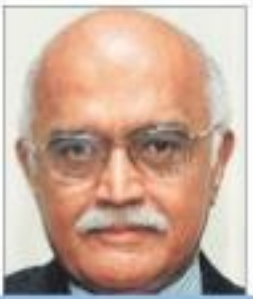


Our Congressional lobbying efforts ineffective



VAPPALA BALACHANDRAN
EX-SPECIAL SECRETARY, CABINET SECRETARIAT

On October 24, the MEA official spokesperson issued a strong statement on the hearing by the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the US House of Representatives (October 22) chaired by Brad Sherman on the human rights situation in Kashmir. He said that the hearing was used to undermine India's recent steps to check cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. The Kashmiri Overseas Association (KOA) also alleged that the hearing was a one-sided narrative. However, Alice Wells, Acting Assistant Secretary, State Department, asked India on October 25 to provide a roadmap to restore political and economic normalcy in Kashmir.

This hearing is an indication that our current lobbying with the US Congress is not effective. It is for this reason that our diplomats and bipartisan Indian-American leadership had worked together from the 1980s to form a Congressional caucus on India and Indian-Americans. This was achieved in 1993 by Padma Bhushan awardee Frank Pallone and former Congressman Bill McCollum. It helped in resisting legislative challenges from the resourceful Pakistan lobby which wanted to appoint a special envoy on Kashmir, like for the Balkans.

So, it was unbelievable that Brad Sherman, presently co-chair of the India Caucus, was also holding the

sub-committee hearings on October 22! Press reports had said that he had conveyed to our Ambassador Harshvardhan Shringla that his constituents in San Fernando Valley had told him about the Kashmir "stories of difficulties encountered by the constituents and others".

In fairness, Sherman had also issued a public statement on September 30 mentioning that foreign militants were intimidating the Kashmiri public.

It is only "constituency pressure" that moves a US Congressman, as the bipartisan American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) had found out in 1981. This was after a massive defeat to the Israel lobby when President Reagan concluded the AWACS deal with Saudi Arabia. Tom Dine, then director of AIPAC, told the American Jews: "Spread the power base, go to the grassroots, get involved in the political process."

Dine discovered that American Jews, although only 2 per cent of the electorate, could swing results in 80 Congressional districts for presidential elections since 89 per cent of them lived in 12 key electoral college states. He then established statewide chapters of AIPAC to lobby with Congressmen to support legislation favouring Israel and defeating anti-Israel bills. Jewish polling increased to 90 per cent against a national average of 50 per cent. It is said that the Jews could tilt the scales in over 80 Congressional districts for the presidential elections. The most notable victory for the Jewish lobby was the reversing of the Jordan arms deal by President Reagan in 1986.

Our Indian-American leadership also followed this strategy with success in the 1980s-1990s when veteran Indian-American activists like Dr Joy Cherian, Dr Swadesh Chatterjee and



NOT ENOUGH: Concentrating on President Trump or organising glitzy 'Howdy, Modi' shows does not result in legislative success.

The Kashmir hearing of October 22 is an indication that our lobbying with the US Congress is not effective. It is for this reason that our diplomats and bipartisan Indian-American leadership had worked together from the 1980s to form a Congressional caucus on India and Indian-Americans. It helped in resisting legislative challenges from the Pakistan lobby which wanted to appoint a special envoy on Kashmir.

Dr Thomas Abraham had set up bipartisan Indian lobby groups and state chapters for applying constituency pressure on Congressmen. All these efforts were negated with the emergence of the "Hindus for Trump" groups, thereby dividing the Indian community on religious grounds. Our present strategy of concentrating only on President Trump or organising glitzy "Howdy Modi" shows does not result in legislative success.

A similar hearing was held for five days in 1976, spread over four months (June-September), by the Committee on International Affairs of the US House of Representatives on the human rights violations in India during the Emergency. This was preceded by a statement published by 80 leading Americans, including Noam Chomsky, in the New York Times on March 5, 1976. American specialists on India, like Prof Ainslee Ambree from Colombia University, were examined by the committee. Indian representatives

like Ram Jethmalani, then Chairman, Bar Council of India, and Leila Kabir Fernandes were also examined. Professor Ambree had even acknowledged that there was widespread breakdown of law and order by the spring of 1975. This was one of the reasons put forward to justify the Emergency, like how our present government is citing cross-border terrorism as the reason for the "lockdown". However, Ambree added that this did not justify massive arrests and incarceration using special laws.

The committee accepted that the US did not have much leverage on India and had quoted Indira Gandhi's statement in Calcutta in March 1976 that she would not permit foreign nations to interfere in India's internal affairs. But they decided to continue with the hearing as Americans considered India as a shining example of liberal thinking against the background of dictatorial trends in the Asian neighbourhood. They said that even Gandhi valued American public opinion.

Traditionally, human rights have been the principal goal of the US foreign policy.

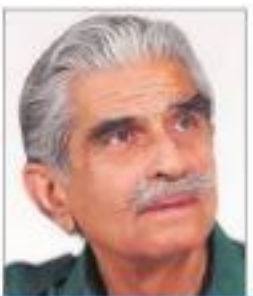
The earliest such intervention was in 1872 when the US urged the Rumanian government to stop ill treating their Jews. Such demarches were made in 1880, 1903 and 1906 with Russia to stop killing the Jews. In 1935, they condemned the Turkish massacre of the Armenians.

With the advent of the Cold War, the Congress found that the State Department was reluctant to deal with human rights violations as the executive branch's policy was selective condemnations based on political considerations. They then started making legislative provisions to enforce human rights.

