

Last chance to ensure no CoP out

At CoP25, nations, especially developed economies, must commit to meaningful climate action; urgent implementation should follow

THE 25TH CONFERENCE of Parties (CoP25) begins amid pessimism on global climate action—the UN has just warned that the world, even if all nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are met, will be hotter by 3.2°C by 2100 since global emissions will be 30% higher than the 2°C limit, and 120% higher than the 1.5°C limit in 2030. Given the US has indicated it will walk out of the Paris Agreement, under which nearly 200 countries committed to the 2°C pathway—if incumbent president, Donald Trump, a climate-change-denier, wins the 2020 elections, it will do so after November 2020—the NDCs will definitely not be met.

Action on phasing out of fossil fuels, a large source of greenhouse gases, has been muted—the UN’s Production Gap report estimates that the world is on track to produce 150% more coal in 2030 than the absolute 2°C (warming above pre-industrial levels) compliance limit, and close to thrice of what is consistent with 1.5°C pathway. Oil production will overshoot the said limits by 16% and 59% respectively. The fourth-largest coal-producer, Australia, and Brazil, a major oil economy, have both threatened a US-style Paris-deal-walk-out though they haven’t made any actual announcement. Climate action by three major fossil fuel producers, the US, Saudi Arabia, and Russia, is estimated to be critically insufficient (that is, if all countries were acting similarly, the world would heat beyond 4°C by 2100). Yet, fossil fuel phase-out—this would require planning commensurate to the paradigm shift that it is—is not on the explicit agenda for CoP25. Indeed, with the UN having said that the point of no return is upon us, and studies having warned that deferment and delay on such action exponentially increases costs of mitigation, it is surprising that nations are still pussyfooting on this. The Katowice meeting (CoP24) was a lost opportunity—predictable, though, with host Poland being a major coal economy—but, if countries fail to make good in CoP25 and the major economies remain unwilling to adhere to the common but differentiated responsibilities principle, the Greta Thunbergs of the world would be right in accusing them of betraying future generations.

The world is already 1.1°C warmer than pre-industrial levels, and even this warming has had disastrous effects—with just 12 years of emissions left to exhaust the carbon budget for 1.5°C warming, a planetary climate crisis is looming. Disasters rooted in climate change have already forced 20 million people to leave their homes annually over the past decade; people are seven times more likely to be internally displaced because of floods, cyclones, and wildfire than volcanic eruptions and earthquake, and three times more likely than because of conflict. The US shirking from the responsibility that its historical and current emissions demand in terms of climate action—it is currently the second-largest emitter and the largest per capita emitter—and the fact that NDCs are nowhere near as ambitious as required mean that CoP countries ex the US will have to vastly increase their commitment. At the UN Climate Action Summit, held in New York in September, nations didn’t inspire much faith. CoP 25 may be the last forum to commit to meaningful climate action—Paris Agreement kicks in from the coming year. One of the key points of discussion at CoP25 will be the modalities of carbon markets that will allow big emitters to buy carbon credits from countries that keep well within their emission goals. For this mechanism to work, countries will have to first commit to sharper cuts—emissions must go down by 7.6% per year over the next decade if the world is to keep to the 2°C pathway—and developed nations must agree to stick to common but differentiated responsibilities.

Get pollution plan right

Long-term action on fossil fuels, transport systems needed

LAST MONTH, the Supreme Court (SC), having taken *suo motu* notice of the deteriorating Air Quality Index (AQI) in the national capital region (NCR) and some other cities in India, called for committed action by state governments and the Centre to end pollution. The SC had come down heavily against the government machinery for having failed to check pollution, saying, “...why they (the states) should not be required to pay compensation to such persons who are being affected by inadequate arrangement to check air pollution?” Yet, the SC has allowed construction of the India Trade Promotion Organisation’s (ITPO’s) Integrated Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre project to go on, despite itself having banned all construction and demolition activity in the NCR on November 4. The ban on other construction is to stay till the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) submits its report. Meanwhile, the restrictions on industrial activity, imposed by the Environmental Pollution Control Agency that SC had created to tackle pollution in the NCR, remain. Be it odd-even, the EPCA’s graded action plan, or even the attempts to control stubble burning in the winter months, the approach has been quite *ad hoc*—while stubble burning does make the NCR a “gas chamber”, it is a seasonal phenomenon; construction and road dust contribute 35% of the national capital’s PM 2.5 pollution (50% of its PM 10 pollution), and domestic cooking and vehicular emissions contribute 22% each. Episodic measures may offer relief, but there is an undeniable need for more concerted action; at-scale, transformative measures are necessary—Sunita Narain of the Centre for Science and Environment cites Delhi’s move to CNG for public transport roughly two decades ago as an example of such effort. So, instead of having odd-even, it is perhaps necessary to ensure stricter vehicular emission standards and incentivise the auto industry to transition to cleaner fuels. A rationing of vehicle sales—though that would be intervening in market dynamics—could also be an interim measure even as the capacity of mass transport systems like buses and railways is beefed up. Coal and other polluting fuels need to be eased out hastily from both industrial and domestic use—many societies in the NCR are still dependent on diesel generators for power back-up—not just in Delhi, but across the NCR states. This will mean ensuring supply of electricity and gas to households and industries. Power generation itself also has to shed fossil fuel dependence—while the Badarpur power plant in Delhi was permanently shut down only last year, 10 power plants around Delhi, at least till mid-November, were set to miss the December deadline for installing pollution control devices. Installation of smog towers, which the SC has mentioned in its order, too, must commence once the government is assured of their efficacy.

Stubble burning, vehicular emissions, cracker smoke—all of these need acting against, but the government and the SC should be asking themselves if these measures amount to anything more than sticking a band-aid. Without long-term measures, Delhi will be keep needing ventilator support every year.

NoCAPS

Capping fees for professional courses at deemed universities will affect their ability to improve infrastructure, attract talent

THE UNIVERSITY GRANTS Commission (UGC) has released for public feedback a set of draft rules to regulate the fee charged by private aided and unaided institutions that are deemed to be universities providing professional education. The UGC claims that the move is aimed to curb charging of capitation fee and/or other forms of profiteering by these institutions, and thereby reduce the financial burden of students. However, the regulator seems not only to be ignoring the fallout that the move could have on the state of higher education in India but also contradicting its own commitment to granting greater autonomy to institutes of higher education.

Curtailling the ability of private universities to decide their own fees, their primary revenue source, limits their ability not only to maintain and advance their infrastructure—crucial for professional education, given how fast technology is advancing—but also to attract top teaching talent. Given that the quality of higher education in India remains a serious concern, such a regulation could deal a serious blow to the country’s education output. Further, given that the credit for enhancing education opportunities in India goes primarily to the private sector—from 642 universities in 2011–12, India recorded 993 in 2018–19, most of which have been private institutions—such curbs would inhibit their ability to provide service in the first place. The move is also regressive as far as UGC’s welcome recent decision to provide graded autonomy to top-rung institutions is concerned. While reducing the financial entry barriers to education, and ensuring that admission to educational institutions is based on merit alone are indeed noble goals, stricter auditing of universities’ finances, penalties for corrupt practices, or increasing the quantum of merit/means based scholarships are all far better means of achieving this.

