transforms into a highly porous space: And into this space, culture seeps in. However, every human culture is distinct, marked by some "original" form of creative expression. Every culture, then, is a different perception of a niche coloured by some amount of whim, coincidental choice of an abstract and plastic mind.

But perception is only one way of looking at an entity. Singularity of perception, though, reduces the time one spends in processing one's world, before converting decisions into actions. Culture, then, must be some conditioned response to frequently encountered "motifs" discerned from complex situations.

Land and culture are multi-dimensional beings. This may make it difficult for the human brain to comprehend their complexity. The human brain may approximate them into patterns. Specifically, the understanding of land may be reduced into its periodicity and culture into an exercise of placing one's individual mental niche into a collective niche of shared themes. But, they are clearly larger than the sum of their components. It is the human perception that needs to be more flexible to gain a better understanding of these concepts.

The writer is a research assistant at the Indian Institute of Science

## SEPTEMBER 16, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

### NO ONE-DAY POLL

THE CONFERENCE OF chief secretaries decided to request the Election Commission to reconsider its view of holding a one-day poll in the Lok Sabha election. This decision was taken by the conference, convened by the Home Ministry to finalise poll arrangements, since the overwhelming view of the states was it would not be possible to mobilise adequate manpower to ensure a single-day poll all over the country. Deputy PM, Y B Chavan, who inaugurated the conference, which was attended by inspectors-general of states, assured the states that maximum possible assistance would be given by the Centre.

### AIADMK-DMK UNITY

THE MOVE FOR unity between the ruling AIADMK and DMK, initiated by the Union Steel Minister, Biju Patnaik, has proved abortive with the AIADMK leader and chief minister, M G Ramachandran, declaring that he would not forsake the separate identity of his party. Ramachandran said the name, flag and principles of the AIADMK would not be sacrificed. On his part, the DMK chief, M Karunanidhi, said the AIADMK which broke away from the DMK in 1972, should return to the parent organisation. The unity move was initiated by George Fernandes, when he met MGR 10 days ago.

### CURBING PRICE RISE

STATE GOVERNMENTS AGREED to strengthen the machinery for monitoring of prices of essential commodities and to take remedial action. This was one of the measures on which there was consensus at the meeting of the chief secretaries and IGP's of states and union territories, held in Delhi. States were told to enforce the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act, storage control order and prices and stock display order which confer wide powers. Central officials also emphasised that it was important to ensure implementation of all existing laws to curb any price rise.



# 11 THE IDEAS PAGE

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Will the fractured Muslim world ever wake up to back Palestinians' cause? — THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE

## Births of a nation

Linking patriotism to women's bodies is uncalled for



ALAKA M BASU

SOMETIMES ONE NEEDS to reject good advice, even when it comes from a person one admires. This seems to be the right time to reject President John F Kennedy's much repeated instruction to "ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country".

Historically, even today, if there is one large group of persons on whom a disproportionate responsibility to buckle up and do its duty for the country is placed, it is women. In today's India, the accusation of female irresponsibility is implied in the global disappointment that its women are withdrawing from the labour force. While some of this disappointment stems from the consequent loss of female empowerment that it is believed to confer, most of the commentary on this process stresses the loss of national GDP growth that it entails. The IMF, for example, estimates that India's GDP would be 27 per cent higher if women's labour force participation were to rise to male levels. It is unclear, however, whether this infliction of guilt will encourage Indian women to do their patriotic duty.

However, it is in the invocation of women's patriotic reproductive responsibilities that Kennedy's proverbial statement needs to be turned around on its head. The latest firing of this salvo occurred in the Prime Minister's Independence Day speech, in which it was declared that having small families is a form of "patriotism". At least at the policy level, we know from past and present experience that such exhortations primarily target women, women's bodies and women's reproductive autonomy. In India, the rush to sterilise as many women as possible often means sterilisations are performed under shoddy conditions with sometimes awful consequences. The 13 women who died during a sterilisation camp in Chhattisgarh in 2014 belonged to a long chain of such assaults on women's bodies. And yet, in 2016-17, most of the country's family planning budget continues to go towards female sterilisations.