They did it mildly in 1973 by adding a "Sense of the Congress" in Section 32 of the Foreign Assistance Act to deny US assistance to a country which imprisoned opponents for political reasons. As there was no follow-up action by the State Department, the Congress passed a legal proviso as Section 502B in 1974. This denied foreign military assistance to countries indulging in the suppression of human rights, except in "extraordinary circumstances" when the President should report the reasons to the Congress. This was to acknowledge the primacy of the President in foreign policy.

In 1975, the International Development and Food Assistance Act (S-116) linked the receipt of economic assistance to the human rights standard. The exception was when the assistance would directly benefit the needy people in such a country. The 1976 Arms Export Control Act and Export Administration Act of 1979 also have linked training of armed forces, police and intelligence agencies with human rights.

Mr Rajnath Singh, take a leap of faith



MAJ GEN ASHOK MEHTA (RETD)
MILITARY COMMENTATOR

Rajnath Singh erred by transforming what is traditionally a simple domestic military ceremony in the IAF into a political and religious one with all the trappings of a single religion abroad. Singh does not represent a single-service faith. He is the Defence Minister of a multi-faith military which is secular, apolitical and professional.

THE images of India's third most powerful leader — Defence Minister Rajnath Singh — in a flying suit with Rayban glasses after flying in the Rafale and in *dhoti-kurta* performing *shastra puja* before the flight — are two contrasting visuals of India's state of defence equipment: from the legacy Russian MiG variants still flying to the fourth generation French Rafale fighter in the pipeline.

It is also a reflection of Singh's conviction in religion, superstition and personal faith which he displayed on the 87th Air Force Day and Dasehra while performing the traditional *shastra puja* in France on receipt of the first Rafale aircraft from his French counterpart. The deification of the Rafale was very elaborate. The Ambassador to France was asked to arrange for a *pandit*. Singh cracked a coconut, placed flowers, tied *mouli*, applied the *Om tilak*, all behind the cockpit while tying chillies and lemons to the wheels of the aircraft — the ritual watched by a bemused French audience. In this *puja*, Singh was assisted by an Indian priest and Air Commodore-rank military air attache to France.

As a soldier, I have witnessed and performed the *shastra puja* in my battalion for six decades on Vijayadashami, a ritual which is strictly in the domain of three persons: the Commanding Officer, the unit priest and the seniormost non-officer rank officer, the Subedar Major. All weapons



DEIFYING RAFALE: In the military, it's best not to mix religion with superstition or politics.

are symbolically worshipped before they are returned to the Quarter Guard. One has never known an outsider perform this ceremony even if he is the Defence Minister of India.

The Rafale belongs to the IAF, which has never performed a religious ceremony abroad while receiving a new import aircraft. At an election rally in Haryana, Singh had announced that he wrote *Om* on the Rafale, 'as per our tradition'. After Bofors, Rafale has proven to be politically volatile, especially the procedure followed in its acquisition on which the Supreme Court has reserved its judgment, even as the ruling party showcased it electorally before its oper-

ationalisation. Applying the *tilak* on an aircraft is not an IAF tradition.

Singh's actions and his self-defence have attracted criticism from the opposition, many calling it theatrics and *puja* politics. NCP chief and former Defence Minister Sharad Pawar mocked Singh for tying chillies and lemons to ward off evil as truck drivers do. Singh's colleague, Finance Minister and former Defence Minister Nirjala Sitharaman, whose main contribution to defence was the defence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the purchase of Rafale, both inside and outside Parliament, said: "Those who had faith had the right to conduct ritu-

faith military which is secular, apolitical and professional. In all-India caste Army regiments, the prayer room contains multi-faith areas where soldiers of different denominations worship their God. Although Singh has asserted he will do what he did in France, again, for the sake of the Indian armed forces, he should take a leap of faith and avoid doing it.

As Defence Minister, Singh has done great things: sending powerful signals of India's rise as a great power; raking up the issues of No-First Use after visiting Pokhran and retaking PoK in the aftermath of the parliamentary resolution of 1994; opening up Siachen to tourism and generally boosting the morale of the armed forces. At his election rally in Satara, Maharashtra, PM Modi had said his government had brought India's armed forces on a par with those of other countries and provided the three services with modern weapons.

Judging from the sparse funding for capital account of the defence budget in the last five years, Modi's claim is an exaggeration. Singh's real contribution to the military would be in getting at least Rs 50,000 crore annually for capital spending, over and above the existing liabilities during the remaining term of this government in order to catch up with China. Deterring Pakistan has largely been achieved. The government has shown recently how it can loosen its purse-strings. When there is a will, there is a way.

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ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

**NAVEEN P SINGH,
RANJITH PC & BHAWNA ANAND**

Authors are with the ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research, New Delhi. Views are personal

Strengthening agriculture, building India

As Indian agriculture is now on the cusp of a major transition, accelerating growth rate, a strong institutional mechanism and sustainable reforms along with affirmative action in states under crisis are prerequisite for building rural India

area has been degraded through deforestation, over-cultivation, soil erosion and depletion of wetlands, amounting to a loss of 2.5% of GDP annually. Further, poor soil fertility status owing to non-judicious use (of water, fertiliser, etc) in the Green Revolution region is raising sustainability and food security concerns, necessitating an immediate redressal of several constraints.

Furthermore, the ecosystems of various types in recent times are slowly degenerating. The forest and tree cover, which, according to the National Forest Policy (1988) and the draft National Forest Policy (2018), should be around one-third of the total area, is not even one-fourth at present. The National Agriculture Policy (2000) has also advocated encouraging farm forestry, block forest, village wood lots and others, but the current share of agroforestry system stands at 3.39% of the geographical area. The taskforce of the erstwhile Planning Commission, 2001, assessed that the implementation of agroforestry system in the rainfed area will help in poverty alleviation of 30 million people. As forest and surrounding ecosystems are critical for the onset of monsoon and precipitation, there is a demand for concerted efforts for better management, besides seedling distribution to the existing agroforestry systems.