THE REAL MAINSTREAM

VICTIMS OF THE BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY ARE STILL AWAITING CLOSURE TO THEIR CONTINUED MISERY

The unfinished agenda of Bhopal

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lifestyle, lack of hygiene and poverty. ICMR was supposed to do these studies, but inexplicably stopped its investigations in 1994.

In 1989, Union Carbide paid \$470 million as compensation for the disaster—one-seventh of the original demand from the Indian government. In return, the Supreme Court terminated all civil and criminal cases against the company. When the trial began, as per the government data, there were some 3,000 deaths and 30,000 cases of injury. But, when the case was finally decided, compensation was given to virtually the entire city. Some 6 lakh people got money as “affected”. The family of the dead got ₹2–3 lakh as compensation, and the rest got about ₹15,000 each. For the real victims, the settlement was a joke as these were not sufficient to even meet their medical bills.

In 2010, the Union government agreed to additional compensation of ₹10 lakh for death and ₹1.5 lakh in the cases of disability, renal failure and cancer. But the affected say the government excluded many as their diseases were not listed as severe and permanent disability. In fact, there is a list of illness, called Bhopal Gas Disease, which the government has refused to accept as those caused by the disaster. No one knows how many people are suffering from these or what their treatment status is. Bhopal disaster 1.0, therefore, still lingers on because a sizeable population have neither received adequate compensation nor proper medical care.

Bhopal disaster 2.0

People of Bhopal are suffering

another legacy of Union Carbide—groundwater pollution and soil contamination. The factory used to manufacture three pesticides: carbaryl (trade name Sevin), aldicarb (trade name Temik) and a formulation of carbaryl and gamma-hexachlorocyclohexane (gamma-HCH), called Sevidol. For 15 years till the disaster, it dumped process wastes, by-products, solvents, sub-standard products, wastes from machinery and polluted water at dumpsites inside and outside the plant. These wastes are still lying at the site, polluting soil and groundwater.

Headed a joint study conducted by Delhi-based non-profit Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The study was released in 2009—on the 25th anniversary of the disaster. Independent tests done by CSE and CPCB laboratories found groundwater and soil surrounding the UCIL site contaminated with chlorinated benzenes, mercury, carbaryl, aldicarb and HCH molecules. All these can be linked to the wastes dumped by Union Carbide factory.

This second legacy—Bhopal disaster 2.0—now threatens even a larger number of people than the first one. Many of these pollutants are likely to remain in the environment for hundreds of years. They will keep spread-

ing unless they are taken out and the site is decontaminated.

The worst part is cleaning and decontamination of the site has got embroiled in legal and political disagreements. Disagreements over how to clean the site, what to do with the wastes and who should pay for the clean-up—state governments, the Centre or Dow Chemicals who took over Union Carbide—have stalled progress.

Then, there is a dispute over the fate of the factory site itself. Over the years, most pieces of machinery have been stolen, and the structure has rusted and is collapsing. The state government once had a plan to open the factory gates for sightseeing and disaster tourism. This was opposed by the NGOs, who wanted the site to become a memorial for industrial disaster. In this infighting, the site continues to rot.

Thirty-five years after the tragedy, there is no closure for Bhopal. This is mainly because our response has been inadequate and, to a certain degree, callous.

But, there is learning from Bhopal for everyone. For the government, the learning is that post-disaster management is

as important as immediate relief. We have not had a disaster like Bhopal since 1984, though small industrial accidents are still common.

For the industry, therefore, learning is that it is possible to avoid accidents with constant vigilance and proper planning. For activists and NGOs, the lesson is that the fight should not become an end in itself such that the issues remain unresolved. Bhopal is a classic example of our inability to resolve conflicts because the fight for justice became an end in itself.

Thanks to the state govt and the NGOs clashing on what to do with the factory, the site is in a state of rot. NGOs should keep in mind that the fight must not become an end in itself such that the issues remain unresolved

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mistrust in NDA leadership

Rahul Bajaj’s bold assertion, which was meant for Amit Shah, that the Modi government was not open to criticism speaks volumes about the atmosphere of distrust and apprehension amongst businessmen. Certainly, when an upright industrialist like Bajaj says something relevant to the nation’s welfare, it makes ripples. The Centre must address entrepreneurs fears and concerns to boost the economy as they are the country’s foremost job providers. In fact, besides the dictatorial style of functioning of NDA stalwarts, there always remains a political uncertainty in non-BJP governed states as BJP has earned the dubious distinction of dismantling elected governments, and thus encouraging defections. — Brij Bhushan Goyal, Ludhiana

Penalising rapists

While there are widespread protests in various parts of the country demanding capital punishment for the perpetrators of the rape and gruesome murder of the 25-year-old veterinarian in Hyderabad, my heart goes out to the 8-year-old Asifa Banu of Rasana Village, near Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir, who was abducted, cruelly gangraped for days, and murdered. At the time, when the accused were arrested, some communal-minded Hindutva elements opposed the arrest of the accused. If only stern and severe action had been taken then, the crime in Hyderabad could perhaps have been prevented for fear of punishment. For long, I have been against capital punishment, but after the Kathua and Hyderabad cases, I am convinced that it is a must. — TS Fernando, Virugambakkam

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Expect 25bps cut on December 5

FY20 growth forecast is cut by 40bps to 5.1% after September quarter growth came in at 4.3%. Growth is still falling as real lending rates are still rising. India Activity Indicator points to slowdown continuing

INDRANIL SEN GUPTA & AASTHA GUDWANI

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WE CONTINUE TO expect the RBI MPC to cut policy rates by 25 bps on December 5, and by 15 bps in February. Although nominal MCLR has slipped by 40 bps (50 bps in FY20, 40 bps in FY21 BofAMLe), on RBI easing, it has risen 120 bps in real terms as core WPI inflation has fallen to 0.7% from 3.1% last year on weak demand. A saving grace is that MCLR on retail/SME loans would immediately fall as they are linked to ‘external’ benchmarks like the RBI repo rate. After all, time is running out for lending rate cuts, with the ongoing ‘busy’ industrial season set to intensify in the March quarter. Note, we use core WPI inflation to calculate ex post real lending rates as it captures corporate pricing power, while RBI targets CPI as it reflects the cost of living.

Growth fell more than expected, to 4.3% in the September quarter (4.7% BofAMLe, 4.5% consensus), even below June’s 4.9%, with the 2018 liquidity crunch still hurting.

Sequentially, too, growth fell by 0.9% versus median quarter-on-quarter of -0.1%. Our BofAMLe India Activity Indicator points to the slowdown continuing.

In response, we cut our FY20 growth forecast by a further 40 bps to 5.1%. While we expect a shallow recovery to 5.2% in the December quarter on base effects, the bottom has got deeper and longer. September slowdown was led by 0.5% industry contraction. Core industries’ production fell 5.8% in October atop -5.1% in September. Barring public expenditure, services growth moderated. Investment continues to slip to 27.3% of GDP from 29.2% last year (see graphic).