There are, of course, technical problems with this hurry to address India's population "explosion" — for example, thanks to the population momentum, even if the total fertility rate declines by as much as 0.5 births more than currently projected by the UN, the population will still be around 1.5 billion in 2050, compared to the 1.6 billion if birth rates continue their current expected steady decline.

Apart from that, women's bodies and reproductive needs will be much better served by greater state investments in so many things other than advice on patriotic duty. In the last National Family Health Survey, about half of Indian women were anaemic, some 22 per cent had a below normal body mass index, only 21 per cent of

women had the full regimen of antenatal care during their last pregnancy, just 60 per cent of children aged 12-23 months had received the full recommended regime of vaccinations, and as many as 17 per cent of women had their last births delivered by C-section. Predictably, but ominously, this last figure was 40 per cent for births in private hospitals compared to 12 per cent for births in public health facilities — given WHO's indication that under usual circumstances about 10-15 per cent of births should end up needing a Caesarian delivery, we know where the money-making is happening.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that our Maternal Mortality Ratio is as high as 174 maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births (as an embarrassing point of comparison, it is 30 in Sri Lanka) and our under-five child mortality rate is 50 per 1,000 live births (nine in Sri Lanka). Within India, the child mortality rate goes from a low of seven in Kerala to a high of 78 in Uttar Pradesh. With what kind of righteous self-confidence can we ask the patriotic UP mother to cut down her births, when the chances of losing some of these births to early death are so high?

Even when she does feel her national duty more acutely than her fertility demonstrates, it is worth noting that there is what is called the "unmet need" for family planning — the percentage of women who do not want another birth ever or right now, but who are nevertheless not using any contraception. This figure is 13 per cent for India, 6 per cent for Andhra Pradesh, 18 per cent for UP and 21 per cent in Bihar. If more of this unmet need can be understood, and sympathetically (not with aggressively offered female sterilisation) met, maybe we will discover that most women in the country are already very patriotic.

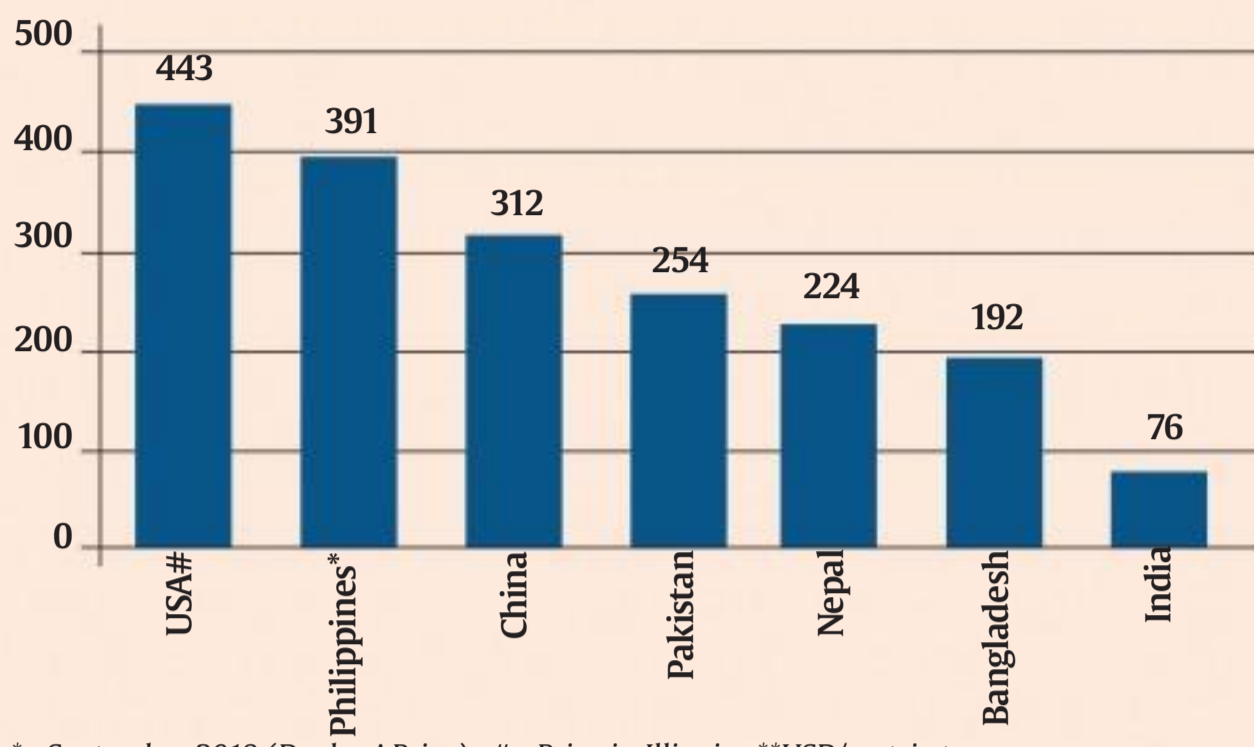
To be fair, urging women to have or not have children for the sake of the nation is hardly an Indian invention. It underlay Nazi Germany's denial of contraception and abortion to non-Jewish women (unless the sexual partner was Jewish) so that the master race could increase its numbers, the glorification of motherhood in Fascist Italy and in the 1930s Soviet Union. In many of these cases (including France in the 1920s), bronze, silver and gold medals were awarded to patriotic mothers depending on how many children they gave birth to. As an amusing aside, in Nazi Germany women with more than five children were allowed to name a famous person as godfather, but that programme was suspended after it was found that Hindenburg was more popular than Hitler for this.