Effective institution and policy

Institution and policy are key elements to connect the ground realities to the people. The right mix of technology and clear perception of the past experience would help to better leverage these elements in a more effective manner. First, the 'integrated approach' by fortifying institutions (such as Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Rythu Kendras, and key NGOs, etc) that are at the frontline of farm service. For instance, improvement in irrigation infrastructure that stabilises agricultural production and sustainable agri-food system, while also increasing scope to diversify our agri-food systems; improvement in logistics to combat uneven price spread and volatility; and crack on cartelisation in the market that ensures remunerative prices to farm produce and affordability to consumers. The second is to establish demand-driven institutions, such as National Agriculture Disaster Authority, an agency to streamline drought/flood declaration and claims which are often ignored and reflected in price spike and distress sale. Further, disconnect of agricultural policies (both at the Centre and state levels) has warranted reforms to resolve farm

distress. Therefore, policy paradigm at various levels needs to take cognisance of evidence-based research findings to alleviate farm distress. The third is to establish agri centres/service in embassies amongst key countries importing agri-products to ameliorate global supply chain in order to suck up excess farm supply and harness comparative advantage in niche segments. Time is now ripe to create a Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) that would help to better leverage and place farm dependants and their products aided by APEDA (Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority). The model of FAS can take cues from the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture). Fourth, strengthening the real-time delivery of risk-management tools and interventions like insurance, MSP, price stabilisation fund (uptick in allocation, creation of price-risk management fund), future market and contract farming, which, in turn, can increase propensity to save and invest in farm operations. The last is that public investment, which is the main source for agricultural growth, is slowly decreasing—it currently stands at 17%, compared to 33% in 1985. It is evident from empirical studies that when public investment grew just by 1% during 1991-2005, agricultural GDP grew by almost 2.7%. When investment increased in the subsequent period (2006-17) by 3%, GDP growth raised to 3.3%. Increased incidence of extreme natural events weakens the farm infrastructure in rural areas, which further accentuates climate vulnerability. Therefore, rise in public investment is a dire need when the goal of doubling farmers' incomes is nearing, whilst absorbing such shocks of natural events in the coming years.

Agri reforms in recent times are often touted as old wine in a new bottle, with less capacity to heal farm distress. Indeed, reforms in the recent years are modest and most convincing to stakeholders, but failed to tide over uncertainties of natural events. Time is right to put agriculture on the Concurrent List (if not completely then partially), so that missing dots in policy adoption and translation may be connected in order to streamline micro-level policy interventions and macro institutions. As Indian agriculture is now on the cusp of a major transition, accelerating growth rate, a strong institutional mechanism and sustainable reforms along with affirmative action in states under crisis are prerequisite for building rural India.

● IS LIBRA DOOMED?

The Zuck Buck ruck

Facebook's planned digital currency has had a miserable few months

ON JUNE 18, Facebook announced Libra, a new global payments system and currency, to be launched in 2020. Dubbed the "Zuck Buck" by Brad Sherman, an American congressman, the plan was to employ a mix of entrepreneurial and the technology underlying cryptocurrencies to shake up the world's financial systems. Money would move at the speed of a smartphone-swipe, even across borders. Libra would lubricate life in the rich world and revolutionise it in poor countries, where basic financial services are dear and often scarce. After all, as the firm points out, 1.7 billion people have no access to a bank account. Besides further expanding Facebook's empire, Libra would bring them into the financial fold.

In the subsequent four months, Libra has had a bruising time. Many of its partner firms have got cold feet. Politicians and regulators around the world have made disapproving noises. On October 23, Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's boss, spent a lonely few hours in Washington, DC, fielding mostly hostile questions from American politicians on the House of Representatives Financial Services Committee.

One problem, as Mr Zuckerberg admitted, is Facebook itself. Maxine Waters, the Californian Democrat who chairs the committee, began proceedings with a litany of its misdeeds, pointing out that it is subject to antitrust investigations in 47 states, that Russia has used it to meddle in American elections, and that it has been fined \$5 billion for deceiving consumers. Nydia Velázquez, a Democrat from New York, accused Mr Zuckerberg of lying to European regulators over the firm's merging of user data from WhatsApp, a messaging service bought by Facebook in 2014, with those from the rest of the company. Why, the congresswoman wondered, should a firm like that be trusted with something as important as a currency?

Mr Zuckerberg pointed out that Libra would be administered not by Facebook, but by the Libra Association, an independent body that includes other companies and is based in Switzerland. But the association is already not what it was. Of the 28 original members, a quarter have left. PayPal, an online-payments firm, departed on October 4. A week later eBay, Mastercard, Mercado Pago, Stripe and Visa—another group of payment firms—jumped ship, as did Booking Holdings, a travel company. PayU, a Dutch firm, is the only payments firm still in the association. Other remainers include two ride-hailing firms (Uber and Lyft), a pair of telecoms companies (Iliad and Vodafone), a gaggle of venture capitalists and a handful of charities. The association's head of product, Simon Morris, left in August.

Other questions concerned users' privacy and Libra's potential attractiveness to money-launderers. Mr Zuckerberg promised that Libra would not launch until it had permission from America's alphabet soup of financial regulators. But for a currency with global ambitions, placating the Americans will not suffice. France, Germany and Italy have already said they may block Libra; ministers in India, which has more than half a billion internet users, have been unenthusiastic too. Facebook has said that, unlike most cryptocurrencies, Libra will be backed by a basket of assets, including currencies and government bonds.