We do not set much store by the fact that November inflation will climb to 5.2% from October’s 4.6%; November-February should similarly go up to 4.7% from 3.3% in April-September on the onion price spike/base effects (see graphic).

Onion prices have shot up to 159% in October from 119% last month.

A saving grace is that core inflation ex gold, silver et al slid to 3.3% in October from 3.7% in September (see graphic). Fundamental drivers of inflation remain in check. A substantial output gap restrains corporate pricing power. Second, liquidity remains tight: excess M3 demand is still 1%. Third, agflation should be in check as full rivers augur well for coming winter rabi sowing, although the start is delayed by late rains. Fourth, ‘imported’ inflation is muted, with recent RBI FX intervention (\$33.1 bn FYTD) limiting depreciation (1.1% FYTD) as well as soft weak world growth holding global commodity prices.

In our view, growth is collapsing because real lending rates are rising.

Edited excerpts from BofAMLe’s 4.3% growth vs 5.2% CPI: 25bps RBI rate cut on Dec 5 (December 2, 2019)

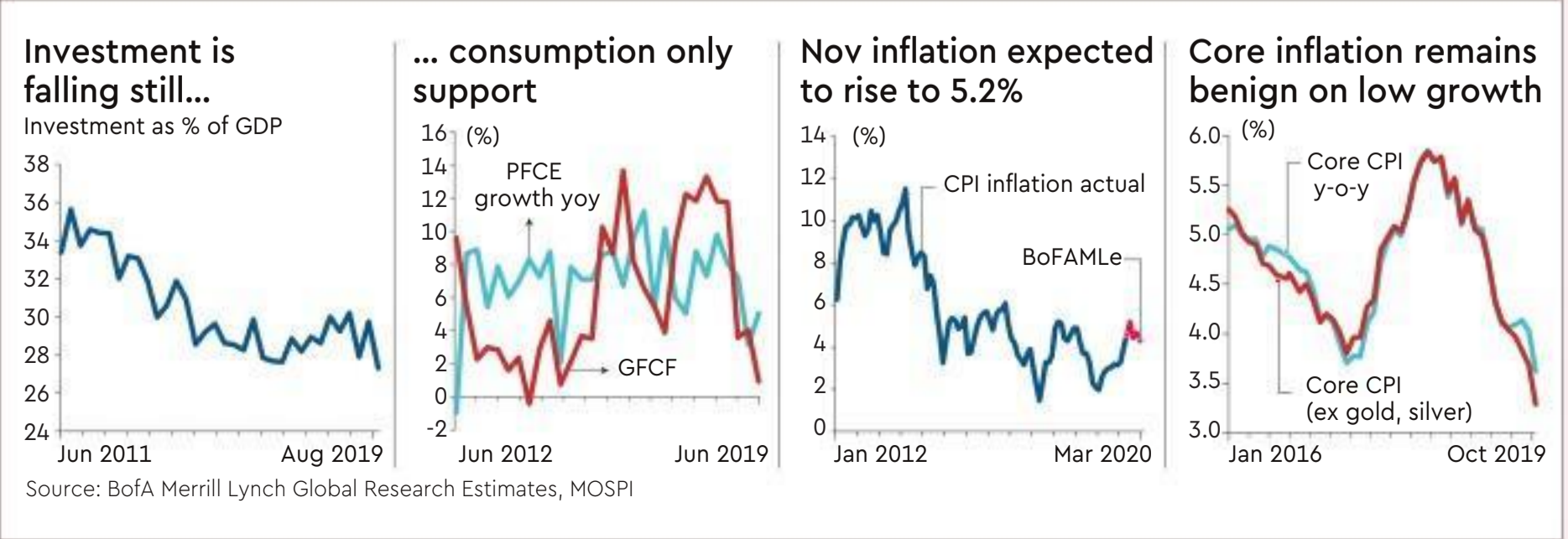




ILLUSTRATION: ROHINIT PHORE

**SANTOSH MEHROTRA
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The real picture on jobs

A focus on principal status jobs alone leads to the erroneous conclusion of rising formal jobs, while in fact, the number of contract jobs (with less than a year's contract) is rising in both government and private enterprises

PRINCIPAL STATUS OF employment (working for more than 182 days in a year) is an important component to explore employment trends in India. However, it is insufficient in a highly informalised economy, where many workers work in different occupations and casually, at different sites, over a year, even though they may or may not have a principal occupation. It is a mistake, thus, to ignore the subsidiary status of employment (as some scholars do). In fact, both usual principal and usual subsidiary status of employment are equally important, and both are primary for employment estimation. Neither should be considered as secondary, and, hence, neither should be ignored. It is also important to throw light on the quality of employment generated in India, and its links with the recent rise in the incidence of poverty.

The increase of employment based on only principal status is not a new trend, rather, it is the usual employment trend. For example, total employment (based on only on principal status) increased from 33.4 crore (1993-94) to 36.8 crore (1999-

2000), then to 41.5 crore (2004-05). It increased again to 42.8 crore (2009-10), 43.5 crore (2011-12), and further to 45.1 crore by 2017-18. But, when we compute employment considering both the principal and the subsidiary status together, it gives the actual picture. This is the method used by many developing and developed countries, including the Inter-

national Labour Organisation for employment projections.

Although absolute number of jobs by principal status increased consistently over 25 years, the growth rate of jobs has suffered a tremendous decline in recent years. Annual job growth by principal status was 1.7% during 1999-2000, and 2.5% during 2000-2005. It declined to 0.7% during 2005-2012, and further to an even lower level of 0.6% during 2012-2018. This is a matter of grave concern. This means that educated youth, who enrolled in secondary and higher education during 2005-2012, are joining the labour force with lesser number of jobs on offer.

The claim that workers who have reported employment by subsidiary status (worked less than 6 months) are disingenuously unemployed is wrong. The accompanying graph explores subsidiary employment of the workforce for 2017-18. Out of 1.4 crore workers (in subsidiary status alone), only half were unpaid family members (unlike what some scholars think). For the rest, the fall in subsidiary employment undermines livelihoods. Thus, 40 lakh were self-employed by their own account, running their own business. Another 1 lakh were employers, who hired other workers as employees. This might be due to adverse economic conditions and other reasons. Furthermore, about 4 lakh subsidiary workers were engaged in regular wage/salaried jobs, while about 25 lakh were engaged in casual wage employment; it will be a disaster if their jobs were to disappear post-2018.

This disaster befell millions (subsidiary status only) between 2012 and 2018, the majority (1.35 crore) was 'other than unpaid family labour'. Of this, about 60 lakh were own-account (self-

employed), 1 lakh were employers, 4 lakh were regular workers, and 70 lakh were casual wage workers. Hence, ignoring the subsidiary status underestimates the scale of workforce losses, at the cost of human well-being.