In contemporary times, a lawmaker in South Korea has just urged a female economics professor, nominated to head the country's trade commission, to do her national duty and get married — contribute a child to the country before selfishly worrying about her career advancement.

So, there you have it. Whether it is to tell women to have babies or not have babies, it seems that the men doing this telling are only doing it for the nation's good — not out of any masculine impositions of control on female bodies and female lives.

The writer is professor at Cornell University, Department of Development Sociology

### RETAIL PRICES OF UREA IN SELECTED COUNTRIES (OCTOBER 2018)\*



\*= September 2018 (Dealers' Price), #= Price in Illinois, \*\*USD/metric tonne



C R Sasikumar

## The right to choose

Government could give fertiliser subsidy directly to farmers and let them decide if they want to practise zero budget natural farming or use chemical-fertilisers



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH  
BY ASHOK GULATI

THE NARENDRA MODI government completed 100 days of its second term (Modi 2.0) last week. On this occasion, most cabinet ministers spoke of the achievements of their ministries. The headlines in newspapers were, however, about the abrogation of Article 370, or the biggest slump in auto sales in the last two decades, or the slowing down of GDP growth. I tried to search for bold moves in agriculture as it affects the largest number of people. But I couldn't find any. Some already-announced schemes were tweaked and a few new ideas were offered but without solid scientific and financial backing.

The PM-Kisan Yojana (PMKY) — an income support of Rs 6,000 per year to small and marginal farmer households — was announced before the parliamentary elections. Modi 2.0 has extended the scheme to the families of all farmers. The 2019-20 Union budget has provisioned Rs 75,000 crore for this scheme. This is the first step towards direct cash (income) transfer to farmers' accounts. As I have argued earlier, this scheme will be meaningful if other subsidies — such as those on food, fertiliser, power and irrigation, and agri-credit — are clubbed with the PMKY and given directly to farmers. The move should be complemented by allowing market forces to set prices. Else, PMKY may come at the cost of investments in agriculture, which have fallen from a peak of 18.2 per cent of the agri-GDP in 2011-12 to 13.7 per cent of the agri-GDP 2017-18. With such a fall in investments, the dream of doubling farmers' incomes by 2022 cannot be fulfilled. In this article, I want to focus on some-

thing new and interesting that the prime minister talked about in his Independence Day speech. He repeated the same in his address to the 14th Conference of Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Greater Noida. The PM's key message was to reduce consumption of chemical fertilisers and promote zero budget natural farming (ZBNF). The concept, fathered by Subhash Palekar, uses dung from desi black cows, their urine, adds jaggery and pulses' flour in certain proportions and deploys that, as *jeevamrit*, to augment microbial activity in soil. This is supposed to make our soils healthier and augment productivity in a sustainable manner. Incidentally, ZBNF was also mentioned as the future of Indian agriculture by Nirmala Sitharaman in her maiden budget speech.