A report by the G7, a rich-country club, nevertheless said that Libra, if widely adopted, could pose a risk to the global financial system and should not go ahead until it could be proved safe. That Libra has been described as a cryptocurrency (exactly how it would work remains unclear) will not have helped: regulators are well aware of cryptocurrencies' reputation for scams and shady dealing.

Still, positive thinking is the order of the day, at least in public. Mr Zuckerberg talked at length about the value of innovation, and Libra's potential to spread freedom and democracy around the world. After the defections from the Libra Association earlier in the month David Marcus, the Facebook employee leading the initiative, tweeted that "in a way, it's liberating". Perhaps. But Facebook may hope there is not too much more liberation to come.

THE ECONOMIST

France, Germany and Italy have already said they may block Libra; ministers in India, which has more than half a billion internet users, have been unenthusiastic too

HIGHLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE

Why HSPs are a boon to humanity

They have an entirely different approach to their physical environment, and that is not a weakness, but a strength

VIDYA HATTANGADI

The author is a management thinker and blogger



HSPs are empathetic by nature. It's just that they are biologically-wired differently. They have an entirely different approach to their physical environment, and that is not a weakness, but a strength.

They are highly intuitive: Although this may be a rephrase of his thoughts on the subject, Einstein has been widely quoted as having said: "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant." We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift. In my opinion, even Steve Jobs was HSP. The co-founder of Apple had said

that he believed intuitive heart leads to success. The opposition to Einstein's landmark theory of relativity in the 1920s was unprecedented and extremely fierce, but the physicist followed his instinct and stood by his work. Einstein's general theory of relativity is now renowned as a pinnacle of modern-day physics.

They are shy and prefer to withdraw from the crowd: These sensitive people jump to help people easily because they understand needs of people easily. The "King of Late Night" television show host Johnny Carson was in total control during



his shows, but once he stepped away from the spotlight, he was shy and aloof. Carson rarely gave interviews and remained a very private man, despite his public persona. He once revealed, "I can get in front of an audience and be in control ... backstage, I'm aloof because I'm not very comfortable."

HSPs have a different approach to their physical environment: Being considerate and well-mannered, HSPs tend to get affected when someone is not. They are detail-oriented and notice things others may miss. In addition, they are gifted, they can read people well, and know when they

are lying or deceiving. The tone, pauses, body languages are all clues that they easily catch. They get stressed with overthinking, which leads to low immunity, which may result in frequent cough and cold. They don't like anything in exaggeration; they don't like to be in large groups, too many lights, strong smells, loud noise. They are not party persons. A lot depends on how they feel. With incredible intuition, they work according to their gut feeling.

They are more expressive in their relationships: HSPs crave for deep connections. According to Dr Aron's research,

sensitive people tend to get bored in marriage than non-sensitive people, mostly due to the lack of meaningful interaction. Dr Aron adds that HSPs tend to withdraw from a relationship that lacks meaning and involvement. They look for meaningfulness in all that they do in life. The key to a successful relationship for an HSP is communicating what they want out of a relationship, and finding a partner who understands their emotions. "Sensitive people can't help but express what they're feeling," says Dr Aron.

They are a boon to the society: People often react adversely or get reticent around HSPs. What they don't realise is that the extremely sensitive person is vulnerable because he/she is hurt in the past. Many feel that such people are fragile and unable to handle themselves, but they have their own reasons for behaving the way they do. At such times, it is best to give them space to analyse the situation and get a hold of themselves.

SPS (HSP) is not a condition, a disorder, or a diagnosis. It is a neutral trait evolved in 20% of the human population and many non-human species as well. HSPs process stimuli deeply due to a biological difference in their nervous system. As a result, they easily get overwhelmed and often need more self-care than others.

If you are an HSP, be proud because you're alive in every sense of this word in this wildly beautiful world. Sensitivity is your strength. Keep soaking in the light and spreading it to others.

OUR VIEW



A call for the Centre to foster competition

Now that the apex court has lumped the telecom industry with a back-breaking liability, fears have arisen of a drop in market rivalry. But there may yet be a way to ease the burden

By upholding the view that all revenue accruing to telecom companies be used as a base for determining the portion they need to share with the government as licence fee, the Supreme Court last week appears to have delivered a crushing blow to an industry teetering under a mountain of debt piled up to purchase spectrum at exorbitant prices and roll out some of the cheapest cellular services to be found anywhere in the world. The additional liability of ₹1.3 trillion on account of the revised licence fee, accumulated penalties and spectrum usage charges, all included, could fundamentally alter the scope of competition among Indian cellular service providers that have accumulated, by some accounts, ₹7 trillion in debt, principally to pay for radio frequencies won in auctions. The government, on its part, is mindful of earlier judicial interventions in an allocation policy that once ran the risk of underpricing this scarce natural resource. Various approaches have been tried and the settled view is that the most transparent way to allot spectrum is through a bidding process. Telecom policy, however, cannot afford to be oblivious to the role competitive intensity plays in the development of a sector that is vital to India's transition to a digital economy. An insistence that even the returns earned by a telecom firm on its investments need to be shared with the Centre, unfortunately, hobbles almost every player's ability to compete.

India started out by clubbing cellular licences with spectrum for a flat fee. When this approach showed limitations, policymakers switched to a charge per subscriber, which proved way too high, and eventually, to a revenue-sharing model that allowed cheap services

to fan out across India. This arrangement grew contentious as spectrum pricing increasingly dissociated itself from licence obligations and it became clearer to regulators that onerous charges for permission to provide telecom services were counter-productive. The current policy iteration has come a long way in unbundling radio frequencies and licences, and the way forward appears to be to keep the latter purely as a regulatory measure. As telecom services tend towards universal availability, the concept of a licence fee becomes anachronistic and penalties for delivery failure acquire greater salience. The apex court's ruling could trigger a response that hastens the process of splitting policy into a pricing mechanism for spectrum and an unpriced permission to operate. That would be in line with telecom regulation in several countries.