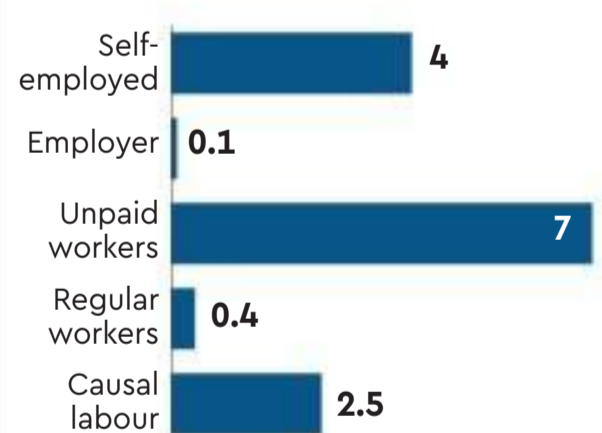
While the growth of jobs in agriculture had become negative (-2% pa), for the first time during 2005-2012, and continued to be negative (-1.9%) since 2012 (a welcome development), growth in non-farm jobs, which is crucial for sustaining the economy's structural transformation (based on UPSS), was about 4.9% and 3.9% per annum during 2000-2005 and 2005-2012, respectively. Unfortunately, it fell to a low 1.2% post-2012 (see graph). While falling employment in agriculture is good for the economy, we need to recognise the falling growth of non-farm jobs.

We know that a significant source of decline in subsidiary work is because unpaid family workers (underemployed), mostly from agriculture, stopped working. But partial estimation, as carried out by others, completely missed out on the workers who had lost jobs in manufacturing (about 30 lakh in mere six years). Moreover, a focus on principal status jobs alone leads to the erroneous conclusion of rising formal jobs; while in fact, the number of contract jobs (with less than a year's contract) is rising in both government and private enterprises. In manufacturing, jobs with less than one year contract increased from 2 lakh to 7 lakh; while in service sector, they increased from 65 lakh to 1.05 crore during 2011-12 and 2017-18.

While declining underemployment in agriculture is a good sign of structural transformation, an upsurge in educated youth unemployment and rising discouraged labour force (who are neither in jobs nor in education and training) is actually alarming. Given the fact that government or public sector enterprises contribute only about 13% of total non-farm sector jobs in India, policies should focus on creating jobs in the government sector (health, education, police, judiciary) along with an appropriate policy for boosting private sector jobs. Furthermore, policies for boosting the growth of real wages is also equally important, as stagnant real wages have already pushed many non-farm workers (those belonging to the lower end of the income distribution) below the poverty line again. The incidence of poverty among non-farm sector workers increased from 27.2% to 32.6% during 2011-12 and 2017-18. This should worry policy-makers.

Distribution of workers (only subsidiary status) by their types of employment, 2017-18

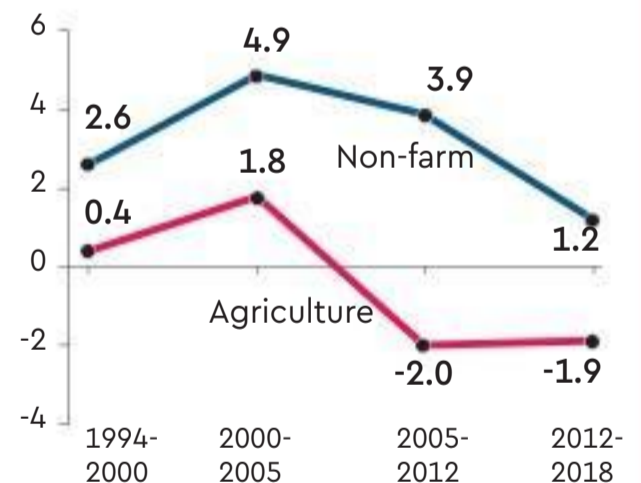
No. of workers (million)



Source: Authors estimation based on PLFS unit data

Growth rate of Jobs 1994 to 2018

Annual growth of jobs (%)



Moving beyond MSP

Protecting farmers' income through market mechanism

**HARSH K BHANWALA
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Bhanwala is chairman and Kumar is senior officer, NABARD. Views are personal

MSP also cannot be ignored, given the rise it has seen over the years. The total food subsidy (₹2,000 crore in 1987-88) increased to ₹72,823 crore in 2011-12. The food subsidy budget for FY17 was ₹1.34 lakh crore, of which ₹1.03 lakh crore was to be routed through FCI to intended beneficiaries. Can commodity derivative markets offer solutions that can be a credit alternative to MSPs?

For deciding which crop to sow, farmers need information on current price, market arrival related information and forecasting of market trends. Along with the information of the spot market, the forward and futures market prices are also required to be disseminated to farmers. They need to be trained in taking appropriate signals from

the forward and futures prices. Crop pricing decisions can thus be taken by farmers based on prevailing spot market price/futures price, and crop panning can be done based on signals transmitted from market through futures prices. As regards perishable crops like onion, potato, vegetables, fruits, etc, price spikes and glut situations can be avoided by strengthening production clusters, developing distributed warehousing facilities, putting in place agri-logistics arrangements like cooling and processing facilities, transportation, etc.

Remunerative prices: In a developed commodities derivatives market, there could be several market-based instruments that can serve as an efficient alternative to MSP. These could be options, forwards and



futures. These instruments rely on market prices rather than administrative prices, thus shifting risks to viable financial markets that are better able and willing to take risks. Of these instruments, commodity options could serve as the best alternative to the current price support system.

Actually, MSP works as option contract. If price were to fall below the specified MSP, the government has the obligation to purchase from farmers at MSP. At the same time, the farmer is under no obligation to sell to the government if the price stays above MSP. In the event, the farmer is free to sell in the open market at a price higher than MSP.

There are two type of options—call option and put option. Buyers of “put”

option have the right but not the obligation to sell, or make a delivery, at a predetermined price and date. Therefore, put option could be used by farmers as it empowers them with the right to sell at predetermined prices without any obligation to sell for the same. If a farmer buys a put option of a commodity he produces, he locks in his profit by paying a premium. Here, this premium could be partially or fully subsidised by the government. In case prices fall after harvest, the farmer gets the predetermined price of his produce, and if prices rise after the harvest, he can sell in the open market to realise higher prices of produce.

Although commodity futures are available with Indian commodity exchanges where farmers can theoretically sell futures

on various agricultural commodities to “lock in” their price, there are two drawbacks. Firstly, selling through futures means depositing margins for farmers as sellers of futures, and secondly giving up on any further rise in the price of their produce. Though buying a put option is similar to selling a future, it involves no margin to be posted, and the only loss that accrues if the underlying commodity's price increases for the put buyer, who could be a farmer, is the original premium posted. The benefit of the upside is preserved for the put buyer.