At the very outset, let me say that I am a supporter of adding organic matter — be it dung or farm yard manure (FYM) — that can improve carbon in our soils. It is well known that chemical fertilisers are not used rationally by our farmers. Although the optimal ratio of using nitrogen (N), phosphate (P) and potash (K), differs from plot to plot, at the all India level, it is generally agreed that the optimal combination of N, P and K should be in the ratio of 4:2:1. In 2009-10, this ratio was 4.3:2:1 — quite close to the desired level. But in 2010, the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme was introduced. It almost freed prices of P and K from government control and provided some fixed subsidy on these fertilisers on a per tonne basis. However, N (urea) was excluded from this scheme. As a result while DAP (di-ammonium phosphate) and MOP (muriate of potash) carry a subsidy of about 25-30 per cent of their cost of production, urea has a subsidy of more than 75 per cent on its cost of production. The Indian urea prices are perhaps lowest in the world, and certainly lowest amongst the major countries (see graph).

No wonder, there is overuse of urea in relation to DAP and MOP. Normally, whenever chemical fertilisers are used, a good dosage of FYM is recommended. So FYM, or something akin to *jeevamrit*, is conceived as a supple-

ment, not a substitute of chemical fertilisers. But there could be serious questions if the government's intention is to completely jettison chemical fertilisers — PM talked of halving fertiliser consumption in his "Mann ki Baat" speech of November 26, 2017. First, has the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) studied the possible impact of ZBNF on yields of major crops like wheat and rice in comparison to chemical fertiliser-based farming? It needs to do large scale testing in different regions to see the nationwide implications of ZBNF on the overall production of major crops. I understand that such studies have not been conducted. In fact, the limited information that is available suggests a 30 to 50 per cent drop in yields. That could puncture a big hole in India's food security basket. Do we want to go back to the "ship-to-mouth" situation of the mid-1960s?

Second, if the PM wants to cut fertiliser consumption by half by 2022, why is the government investing in new urea plants of 1.27 million tonne, each under the public sector — at Gorakhpur in UP, Barauni in Bihar, Ramagundam in AP, Sindri in Jharkhand and Talcher in Odisha. The combined capacity of these plants is likely to be about 6.35 million tonne and the production cost more than \$400 per tonne. One wonders whether there is any coordination between what the PM says and what his government is doing? It seems a typical case of left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing.

My humble submission is that the fertiliser subsidy, which is budgeted at Rs 80,000 crore for 2019-20, be given directly to farmers on a per hectare basis and allow them to decide whether they want to do ZBNF or chemical-fertiliser based farming. The fertiliser prices will then be market determined, ensuring their efficient usage, stopping their diversion to non-agri-uses as well as to neighbouring countries. It will be a win-win situation from several perspectives. Can the Modi government do that in the next 100 days?

The writer is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIER

Has the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) studied the possible impact of ZBNF on yields of major crops like wheat and rice in comparison to chemical fertiliser-based farming? It needs to do large scale testing in different regions to see the nationwide implications of ZBNF on the overall production of major crops. I understand that such studies have not been conducted. In fact, the limited information that is available suggests a 30 to 50 per cent drop in yields. That could puncture a big hole in India's food security basket.

movement. "It is not only Arundhati Roy and other renowned Indian writers who have expressed their chagrin against India's treatment of Kashmiris, but saner voices of students, teachers, political workers, and their leaders are also condemning the serious human rights violations," the article notes. Ahmar then asks, why despite domestic and international opprobrium, has New Delhi not lifted the blockade? He answers: "First, the narrative held by BJP stalwarts that relaxation in the occupied state cannot be given unless the alleged cross-border interference stops... Second, India also knows the fact that it will be Pakistan's last intention to allow Pakistani Kashmiris to cross the Line of Control (LoC)."

Ahmar argues that Pakistan will not provoke an escalation of the conflict at this time. He ends with a simple appeal: "Letting the Kashmiris speak and decide their own destiny is the need of the hour. If saner voices against New Delhi's brutal crackdown in the Valley are raised in India today, a time will come when one can expect a major reversal of the Indian policy of neglect, indifference, and cruelty."

STICKY WICKET  
Last week, the Sri Lankan cricket team pulled

out of a scheduled limited overs' series in Pakistan, citing security concerns. "Clearly," says the September 14 editorial in *Dawn*, "the memories of the terrorist incident of 2009, when the Sri Lankan team's bus was attacked in Lahore, are still fresh in their minds."