India has deepened its telecom penetration vastly since the early 1990s to become the world's second-biggest market by subscribers. The learning curve has been steep, both because of the disruptive nature of technologies in this industry, as well as the strong regulatory reflex of Indian policymakers. Complications arise because the entire market is not at the cutting edge of technology: Every second call in the country today is made from a basic handset on cellular networks that are two or three generations older than the latest system available. As our policy challenges shift from enabling digital access to increasing consumption, we need to ensure that the market witnesses sufficient rivalry. Perhaps the government could waive the interest and penalty part of the arrears, refine its policy mix to lower other costs, and aid that cause. In this sector, more than anywhere else, a generous policy stance would serve us well.

MY VIEW | THE IMPARTIAL SPECTATOR

Reality must catch up with all the rhetoric on reforms

SHRUTI RAJAGOPALAN



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The state of the Indian economy has been described in rather depressing terms lately. There are debates over whether India is experiencing a structural slowdown, a cyclical slowdown, a U-shaped or V-shaped recession, or no slowdown at all and simply a bump in the road. It is difficult to be objective when the numbers are suspect, and Indian growth numbers hardly inspire confidence. But there is another way to describe the state of the economy—that it is in limbo. It feels like everyone is waiting for something to happen, for the other shoe to drop, or for the government to unshackle India's potential.

What is odd about this limbo is that it is caused by a peculiar kind of regime uncertainty. Other countries are currently experiencing some form of that phenomenon—like the possibility of a presidential impeachment in the US, or a far more severe version caused by an endlessly prolonged Brexit in the UK. India is not experiencing any of the usual causes of regime uncertainty in terms

of elections, treaty negotiations, possibility of war etc., but the consequences of the lack of a clear economic vision.

This limbo has been induced by a gap between the state narrative and actual action. Prime Minister Narendra Modi left no stone unturned in going to various Indian and foreign platforms, declaring India open for business and encouraging investors to invest in India. Yet, the rhetoric has not been followed by meaningful reforms. One would think that such grandstanding was relatively harmless even if followed by inaction. This would be true for most leaders. But Modi is a master at creating narratives and instilling faith because of his personal integrity and discipline. This leads individuals and firms to form expectations not just of his intent, but also his governance. When those expectations are unmet, however, they revise their beliefs and wait for credible signals of actual reforms.

Why is limbo a bad thing? For two reasons. First, it makes individuals and firms wait and put off decisions for a later time. They are waiting to understand the nature of reforms, especially in factor markets, before they make investments. For example, an expectation that the government will systematically reform labour regulations to

reduce the relative cost of capital to labour would cause firms to invest in projects that are labour intensive. Alternatively, if the government was expected to tighten labour regulations, then firms might choose capital-intensive, labour-replacing equipment. In the absence of clear expectations and a good understanding of the government's vision, businesses would simply postpone investments.

A second consequence is that while waiting for certainty on the broad economic situation, firms may engage in rent-seeking. The recent turn of the government towards providing sectoral relief during the economic downturn encourages many firms waiting for clarity to take their chances in the political churn to seek temporary benefits in the form of sops, tax breaks and subsidies. Sectoral-policy tinkering by the government leads to rent-seeking behaviour among businesses, but cannot unleash growth and innovation.

In either case, whether it is firms waiting

for reforms or tiding over the downturn with all the help they can get, they are waiting for the government's next move.

But, oddly, it is not just businesses that are waiting for the government's signals. Even the bureaucracy seems paralyzed into inaction in the absence of a clear economic vision. Files seem to be piling up, and businesses complain that orders and clearances are just not moving along. This could be because bureaucrats are unsure which moves will be rewarded and which ones punished. And with the government coming down hard on corruption, they would face complicated decisions.

Almost every economist has called for the second stage of economic reforms, echoed almost daily by intellectuals and columnists in India, and also the foreign press. While they might disagree on the exact nature of reforms, everyone agrees that a strong and credible signal from the government is urgently required.

Since 2014, Modi had styled himself as a

nationalistic economic reformer. But after his 2014 victory, at the first and slightest hint of trouble with a reform of India's land acquisition process, the government developed cold feet and called the whole thing off. The one major reform that the government did push through was the botched-up goods and services tax (GST), which may have had the opposite effect of what was intended. In this year's general election campaign, Modi may have presented himself as more of a nationalist than an economic reformer, but that does not leave reforms off the agenda.

Acts of commission such as demonetization and faulty GST implementation have hurt the economy. But what is less known and appreciated is how acts of omission, in terms of liberalizing the economy, are being picked up and punished by market.

No single individual or government can be blamed for the state of an entire economy. But the economy may not have found itself in limbo had the reality been in line with the government's rhetoric on reforms. Narrative-building alone cannot change our economic circumstances.

Only big, bold and market-embracing reforms—especially liberalizing the markets for land and labour, and streamlining GST—will help.

MY VIEW | BARE TALK

A policy agenda to meet India's steep employment challenges

We must enable small businesses to grow since these hold the greatest potential for job creation



V. ANANTHA NAGESWARAN AND GULZAR NATARAJAN are co-authors of 'The Rise of Finance: Causes, Consequences and Cures'

As India battles an economic slowdown and myriad other associated problems, attention is bound to be deflected from the ever-present priority of job creation for the country's youth bulge. There was cheerful news from India's factories in the recently released Annual Survey of Industries for 2017-18.