There are several benefits of facilitating remunerative price (on the lines of MSP) to farmers/FPOs as well as to the government using the option approach. Firstly, the price gets locked-in by farmers as put options act as an insurance and the risk from price fall is mitigated, while at the same time retaining unlimited potential for upside gains in case of price rise. Secondly, for the government, the cost of subsidising option premium would be a fraction of total procurement and administrative cost. This will result in huge cost savings for the exchequer and reduction in administrative efforts. Thirdly, all transaction details and trails can be transparently recorded ensuring efficient utilisation of public resources. And finally, the risk of price fall is transferred to counter-party through the exchange platform by paying a small premium, and due to lower cost, reach can be widened to benefit more farmers than what is being covered under MSP.

IBC VS RERA

Should IBC be the first option?

**NIRANJAN
HIRANANDANI**

Founder & MD, Hiranandani Group, and national president, NAREDCO



India Inc sees aggressive use of IBC in debt recovery mechanism; finds it counterproductive

IN THE CHALLENGING scenario that the Indian economy finds itself in, the resolution of debt recovery is a sensitive issue. Over the years, we have witnessed various changes and amendments to the legal framework to make the system fair and just for both sides in any such dispute.

The perception gaining ground amongst India Inc is that the attempt to bring in fair play and have a balanced approach tends to have gone a bit in favour of those seeking recovery—at times, leading to a situation where a dispute, instead of being resolved, ends up in the debtor company having to ‘close shop’. The reality of this situation, as different from the perception, is that small debts taken up under bankruptcy laws have the potential to have a company that may have solved the problem, end up downing shutters.

The insolvency regime has seen a majority applications as having been filed by operational creditors—such as vendors, suppliers and employees. This is a situation where such ‘operational creditors’ can potentially force the company into liquidation for a default, at times as low as ₹1 lakh.

The impact will be felt in sectors where there are not many bidders, as invoking the bankruptcy code creates a potential scenario where the debtor may end up in liquidation rather than a revival. This is a scenario that is not ideal.

The ideal scenario would be the one where lenders should not end up opting on invoking the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) as the step of first choice—I would look at medical treatment for illness as an apt example: oral medicines, injections always are the first option—an operation, to give an example, would be a later option. With different options available to a debtor, the recent trend has been the one where lenders have been seen preferring the option of invoking the IBC. It is like opting for an operation at the very initial stage, where injections or oral medicines

The government needs to be cognisant of what is all-too-apparent—aggressive use of the IBC as a first option rather than as a last alternative

might just work out.

If we take the example of real estate, among the options available to an aggrieved estate in a real estate transaction, appealing before a criminal court, approaching a consumer forum, approaching RERA Conciliation Tribunal, and then filing an application under RERA—as also invoking the IBC.

Logically, since RERA is the regulatory body for real estate, one would expect aggrieved lenders to first move courts, consumer fora and RERA Conciliation Forum, before approaching RERA—but what if even lenders with small amounts outstanding opt to invoke the IBC? Effectively, lenders can take an unrelenting position on debt recovery by invoking the IBC.

Given this situation, India Inc hopes that the government will come up with measures that will reduce lenders' selection of taking debtor companies to bankruptcy courts even at the slightest delay in loan repayments. This can be done through a change in the insolvency code, which is necessary given the rising strain on balance sheets as a result of the slowdown in the Indian economy.

It is not prevention, rather the option would be preventing the aggressive use of the IBC as a recovery tool by lenders, effectively by rebalancing rights of lenders and loan defaulters. The IBC should not be the first resort for a lender for handling a default, given that there are other fora. India Inc hopes for some changes in the code to ensure this happens, and the government needs to be cognisant of what is all-too-apparent—aggressive use of the IBC as a first option rather than as a last alternative.

Women’s Safety as Task of Democracy

Indian society has to confront its flawed values

In the wake of the recent brutal rape and murder of a young woman in Hyderabad, much of the public discourse on the subject has been confined to outrage, policing, punishment and tougher laws. One honourable member of Parliament even called for a lynch mob to teach the culprits the lesson they deserve to learn. All this sound and fury suggest that few really want to address the basic flaws in our culture that breed male violence against women. Holding up a mirror to ourselves can be a painful exercise; it is safer to vent against the government of the day, paucity of law enforcement personnel and unutilised budget allocations for women’s safety programmes.

Deep-rooted social prejudice against women finds articulation in India’s adverse sex ratio, particularly in the age group 0-6. Families prefer boys: female foetuses are selectively aborted, infant girls allowed to die. A welcome official campaign has been addressing this most violent form of discrimination against the female sex. However,



other egregious forms of discrimination that push women to a subordinate role in society and train men to see themselves as entitled to favourable treatment fail to get addressed. Facing up to such forms of discrimination entail challenging values embedded in religion, social hierarchy, family structure and property rights. Reducing women to objects of desire is part and parcel of mainstream culture, whether movies, music, literature or folk songs. The canon of Hindu orthodoxy upheld by the dictums of Manu, the ancient lawgiver, holds that women are to be protected by the father, the husband and the son at different stages of their lives, and do not deserve autonomy. Reproducing caste calls for control over female sexuality: if women were to choose their partners outside the caste, it would undermine the institution. Resolute pursuit of eliminating gender discrimination conflicts with traditional values of society, cutting across religions.

Only rigorous democratisation of society can bring about sustainable improvement in the conditions of women. The sooner we realise this, the better.

Anguished Cry for Reform From Railways

The latest available operational figures for the Indian Railways show that it is hurtling towards a debt trap and worsening capacity constraints, and needs to change tracks — fast. The Comptroller and Auditor General’s (CAG) report for 2017-18 shows that the operating ratio (OR) of the Railways, the ratio of total working expenses to gross earnings, has hugely deteriorated to 98.44%, which is really its worst show in a decade.

It implies that the Railways’ annual revenue is almost entirely spent on everyday expenses, leaving practically nothing for much-needed investment. There is a fundamental structural imbalance in rail finances. The Railways passenger segment consumes two-thirds of its resources, but yields barely a third



of its revenue. What is worse, the routine cross-subsidisation of passenger fares with pricey freight rates means that it is increasingly outpriced by road transport in the freight market, its traditional cash cow. Further, the paucity of investible funds leads to rising congestion (read: lengthening infrastructure deficits) on the busy routes. The OR for 2017-18 would actually have been 102.66%, or gone into a negative balance of over ₹5,600 crore, but for advances from entities like NTPC. Railways finances remain sub-optimally dependent on hauling coal and other low-margin bulk items. An efficient Railways would, instead, massively improve logistics and transport nationally.

The Railways must form joint ventures with the main municipal corporations and major states without further delay, to better finance its social service obligations, namely, cheap urban transport. What is required is a modern, business-like approach to rail operations, including corporatisation, as is now the standard practice the world over, and stepped-up efficiency levels.



The new way to calculate it doesn’t really help mathematically challenged humans

Age is Not Just a Number for Dogs

It has been ridiculously easy so far to calculate the ages of our furry best friends, using the ‘traditional’ measure of multiplying their chronological age by seven to arrive at their canine equivalent. Even though some dog breeds rarely make it past single digits (in ‘human’ years) while others even become canine centenarians, no one has ever questioned the ‘times seven’ method. So, it was expected that when some researchers did hit upon a more accurate measure of ‘actual’ canine age — though such precision would not seem necessary to many dog lovers — they would keep in mind the limited mathematical capabilities of the average humans. But that, clearly, was not to be as the new formula is based on the epigenetic clock, which is actually a biochemical test based on DNA methylation levels.