According to the editorial, these fears are now exaggerated, if not misplaced. It argues that the security situation has improved significantly, and perhaps the Sri Lankan cricket board did not do enough to convince its players to visit Pakistan. But the editorial gives the other side of the picture too: "Meanwhile, there is a feeling among many former cricketers that the PCB did not play its cards right either, and that the board should have set its own conditions instead of agreeing to a depleted touring team." "Whether or not one agrees with that view, it is hoped that when the touring side returns to Sri Lanka, it is able to convince those who chose to stay away that they made the wrong decision" it says.

The editorial then marks the change in Pakistan cricket: "Though major foreign teams have shunned tours to this country in the past decade, Pakistan's status as a major cricketing nation has not been altered in any way. Pakistan Super League, which ranked as the second most popular T20 league after the Indian Premier League, has attracted leading foreign players to the country in the past two years."

## VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

### TRAGEDY FORETOLD

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR, A former Bangladeshi diplomat and now an analyst, makes one thing clear: "India is making its own people stateless. Bangladesh shouldn't have to pay the price." Zamir's article in *The Dhaka Tribune* on September 15 expresses a view that has become increasingly common in the Bangladesh media. It establishes first the flaws, both administrative and moral, in the NRC process in Assam and then clarifies the role Bangladesh is (un)willing to play in the scenario.

Zamir states that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has long rallied against illegal immigration into India, and has been using this also as a political weapon for the last three years in particular." He goes on to point out some of the most glaring exclusions from the final NRC list, for example, of an Indian army veteran spending 11 days in a detention camp. The article also points out Home Minister Amit Shah's past statements, of "infiltrators" being "termites" and the fears such talk engenders. In addition, there are several problems with the appeals process, accuracy of the list.

But the nub of the article is this: One thing needs to be understood by the Assam administration presently in control of the BJP is that, "Densely populated Bangladesh is already

suffering from having to look after more than a million illegal Rohingya immigrants from the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Consequently, there is no question of Bangladesh being forced to receive more alleged infiltrators. Such a measure could seriously affect bilateral relations. It might also encourage insecurity and possibly generate unfortunate clouds of communalism. This is an internal matter of India and that matrix needs to be understood. Consequently, India and the state government of Assam, instead of generating more despair, anxiety, and anger, might consider giving those designated as stateless people participatory presence within the Indian paradigm after their release from detention centres."

### SILENT VALLEY

Moonis Ahmar, former dean of social sciences at Karachi University, takes the Amnesty India report on the "crackdown" and "blockade on communications" in the Kashmir Valley as the starting point of his article in *The Express Tribune* on September 13. He writes that "After more than five weeks of crackdown and communications blackout, voices of dissent are being raised by various human rights organisations and civil society groups in India". "Let Kashmir speak," according to Ahmar, is the essence of this

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### LISTEN TO THE PM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Let's talk safety' (IE, September 13). The road transport and highways minister's statement on the amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act betrays an authoritarian outlook. The Act is well-intentioned, but its enforcement should be on reasonable terms.

SK Balasubramanian, Pune

### ABOUT TEACHERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'It begins in school', (IE, September 13). The Draft NEP 2019 acknowledged the importance of foundational learning by giving special focus to five years of early childhood care and education. But the proposed pedagogical model remains teacher-centric. The quality of teachers is bound to have a profound impact on the learning outcomes. Technology can be a great equaliser; standard recorded video modules can aid the activity-based learning and trained educators can improvise lessons to make the learning experience interactive.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

### PUBLIC MONEY ISSUES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Andhra spectres' (IE, September 13). The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy is on a demolition spree of the state's infrastructure. Can the state and the country afford such whimsical acts? Such infrastructure may have been commissioned by his political rival, Chandrababu Naidu. But the infrastructure was built using public money.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

### 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.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

### PAK'S HYPOCRISY

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Pakistan takes hard line on Jadhav' (IE, September 13). Pakistan reached the UNHRC with its agenda of violation of human rights of Kashmiris. But by denying Kulbhushan Jadhav consular access, it has gone against the International Court of Justice's verdict. The country's economy has fallen to such an extent that it has levied charges on the Sikh pilgrims to the Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara. These are desperate times for Pakistan and it is using the Kashmir issue to divert public attention.