Job creation in the sector has been steady, if not spectacular. The number of workers employed grew 4.8% in 2017-18. Total people engaged (including managers) rose 4.7%, the highest in four years. Promising as this is, the sheer magnitude of job creation required for young Indians to enjoy a life of dignity means that millions of them must become job providers rather than swell the ranks of job-seekers.

In the years after independence, India's traditional industrial policy was built around three pillars—concessional credit, fiscal incentives and input subsidies. However, a growing body of research has upended this conventional wisdom and shown that the predominant source of job creation is firms that start small and formal, and eventually grow into medium-scale enterprises. In doing so, they reveal an alternative path to generating productive jobs in India. This is not to overlook the value of large firms, but only to highlight the disproportionate importance of startups in job creation. Some of the findings are

particularly relevant.

One, although micro businesses dominate most countries' economies, India's economy has an excessive proportion of less productive, informal micro businesses. Two, employment in India is concentrated in these micro businesses, whereas in developed countries, it is concentrated in formal small and medium-sized firms. Three, productive jobs are created by firms that start out as formal. Four, new and young firms create more jobs than older, established firms. Five, growing and efficient firms are founded and run by educated entrepreneurs. Six, with age, Indian firms typically stagnate or decline in employment. Seven, India has a deficit of productive, job-creating entrepreneurs, and an excess of informal entrepreneurs focused on survival.

These findings suggest that government policies on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) must become more nuanced. Informal micro enterprises and single-person enterprises run by those lacking formal education should be termed "subsistence enterprises". The government would then be under an obligation to support them with basic public goods, including education and a robust social safety net. Educating the next generation is critical to breaking the iron grip of poverty and pulling single-person enterprises out of survival mode. However, support to these subsistence enterprises should be provided under anti-poverty measures and not under an economic development programme (much less under productive job-creation measures).

In general, the government's perception of entrepreneurship as a viable solution to the lack of employment options is well-founded. International evidence is supportive of this: Startups and young firms create more jobs regardless of their size, and educated entrepreneurs have a far higher probability of success. Therefore, public policy to support entrepreneurship and MSMEs should target these entrepre-

neurs. However, any government support should be made contingent on the enterprise's progress in creating jobs and productive growth, thereby encouraging truly dynamic entrepreneurship.

To enhance the productivity of businesses and promote growth, the government should subsidise the provision of management support services—as industrial public goods—to young businesses. A nascent initiative in South Tamil Nadu shows that huge productivity gains are waiting to be unlocked in small businesses if entrepreneurs are made to understand the importance of some critical principles and concepts related to finance and human resources. Moreover, as education plays a big role in the growth of startups and their contribution to employment generation, institutions of higher learning should prepare students to be entrepreneurs in the same way that they equip them with functional, marketable skills.

The government should also periodically update the definitions of MSMEs to bring them closer to international standards. This will help ensure that businesses are not prematurely labelled as large and are not denied government support while still in need of it.

Finally, internalising the most important principle of public policy—if you cannot help, at least do not hurt—is the first thing the government can do to support entrepreneurs. It is a lot easier for governments to impede economic activity than to foster it. The difficulty in arresting and reversing the current narrative of an economic slide is a case in point. Just avoiding doing the wrong thing will obviate the need for the government to support the economy actively later. In other words, not getting in the way may be the most important policy intervention that any government anywhere could undertake.

This piece is based on the authors' working paper, 'India's quest for jobs—a policy agenda', published by Carnegie India earlier this month

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

The moment you make a mistake in pricing, you're eating into your reputation or your profits.

KATHARINE PAINE

MY VIEW | A VISIBLE HAND

A better picked arrow from the quiver may have found its mark

Sharper weapons are needed to spur demand and reverse India's economic slowdown than a corporate tax rate reduction



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Mint columns at: [www.livemint.com/
visiblehand](http://www.livemint.com/visiblehand).

In late September, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in a surprise move slashed the effective corporate tax rate for Indian companies from about 35% to 25%, with a reduction to 22% for those not using any other incentives. In one quick step, Indian corporate tax rates had moved from the highest decile of big countries to a little below the average. The move was widely hailed as a bold supply-side reform and markets cheered on the day.

This column peels the corporate tax onion and puts it back together in an attempt to unpack what it really means. Before a comparative tour of corporate taxes around the world, let's remind ourselves of what corporate taxes are all about. A corporate tax is a direct levy placed on a firm's profit by the government. In most jurisdictions, this tax applies to corporations, but not partnerships or proprietorships, where the income passes through to the income of the individual in whose hands it is taxed. Corporate tax is also most often applied to net profit; that is, the income net of the expenditure incurred to generate it. Additionally, in most jurisdictions, dividends are taxed on distribution by the corporation and/or in the hands of the individual receiving it, making corporate tax an "inefficient" tax in economic terms.

The idea of corporate taxes gained steam only with the gradual rise of the limited-liability joint stock company in the early 20th century. Famous companies from an earlier era, such as Carnegie Steel and Standard Oil in the United States, were formed as trusts and not as corporations. In the US, the first corporate income tax rate of 1% was introduced by tax legislation in 1909. This rate slowly rose to 53% in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War. The rate has been coming down since the famous supply-side cuts of US President Ronald Reagan that began in 1980, and have reached a low of 21% under the Trump Tax Act of 2017. The UK followed a different path, taxing corporations at the same rate as individuals until 1965, when a corporate tax regime starting at 45% was introduced. Generally speaking, corporate tax rates around the world were the highest during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and have been steadily declining since then. The average 2018 corporate tax around the world was 23.03%, while the number weighted by gross domestic product (GDP) was 26.47%. Among large countries, France (34.4%) and Brazil (34%) have corporate tax rates above 30%.