For those not deterred by such scientific esoterica, the new method entails multiplying by 16 the natural logarithm of a dog’s age (which moves at different speeds and is usually a single number followed by several other digits after a decimal point) and adding 31 to the total. Even though mobile phone calculators are there, the joy has just been squeezed out of the human-dog equation. Besides, what is achieved by knowing that an energetic two-year-old pet is actually a spry middle-aged mutt rather than a teenager? Age is just a number, right?

SWAMISPЕAK Statisticians are not crooks. But their methodologies do need to change

Counting Correctly Counts



Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

The government has junked the 2017-18 National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) consumption survey which, according to a leaked report, showed total consumption declining by 3.7% between 2011-12 and 2017-18, and rural consumption falling 8%. Protests have erupted from Opposition parties and a group of 214 academics.

On the other hand, Surjit Bhalla, now India’s executive director in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has lambasted the NSSO findings as unbelievable. He has shown that between 2011-12 and 2017-18, sales of cars rose 31.5%, of two-wheelers 45.6%, of airline passengers 95.6% and of cellphone users 44.4%. This is totally incompatible with the NSSO claim of falling consumption.

Diverging Divergence

Bhalla further says that the ratio of NSSO to GDP estimates (made by national accounts) of consumption had plunged steadily from 95% in the 1960s to just 55% in 2011-12, and now to an incredible 33% in 2017-18. No economic explanation can explain such a huge, rising divergence. Something may be wrong with GDP data. But, clearly, much more is wrong with the NSSO data.

In a recent interview in Mint (bit.do/fjrtu), Pronab Sen, the most respected

statistical expert in India, says whenever the statistical system throws up bad news, the government tries to suppress or discredit it. He is correct. GoI should not suppress data even when inconvenient. But that does not mean NSSO data are sacrosanct and cannot be questioned, or called incredible.

As I related in this column last fortnight (bit.do/fjskC), even in the US, household surveys provide serious underestimates so regularly that a recent academic paper was titled ‘Household Surveys in Crisis’. We should accept that NSSO household surveys are flawed, not because the statisticians are liars or saboteurs, but because all such surveys are inherently flawed, more so in India’s circumstances.

We need a drastic overhaul of NSSO survey methodologies. Survey data must not be hidden as being politically embarrassing. Rather, they should be published along with a frank discussion of their flaws. This is happening in the US, where, too, household surveys underestimate consumption by up to 40%. US academics are trying to create models that modify household surveys by incorporating independent production and sales data. India must do the same.

Pronab Sen says critics including the government are “consistently questioning the professionalism of [the government’s] statisticians”. No, I am questioning the credibility of their models and methods, which are also under question in other countries like the US.

Sen says GDP data (national accounts) are drawn mainly from the corporate sector. But the non-corporate sector accounts for half the economy. So, maybe the corporate sector is doing well, but non-corporate sectors are doing badly, which is why consumption is falling.

We must abandon unadjusted NSSO data, which have drifted from reality. Instead, we must develop models using other data sources to adjust the NSSO data



Sit down to scrutiny

This will not wash. First, production in the organised and unorganised sectors is closely linked. Unorganised producers use inputs from the organised sector — electricity, steel, aluminium, yarn, plastics, commercial vehicles. Second, the country is steadily getting more formalised, which is why the ratio of corporate tax to GDP has tripled since 1991 despite a cut in the tax rate.

Lie Lie Land

Third, the government has given over ₹3 lakh crore of Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) small business loans to the unorganised sector, and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) lending to micro credit groups and small businesses have grown explosively. Sen’s thesis of a collapse of the unincorporated sector is contradicted by independent data.

Sen says NSSO data do not fully capture the upper income groups, who refuse to participate in surveys. “But that does not mean that it is not capturing data for the lower income groups accurately,” he states. Sorry, but independent data such as Bhalla’s show that the NSSO fails even in lower income data.

I looked up sales data of top FMCG companies, which cater to the lower and middle classes. Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, sales of Hindustan Unilever rose by 52%, of Nestlé by 32%, of Britan-

nia Industries 85%, and of Venky’s (the top chicken producer) by 171%. No sign here of falling consumption among the lower and middle classes.

I argued in this column last fortnight that the total inability of opinion polls and exit polls to predict election results proved conclusively that people lie to surveyors. They will not say anything they think might harm their personal interest. In the last two decades, subsidies and benefits from both the Centre and states have often been targeted at the lower sections of the population. It makes no sense for people to honestly declare their true consumption, and risk being graduated out of income categories from which they could get current or future benefit.

I am certain that this is the key reason for the consistently growing gap between what the national accounts and NSSO surveys show. Neither Sen nor any other critic is able to counter my thesis. That simply strengthens it.

The government is certainly wrong to try and hide NSSO data. But that does not make the data any less incredible. We must abandon using unadjusted NSSO data, which have drifted far from reality. Instead, we must develop models using other data sources (such as production, sales and tax receipts) to adjust the NSSO data. The US is attempting this. We should not lag behind.

Bell Curves ■ R Prasad



You must have courage, and a deep pocket to carry it!

FINANCIAL RESOLUTION & DEPOSIT INSURANCE BILL

Look Before You Re-Leap



Manas R Das

The 1999 Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report on reforms in deposit insurance in India had recommended to give the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) powers to act as receiver and liquidator of failed banks. This RBI recommendation was taken to its logical conclusion by the tabling of the Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance (FRDI) Bill in Parliament in August 2017. It was, however, withdrawn a year later after concerns about the bail-in clause, according to which depositors of a failing financial institution would have to bear part of the resolution cost.

There is now talk of the possibility of the Bill — especially the aspects related to the banking sector — with the recent Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) meeting last month headed by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman reportedly discussing the FRDI Bill. So, it is an appropriate time to evaluate different aspects of the once-considered, once-removed Bill, beyond the already much-discussed bail-in provision, and suggest a few modifications.

The Bill does have several merits. For the first time in the history of Indian financial laws, a Bill details the resolution of troubled financial institutions. Combining the two related functions of deposit insurance and resolution into one law, and bringing both under one institutional framework, constitutes another of its virtues. The incorporation of the ‘No Creditor Worse Off than in Liquidation’ (NCWO) provision satisfies the Financial Stability Board’s (FSB) ‘bail-in’ principle. Inclusion of cross-border resolution, and emphasis on recovery and resolution planning are noteworthy.

Depositors, obviously, had earlier rejected the ‘bail-in’ provision. But they did realise that banks, like other businesses, are failure-prone, and that bank

crises can jeopardise their savings. Such sensitisation will enhance depositor discipline on banks, besides improving one’s own financial planning.

There are demerits of the FRDI Bill. Bringing in non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) last month under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) is a welcome move, which also rectifies an earlier aberration in the law. But the question of extending deposit insurance to NBFCs remains unresolved.