Sumit Chaudhary, Chandigarh

# 12 THE GOVERNANCE PAGE

## RAJASTHAN REBOOTS THE RTI ACT

# Jan Soochna Portal to provide Rajasthan govt information at the click of a button

Citizens can access data about 23 flagship schemes and services of 13 departments on their mobiles

DEEP MUKHERJEE  
JAIPUR, SEPTEMBER 15

ON SEPTEMBER 13, Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot launched a "Jan Soochna Portal" aimed at easing the access to information for the beneficiaries of welfare schemes. The portal has been created by the Department of Information Technology and Communication (DoIT&C) in collaboration with civil society. It realises the true intent behind Section 4(2) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005. In essence, this section requires public authorities to proactively — that is, suo moto — disclose information so that beneficiaries do not have to run from pillar to post trying to figure out what went wrong and how to set it right.

No wonder, 60-year-old Balulal Gurjar, a resident of Thana village in Bhilwara district, is enthused to hear of this portal. For the past few years, Gurjar has accompanied many fellow villagers to government offices, inquiring about their old-age pension entitlement that hadn't been credited in their accounts. In recent years, thousands of pension beneficiaries of Rajasthan have protested after their names were struck off from the government list on account of their "death" even though they were alive. "For many months, we were kept in dark as there was no way to know what had really happened. Had there been a Jan Soochna Portal back then, it would have been easy for us to know what had gone wrong," says Gurjar.

At present, the portal has information about 23 government schemes and services from 13 departments which the public can access with just one click on their computers, mobiles or kiosks installed in villages.

Activist Nikhil Dey from the Sookhna Evam Rozgar Abhiyan and Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) says that before this initiative the provisions of Section 4(2) of the RTI Act were not implemented properly. "We realised that the government is gathering a lot of information and hiding them behind admin laws. We wanted to build a janta information system where reports are generated useful to people. Governance has to be a joint effort," says Dey, who has consulted and collaborated with (DoIT&C) officials on the various features of the portal.

The portal aims to create a streamlined system for public information to prevent anomalies and corruption. Information about several schemes such as Ayushman



Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot, deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot, activist Aruna Roy along with other delegates during the launch of the Jan Soochna Portal on Friday. Express

## EXPLAINED

### How Rajasthan improved RTI

SINCE THE 1990s, Rajasthan has always played a central role in improving public access to information. The latest initiative requires the government to disclose a lot of information related to government schemes on its own, thus making it easy for the common man. By streamlining and centralising information, the portal also prevents anomalies and corruption.

Bharat Mahatma Gandhi Rajasthan Swasthya Bima Yojana, which provides free health insurance to beneficiaries has been uploaded to ensure that there is no mismatch between the amount listed as an expense by a hospital while treating a patient and the money it actually charges. Earlier, the previous government's flagship scheme Bhamashah Swasthya Bima Yojana had wit-

### KEY INFORMATION PROVIDED UNDER JAN SOOCHNA PORTAL

- Public distribution and ration system
- Social security pension beneficiary information
- MGNREGA workers
- Sanitation beneficiaries
- Govt-run free medicine scheme
- Govt-run health insurance schemes
- Farm loan waiver
- Labour card holders
- Procurement of food grains on minimum support price
- Mining and district mineral foundation trust data
- Land ownership details

nessed many cases where higher expenses were falsely shown by hospitals.

The effort to create a centralised information database for the public in Rajasthan started last year when civil society members interacted with the government and gave their suggestions on policy issues as part of an initiative known as Digital Dialogue. "We told the government that whatever informa-

tion you have you give it to the public without any hindrance. We also asked them to organise it in a way so that it is useful for people. This initiative converts a culture of secrecy into a culture of openness," says Dey.

The launch of the portal is likely to result in centralising information about government schemes on one website and prove beneficial to the public by obviating the need to go through a tedious RTI application process to know more.

One can get land records and documents from the portal that earlier could only have been accessed through patwaris. Under the new process, one has to enter village and district details to know who owns a piece of land. Similarly, for mining, a sector where widespread corruption has been unearthed in past instances such as the Rajasthan mining scam of 2015, the flow of information in the public domain has been made more transparent.