There has been much academic discussion about corporate taxes, with an emphasis on the question of who bears their burden. Despite empirical research and active discussion, academics remain divided. The pioneering academic paper on this topic was written by Arnold Harberger in 1962. Harberger evaluated whether capital, labour or the consumer bears the burden.



Using a theoretical framework, he argued at the time that almost the entire burden of corporate taxes falls on capital. The corollary implication is that any reduction in corporate tax disproportionately benefits capital providers. This increased return on capital could, in turn, trigger greater domestic and foreign investment, stronger research and development, or substitution of labour for capital. Mooji and Ederveen (2005), using a meta-analysis approach, studied the response of foreign direct investment (FDI) to corporate tax in a European Union context and concluded that a reduction in corporate taxes would increase FDI. As a consequence, the EU has among the lowest corporate taxes in the world. Post-globalization, Harberger revisited his analysis in 1995 and 2008, and concluded that in a world of open borders, labour productivity does indeed increase with a reduced corporate tax burden, but does so with a time lag. Academics over the last decade have discussed—empirically and theoretically—corporate tax in an open economy and under conditions where the benefits from lower taxation are negotiated between capital and labour through wage-bargaining methods.

The simplified conclusion from various economic analyses is that owners of firms, workers and consumers, all benefit from a corporate tax

reduction. Though no such study to my knowledge has been conducted in India, one might postulate based on evidence from elsewhere that the immediate benefits would go to capital providers and only subsequent gains would accrue to workers and consumers. The implications of this are quite remarkable. While this year's cuts do qualify as a radical reform, the demand-boosting impact on account of gains for employees and consumers in the midst of an economic slowdown may take a while coming. Metaphorically speaking, this is akin to improving the nutrition of a patient in an intensive care unit.

A corporate tax reduction in the midst of an economic slowdown is an unusual reform. Most often, such tax rates are reduced as a result of ideological persuasion (Reagan and Margaret Thatcher) or to keep an expansion going (the 2017 Tax Act in the US). A direct reduction of individual income taxes would have provided a clearer demand boost, but the recent budget opted for a soak-the-rich income tax policy instead. It appears that the government is selecting its weapon of choice randomly from a quiver of arrows. A better carefully choreographed set of actions is more likely to find its mark in both the short- and the long-term.

P.S: "Business doesn't pay taxes, it collects taxes," said Ronald Reagan.

MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

Phage therapy could arm the world against superbugs

SIDDHARTH PAI



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science

I have written in this column before about the use of big data techniques to find a new class of antibiotics that can deal with superbugs. Superbugs are bacteria that have become immune to existing antibiotics. The over-prescription of antibiotics and their wide use in poultry, fish, and meat farms means that bacteria have had a chance to mutate and become resistant to many antibiotics. To add to this, we are using old ammunition. The last useful class of antibiotics now in use, fluoroquinolone, was discovered in 1962, about 60 years ago.

Antibiotic cocktails that are used to treat superbugs do exist. They are used sparingly and only as a last resort. The irony here is that whether the patient lives or dies, he or she will not end up being a repeat user. As a result, drug companies pour very little of their resources into the discovery of such drugs, as the economic returns from finding a super class of antibiotics simply do not outweigh the costs. Meanwhile, estimates put the number of deaths because of superbugs

at more than one million a year, which is likely to grow to 10 million by 2050. That is one death every three seconds. It's time for action, but if big pharma stays away, this action will lie in the realm of start-ups.

Many start-ups are using the explosion in big data and computing power to run complicated algorithms that may eventually provide a breakthrough. The use of big data by startups dealing with this problem can broadly be classified into three types. The first lies in the simple but effective mapping of disease patterns within a geography and various sets of people among its population. The second is the use of computational algorithms to presage a scientific molecular level discovery, which is what most new superbug antibiotic development startups are attempting. They use these algorithms in their quest to design a chemistry-based solution that will allow for the isolation of certain proteins in the bacterium, which when disintegrated by a chemical substance, will kill the bacterium. The third technique is to use genomics, which studies how harmful bacteria have changed in response to antibiotic use, and use this new-found knowledge to arrive at changes in genomic sequencing to kill the resistant bacteria.

However, the fight against superbugs

can't be won by IT alone. I recently met Dr. Stefanie Strathdee, a chaired professor at the department of medicine at the University of California in San Diego (UCSD). Strathdee is an expert on global health, and apart from her name-endowed professorship at UCSD, is also the associate dean of its department of medicine. Strathdee recounted an intensely personal experience with superbugs, which caused her to start a new line of research. Her husband had been slipping in and out of a coma for two months brought on by a superbug and the doctors had said there was nothing they could do.

Strathdee reached back to her early college training where she had learnt about 'phages' or viruses that attack and kill bacterial cells, a process called 'phage therapy'. Phages were discovered more than 100 years ago by a French-Canadian microbiologist Félix d'Herelle. They were in regular use in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc as a treatment protocol. However, the Cold War allowed pharmaceu-

tical purveyors in the West to ignore these therapeutic discoveries for many years. The political climate was conducive, as collaboration of Russia and the Eastern bloc with the West was minimal.

There are trillions of phages on the planet that have evolved over millennia to become the perfect predators of bacteria. The phage latches on to and enters the bacterium, and once that is done, proceeds to take over its machinery and turn it into a kind of phage-manufacturing plant. The newly-minted phages then burst out and the bacterial cell dies. To work, phages have to be matched to the bacterial infection.