The non-banking sector is amorphous, less transparent and more vulnerable than banks, as recent turmoil showed. Earlier, different committees had disfavoured deposit insurance for non-banks. The 2014 International Monetary Fund ‘Deposit Insurance Database’ was against it. According to the 2018 Survey of Deposit Insurance Systems (DISs) by the International Association of Deposit Insurers, of the 131 DISs in the world, only five provided coverage to securities companies, seven to insurance companies and 17 to investment banks. Among the lower-middle income economies — to which India belongs — no DIS covered such entities. Therefore, each category of financial institutions necessitates a separate DIS — if, at all, necessary.

At present, the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, coupled with the DICGC Act, 1961, protects interest of bank depositors well. Additionally, if DICGC can be bolstered

with requisite statutory powers, capital, personnel and technology, it can become an independent deposit insurance-cum-resolution corporation (RC) exclusively for banks. There would then be no need for a new institution.

From the perspective of banks, however, RC should be brought in after some time, as the sector is undergoing a churn, what with the mega-merger of public sector banks (PSBs) yet to shape up, with some PSBs still under ‘Prompt Corrective Action’ (PCA), and some out of PCA yet to stabilise. Further, adoption of Indian Accounting Standards by the scheduled commercial banks — except regional rural banks (RRBs) — which will impact their financial statements and capital, is pending. Hence, it will be pragmatic to wait till there is some crystallisation.

In addition to RBI’s oversight and PCA framework for banks, another ‘risk to viability’ framework could lead to duplication, and be a wastage of scarce regulatory and supervisory resources. For banks, only one framework is needed.

It seems RC will be highly dependent on sectoral regulators/supervisors. This will not only add to the latter’s workload, but also may, occasionally, cause friction. So, sound coordination and information-sharing between the two parties, which the Bill emphasises, would be crucial. Ideally, RC should have a deposit insurance expert on its board or as an adviser, since one of the key determinants of efficient resolution and depositor’s confidence is how fast the latter’s money is made good.

Finally, the Bill would necessitate a time-consuming ‘repeals and amendments’ of over a dozen legislations. So, the new Act should consider keeping its ripple effects on other laws to the minimum. Besides, the related provisions in these Acts should be seamlessly woven into one to preclude any doubt or confusion, both in letter and spirit.

Before the FRDI Bill is indeed resurrected, more granular, multidisciplinary research is required before deciding on its enactment. The extent to which it syncs with FSB’s Key Attributes of Effective Resolution Regimes for Financial Institutions also needs assessing.



Bandages, before it rises again

Citings

Personal Marketing

JONAH BERGER

Almost everyone has someone they want to persuade. Salespeople want to persuade the customer or the client. Marketers want to persuade the consumer. Leaders want to persuade employees. Managers want to persuade their boss.

From politicians to folks in business, lots of people want to persuade others. But persuasion is often quite difficult. Often, when we try to persuade others, they’re less likely to do what we suggest.... There’s a concept in behavioural science called reactance, and I think this is something many of us are at least a little bit familiar with.

When we try to persuade them to do something, they often do the opposite. They often push back. A good way to think about it is almost an anti-persuasion radar. It detects incoming projectiles and shoots up things to knock them down.... I think in today’s day and age, we’re so used to shooting off an email or texting someone or doing something else because it’s easier. We don’t want to take the time and set up a phone call....

But whether we’re writing a song, creating a movie or doing anything that involves language, thinking about how those words impact that audience is a really powerful opportunity. Words do a couple of things. One, they reflect something about the people who create them, so you can learn a lot about a person from the words they use. But they also impact the people who consume them, whether they’re individuals or the culture more broadly.

From “Finding Your Voice: Why Confidence Is Key to Persuasion”



THE SPEAKING TREE

Gospel of the Gospels

KETHOSER KEVICHUSA

In the Bible’s New Testament, the first four books are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, traditionally known as the four Gospels. Gospel literally means ‘good news’. Christians hold that there is ultimately only one gospel — the gospel of Jesus Christ that the four Gospels present from four different perspectives.

Matthew presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, or Christ. Jesus Christ is the long-awaited, long-expected and long-predicted King of the Jews who has finally come to take his throne. The promises are now finally fulfilled in Christ.

If Matthew traces Jesus’ royal and legal line, Luke traces Jesus’ human and natural line. Luke is more interested in presenting Jesus as a true and full human being, who comes to save not just the Jews, but entire humanity. And that is why Luke traces the ancestry of Jesus not to Abraham, but to Adam, the first human being.

For Mark, Jesus is not just a perfect human being or royal ruler; he is the suffering servant who comes to us, not to be served but to serve, and to pour out his life in the service of the world. That is why Mark gives no genealogy of Jesus. No one, after all, is interested in the genealogies of servants.

John begins with the words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). For John, Jesus is the eternal consciousness, will, purpose, expression and communication of God — God Himself — ultimately revealed to us in this one human being, Jesus. That is why John gives no genealogy of Jesus. God has no genealogy.

Chat Room

Sledge Banks for Karvy’s Pledge

Apropos ‘Karvy Khushi, Karvy Gham’ by Puja Mehra (Dec 3), it is illegal for banks to claim ownership of shares fraudulently pledged to them. For a pledge to be valid, it should have been done by the rightful owners. In this case, the shareholders. Shares, whether in material or dematerialised form, are not similar to negotiable instruments. If Karvy did not have ownership of these shares, there was no valid pledge. Hence, the transferee (the banks) cannot acquire better title than that of the transferor (Karvy).

S KALYANASUNDARAM

By email

Don’t Kill Our Infrastructure

This refers to the Edit, ‘Fast and Loose Do Not Gel With Bullet Trains’ (Dec 3). Governments stopping projects initiated by previous governments will sound the death knell for long-gestation infrastructure projects. In future, no government

would take initiative to start projects that cannot be completed within its period of governance. No investor, domestic or foreign, would evince interest in such projects. The CAG, through audit, should hold the government that decides to stall a project on political grounds responsible for the loss and castigate the decision makers.

K R UNNITHAN

Chennai

Gender Equality, Stepping Stone

Apropos ‘Bare Your Teeth to Sex Offenders’ by Rajyasree Sen (Dec 2), rape is not about sexual desire or gratification; it is more about exercise of power. The notion of equality between men and women must take root in our society. Domestic violence, association of impurity with menstruation and lack of proportional representation in Parliament and assemblies are proof of the ground that we need to cover in gender equality. Along with stringent anti-rape laws and policing, we also need a change in mindset and cultural milieu.

G DAVID MILTON

Maruthanode

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OUR VIEW



Rahul Bajaj opens a debate about feedback

It's important to create a relationship between the government and India Inc that is mutually beneficial. Always. To critique is not to criticize; to reach out is to participate.