The state currently has a network of around 68,500 e-mitra kiosks in villages that connect villagers to a number of state-run beneficiary schemes. The government has announced that it is also developing a mobile app and will install self-service portals in villages so that people can access the Jan Soochna Portal easily and get the information they require. "This portal will play a very big role in serving the people in villages. Information should be provided even before it is asked for and that is what this portal aims to do. The government will provide complete encouragement for this," said Gehlot.

# 'Forests can be saved by honouring tribal rights vested in the Forest Rights Act'

UNION TRIBAL Affairs Minister ARJUN MUNDA believes that money is not the only thing when focusing on tribal development; he says the psychology of tribals needs to be understood for effectively integrating them in the mainstream. In an interview with ABHISHEK ANGAD, he also elaborated on the government's stand on Forest Rights Act. Edited excerpts.



THE POLICY INTERVIEW  
ARJUN MUNDA  
Union Tribal Affairs Minister

**You spoke of the Modi government's 100 days performance in a press conference. What is the report card of your 100 days?**

We are deliberating on how to give proper education in rural India and create opportunities. Tribals are a focus area because in various parameters they are below the national average. We are also focusing on the scattered population that lives in forest areas so that it benefits from all (welfare) schemes. We are measuring the outcomes of all such schemes and it is a big responsibility. The constitutional rights of tribals have not been given to them. How do we address (this gap) in less time. This is the mandate that the Modi government has given to me. For example, we are starting 462 residential Eklavya schools so that the education among the tribals increases.

But a CAG report on social sectors ending March 2017, tabled January 2019, of one state — Madhya Pradesh — pointed out glaring lapses such as inadequate infrastructure in such Eklavya schools, Jharkhand will also get 69 new Eklavya schools, but the state also has its own share of problems. How do you aim to monitor them?

There is a structure now in place for these schools with regular monitoring, like how it happens in Navodaya Vidyalayas. Earlier money was allotted to the states, which used to run these schools, and in some areas, they did not function properly. Now there is a different system altogether.

**The NFHS-4 shows significant nutritional gaps in tribal children. What is the government's plan to reduce it?**

We are developing a monitoring system because various departments have been working for tribals. So we are coordinating to improve the traditional systems of dealing with these things constitutionally through Gram Sabha, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) or PESA Act of 1996, and make people accountable.

**But the Tribal Affairs Ministry has a limited budget while various other ministries and state governments have large chunks of money for tribal development. Is coordination an issue?**

There are a lot of things which are being done which was not there in the past few years. We are monitoring it aggressively.

**In a recent survey on maternity benefits showed that around 75% women did not receive cash benefits, despite applying for it? Tribals form most of this populace.**

This is a state government issue and they have to pay more attention to it. After the state formation, Jharkhand has been growing but has to strive to make it better.

**Forest Rights Act (FRA) was brought because the "historical injustice needed correction". Recently a controversy has erupted. Where do you stand?**

All those people who are saying various things would have been not in contact with the forest area. The matter is sub-judice and I will not go into the merits of this case. Forests can be saved through tribal rights vested in the FRA. Our Ministry is monitoring it continuously and we want to increase the forest area and the people who stay there. We worry so much about forest biodiversity, why should not we worry about the people staying there? Communities living in the forest areas for ages cannot be evicted from the forest.

Full interview on indianexpress.com

## A centre for women entrepreneurs in Kerala

SHAJU PHILIP  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, SEPTEMBER 15

THE SOCIAL Justice Department of Kerala government has proposed an international women's trade centre (IWTC) in line with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015.

The proposed trade centre would be the first of its kind facility in the country. Its initial phase is expected to become operational in January 2021. The centre would be constructed in the Social Justice Department's Gender Park (see photo), which is a platform for bringing together gender policy, research, education and social initiatives. The centre would come up in the Gender Park's main campus in Kozhikode. In the initial stage, the project would give a special focus on providing opportunities for women in the flood-affected areas.

According to the Minister for Health and Social Justice, K K Shailaja, "As more women foray into entrepreneurship and explore other self-employment options in Kerala, there is a need for providing a platform to help them overcome various barriers imposed by society. The IWTC hopes to get potential women entrepreneurs would come



Gender Park, Kozhikode, will house international women's trade centre

forward and participate in international trade, enjoy greater economic benefits, and enhance their competitiveness to tap market opportunities".