Strathdee decided to ask for help, which was forthcoming from labs in Russia, the US Navy, Switzerland and even India, among others, and sourced viruses of eight different strains that were known to be phages of *Acinetobacter baumannii*, nicknamed Iraqibacter. She then injected billions of these phages into her husband Tom Patterson, another scientist at UCSD.

Patterson recovered as a result of her last-ditch effort. After his case was publicized, people contacted Strathdee from all over the world wanting phage therapy. Strangers had helped her and she felt she had an obligation to help them. Strathdee hasn't always been successful, though, because she was contacted too late in several instances. She says the Food and Drug Administration of the US is now making it easier for people to get phage therapy earlier in the course of their infections.

Strathdee says that what is needed now are clinical trials to see if this line of therapy works on a broader scale. Strathdee says if she can use this method for one man, then why not for the entire planet? She hopes to create a library of phages or a giant phage bank with specific phage cocktails for many mutations of superbugs. She is on a quest to raise funding to do so.

After Strathdee's success, she and her husband have now written a book, *The Perfect Predator* (bit.ly/3686Vyb). The story is so fascinating that she has already been able to sell its movie rights. She also gives talks on her experience and what she has been doing to regularise phage treatment. She is scheduled to speak at India International Centre, New Delhi, this month, for example.

GLOBAL VOICES



Cambodia's strongman arm-twists democracy

Hun Sen, the authoritarian prime minister of Cambodia, is worried, and is using every trick in the book to threaten Sam Rainsy of the banned opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party, who plans to return to Cambodia from exile on Nov. 9. Mr. Hun Sen dominates parliament and politics—his ruling party won all 125 seats in parliament in the 2018 election—but still shows signs of insecurity over the return of Rainsy, an exponent of democracy, returning for the first time in four years. Rainsy's supporters have been flashing a nine-fingers sign to mark the date. The prime minister told students during remarks at a recent graduation ceremony, "Don't ever join the nine-fingers campaign. If you dare do it, you should have one of your remaining fingers cut off." Speaking of Rainsy, he added, "It is a plot to carry out a coup d'etat, for regime change! Millions of people and armed forces are waiting for you on November 9. Your head is not made from iron."

Since Rainsy's return was announced in August, Cambodian authorities have launched a fresh crackdown on members of the outlawed party. More than 50 have been charged with crimes, and 31 have been jailed, according to Human Rights Watch... Ideally, Rainsy's return should be an opportunity to breathe some competition into the political scene. Hun Sen prefers "democracy" in which voters have only one choice.

The Washington Post

Restore confidence in a failing system

Are England's 1.3 million children with special educational needs and disabilities—which range from dyslexia through to severe medical conditions—being failed by the reforms introduced by the Conservative education secretary Michael Gove in 2014? In a long-awaited report, the Commons education select committee, chaired by the Tory MP, Robert Halfon, concludes in damning terms that they are. In their report, the MPs say that "the 2014 reforms have resulted in confusion and, at times, unlawful practice, bureaucratic nightmares, buck-passing and a lack of accountability, strained resources and adversarial experiences."

The issue has risen up the political agenda, with thousands earlier this year protesting about cuts, as government funding failed to keep pace with soaring demand for additional support required for children with SEND [special educational needs or disabilities]... England must move to a less confrontational system... The system needs to be more responsive and simpler to access. It would be better to have one standard application form for all councils, which would be easier for parents and schools to navigate. Even if parents win the argument eventually, the children will suffer first. The urgent need is to restore confidence all round.

The Guardian, UK

A revealing ride by Kim Jong Un

The iconography of leadership generally has two purposes: to [legitimize] and validate the authority of a person, and to unite a country behind that person in a single national purpose. Imagery assumes particular significance at moments of national stress, which is why considerable attention has been paid to recent photos of North Korean despot Kim Jong Un charging up Mount Paektu, a mountain of symbolic importance for the Korean people, on a white horse. The pictures were consistent with that government's adulatory propaganda, but experts warn that they could anticipate a bold move from Kim that could have profound consequences for the region.

If North Koreans needed reminding of the significance of the images, Rodong Sinmun, the country's national newspaper, obliged. It explained that Kim's charge showed his "unwavering resolve and willpower to defend the dignity and destiny of the nation and the people without vacillating under any threat or temptation." Kim reportedly visits the mountain whenever he faces important decisions. Ominously, it suggested that Kim was "making a solemn declaration of history." The photos likely anticipate a move by Kim to break the stalemate in nuclear talks with the United States and force Washington, along with the rest of the world, to take notice of North Korea and treat it accordingly.

The Japan Times

Remove hurdles to business activity

Korea's 2 percent growth this year, regarded as a psychological Maginot Line of its economy, looms as a long shot. According to the Bank of Korea, Korea's real gross domestic product grew only 0.4 percent in the third quarter from the previous quarter. The central bank estimates the Korean economy must grow at least 0.97 percent on-quarter in the October-December period to reach the 2 percent target. But given tough economic situations at home and abroad, it is hard to expect a strong boost in the fourth quarter. Exports, a major propeller of Korea's economic growth, are on a 10-month skid from December last year. External conditions have not improved prominently yet.

Even though the world economy is slowing down and low growth is understood as a common phenomenon for developed countries, Korea's stunted growth this year is particularly concerning in view of the absence of severe external shocks of the kind that Korea experienced four times. The Korean economy contracted 0.4 percent in the first quarter, rebounded with 1.0 percent growth in the second, but lost steam in the third. Second-quarter growth was driven largely by government spending... The best way to spur growth lies in the private sector. Companies must be encouraged to invest more and employ more. The first job for the government should be to remove hurdles to their business activities.

The Korea Herald

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