She said the centre would give special focus on hand-holding and bringing economically-weaker women, marginalised groups, and women with disabilities to the forefront by helping to nurture their entrepreneurial capabilities.

Gender Park's Chief Executive Officer, Dr PT Mohammed Sunish, said: "Women startups can be incubated in a high-tech space

that will offer fully automated private and shared office spaces, virtual workspaces, common secretarial services, communication facilities, and business guidance centres". He said the centre would engage local women entrepreneurs and connect them to world markets using the latest technology to build their businesses. It would be the hub that would bring together entrepreneurs, small business owners, industry leaders, business mentors, industry experts, and investors on to a single platform.

The centre is planned as a safe space away from home for women to set up their businesses. It would have creche and day-care centres for kids and adult/senior community centres for the elderly so that women can focus on their jobs and not have to worry about their children and/or aged parents who will be within close proximity.

It would also be a shopping destination catering to the needs of women — from retail fashion and technology outlets to health and wellness centres. This space will be the artery connecting the trade centre to the residential and commercial community of North Kerala.

Apart from having facilities for business and trade, the centre would also include space to promote and showcase performing arts and culture such as dance, music, theatre, and other cultural forms to foster creative self-expression for women.

## MAHARASHTRA/SIMPLIFYING LAWS

# A bureaucrat demystifies legal jargon for the common man

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS,  
PUNE, SEPTEMBER 15

SUGAR COMMISSIONER of Maharashtra Shekhar Gaikwad wears multiples hats. When he is not busy trying to get sugar mills to pay the farmers their dues, Gaikwad tries to untangle the complex land laws of the state. In fact, over the years, his books have become the Bible for the farmers in the state. It is not uncommon to see farmers talking the help of Gaikwad's book while arguing their cases in the revenue courts.

Gaikwad's interest in land laws dates back to the late 1980s when he was a young Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) of Kagal taluka of Kolhapur district. He came across a dispute that had been going on for 80 years. The case — in which two farmers were fighting for the legal ownership of 1.46 acres of land — had

even reached the Supreme Court on two occasions. "As a young officer, I was stumped. Why would these farmers fight for so long over a piece of land," he recounts. So he asked both the parties. The answers were an eye-opener for Gaikwad and made him decide to take up the onerous task of trying to unravel and simplify the tangled world of land rights.

"It was a case of encroachment — the party that was defending its right freely admitted that it had encroached on the land and was growing sugarcane on it. From the annual yield of 80 tonnes, this farmer paid half to his lawyer and kept the case going even as the original owner of the land continued to fight the case as he had promised his father on the latter's death bed," explains Gaikwad. It was a deadlock and the only ones making money were the lawyers. The case made Gaikwad want to simplify land laws. His books, which have gone into multi-



Shekhar Gaikwad (left) with the then Chief Minister Narayan Rane at the release of his book about land mutation in Maharashtra. Express

ple editions, both in English and Marathi, have over the years become the ready reckoner for farmers, litigants and even revenue officers of the state. What differentiates Gaikwad's books from the tomes on land laws is that they are presented in a very different manner. "Interaction with farmers showed me that instead of an academic approach, they would prefer a situational approach to their problems," he says. Thus the books present situations and their legal solutions in a simple storytelling format. Other than the 25 major land laws of Maharashtra, the books draw information from various government resolutions and judgments with regards to land laws.

Of his 18 books, the one titled *Shetiche Khadiya* (Land laws) is the most popular. First published in 2005, the book till date has seen 5 editions. It simplifies various laws related to land and also answers the various ques-

tions related to land deals. Ignorance of land laws, Gaikwad says, often leads to farmer asking for advice from lawyers who charge hefty fees.

The most common problem that farmers face is about the mutation of their land. As the name suggests, change in ownership has to be "mutated" in the land records. Easy as it might sound, this simple act becomes the single biggest source of litigation and often leads to corrupt practices at various levels of government. Gaikwad's book Land Rights and Mutations in Maharashtra delves deep into this problem and presents numerous scenarios that farmers face. "Farmers now carry this book if the village level talathi (official) creates obstacles in their land dealings," he said.

At present Gaikwad is working on his next book, which, he says, aims to help sugarcane farmers fight for their rights.

## IN NUMBERS