India Inc. has a new whistle-blower, and his name is Rahul Bajaj. In this age of corporate best practices, timely disclosures and transparency, a new breed of whistle-blowers has emerged to alert investors and regulators when companies play fast and loose with standards of governance. The chairman of Bajaj Auto Ltd, though, is a different kind of a whistle-blower. Bajaj is the living antithesis of discreet revelations: He has built a formidable reputation for candour and forthrightness, and his current outpourings are true to past form. By pointing out to home minister Amit Shah that an atmosphere of fear has stifled freedom to criticize the government, he articulated what businessmen have only dared say in private. The book *World Class In India*, written by the late management guru Sumantra Ghoshal and co-authored by Gita Piramal and Sudeep Budhiraja, describes Rahul Bajaj as “...an outspoken iconoclast who was regularly in the news not only as a spokesman for the Indian industry in general, but also for his often forward thinking and blunt views on a variety of social and economic issues that affected the country”. This was evident even in November 1993, when he decided to go public with submissions of the Bombay Club—a group of eight prominent Indian industrialists, including Bajaj—to the finance minister of the time, Manmohan Singh, seeking for domestic industry a level playing field with foreign companies entering India.

There is another reason why Bajaj is different. He nominated himself as an industry spokesperson who must speak truth to power. Or, to paraphrase what he said in Hindi, he has sacrificed himself for the greater good. The “sacrifice”, though, puts two issues in sharp

relief. One, Bajaj’s peer group and industry colleagues are diminishing his sacrifice with their silence and refusal to support his cause. They do not need to form a chorus, but can at least follow up with suggestions to the government on what can be done to empower industry and improve the economy. Corporate India often cites examples of the freedom afforded to companies in the US, especially their flexible labour policies, but studiously ignores their ability to freely criticize the US government or president. Bill Gates has openly criticized Donald Trump, and so have many other business leaders, without causing a flutter. India Inc. should realize that keeping quiet further curdles an existing conspiracy of silence. It is all the more ironic because all this is happening at a time when India’s government is reaching out to industry for cooperation in ending the economic slowdown.

Unfortunately, some have failed to properly appreciate Bajaj’s observations, though Amit Shah was rather empathetic and restrained in his response. Party faithfuls and some ministers have jumped in to vilify the industrialist without realizing that this only reinforces his plaint. What this defensive word-cloud seems to highlight is a sense of victimhood. It’s important to create a relationship between the government and India Inc that is mutually beneficial. Always. To critique is not to criticize; to reach out is to participate. India Inc needs to understand this too. If so, it is time to recalibrate the relationship. India’s ruling party has a decisive electoral mandate, which should give its government the resolve to listen, consult and execute without fear or favour. But it’s a process that feeds on continuous feedback.

MY VIEW | ARTHANOMICS

Next year’s budget must not be yet another missed opportunity

Sitharaman should reset India’s fiscal math to acknowledge reality and reinvigorate the economy



R. JAGANNATHAN is editorial director, ‘Swarajya’ magazine

With the loss of Maharashtra, and a near-loss in Haryana, the political tide is clearly turning against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the states. If the party fails to retain Jharkhand and also loses Delhi early next year, one could say that the Modi government’s political honeymoon is well and truly over.

This has implications for the economy, which ought to be on top of everyone’s agenda. If the opposition has smelt blood and is in no mood to help the government push through difficult reforms in the current and future sessions of Parliament, the medium-term outlook for the economy will not improve. The cyclical part of the economy may well revive with fiscal and monetary measures, but the structural part of the slowdown cannot recover without big-ticket reforms. These include not only factor market reforms, but also police, legal, judicial and administrative ones.

Given this reality, the Narendra Modi government needs to shift gears on two fronts: one economic and the other political. The political one is obvious. It has to accept the reality that its footprint over the states will not be what it was before December 2018—when it lost three Hindi-belt states—but a much reduced one. This means it must reach out more to the opposition to evolve a consensus on difficult reforms. It can-

not get things done on its own. When your political capital is eroding, you have to stoop to conquer.

However, the one thing the government does have control over is the Union budget. The next one is two months away, and the government could do worse than to treat it like a routine exercise. Though the overall importance of budgets has been reducing in recent years, the next one can still make waves if the Modi government chooses to make the right noises and adopts big changes.

The Modi government budgets have always been underwhelming. The administration’s big moves were either not made in its budget or were aligned with it only in terms of financial impact. From demonetization to the goods and services tax and merger of the general and railway budgets, from the reworking of budget heads from plan/non-plan to merely capital and revenue, to the shift of the budget presentation date to early February, every single move was revolutionary, often disruptive. As a result of new presentation dates, the Modi government was the first in India’s history, leaving aside the six-year Parliament during the Emergency, to deliver six regular budgets in a single term.

However, this time around, the government needs to make this budget count by focusing on what it can deliver in terms of bang for the buck.

Given the cyclical and structural slowdown, the first thing the budget has to deliver is a boost to consumption and demand. This means many things, but primarily one major shift in priority, from fiscal deficit targeting to boosting expenditure. The finance minister should announce a fiscal holiday in 2020-21 and focus on big-bang spending. Among other things, this means reviving infrastructure spending on roads and railways, clearing all government dues in construction and other projects, especially those to small and medium enterprises, and providing another and final round of capitaliza-

tion for banks and non-banking financial companies (the latter indirectly). It should also mean providing for a slowdown in non-tax capital receipts from such downbeat sectors as telecom. This will expand the fiscal deficit and only a part of this can be covered through asset sales, including privatization.

The next thing to do, which again will optically impact the fiscal deficit, is to bring all off-balance-sheet borrowings by public sector companies such as Food Corporation of India back into the budget by clearing their dues in a single shot. This will push the overall fiscal deficit to nearly 5.5-6% of gross domestic product, but this is not a time to fret about empty numbers. A deficit that already exists off the balance sheet will merely be recognized. It is no different from banks being asked to formally acknowledge their bad loans so that remedial measures can be taken. The fiscal deficit should be given a revised glide path from 2021-22 onwards.

A related measure should be a shift to an accrual-based system of accounting, so that fiscal deficits are not massaged by delaying the reporting of expenditures incurred in one year and bringing forward revenues due from the next. This kind of fiscal legerdemain was common in the United Progressive Alliance era, but it does the Modi government no credit to continue with such dubious practices. A clean balance sheet is the basis on which genuine reforms can be attempted.

It would help if Budget 2020-21 were to focus on a few simple messages such as the ones above and not try to be all things to all people. After several quarters of slowdown and fears that growth and jobs may be trending downwards, the least the government can do is focus on what it can deliver. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman should deliver a short and focused speech in February when she presents the budget. Her real work will begin the next day, when the expenditures earmarked by it would have to be put to good use.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

“Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.”

WINSTON CHURCHILL

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

The trouble with using DNA matches to nab criminals

RAHUL MATTHAN



is a partner at Trilegal and author of ‘Privacy 3.0: Unlocking Our Data Driven Future’

From 1974 to 1986, residents of California were terrorized by the Golden State Killer, a serial criminal who committed 13 murders, 50 rapes and more than 100 burglaries in the state. Law enforcement agencies struggled to identify the perpetrator and were not even sure that all these crimes had been committed by the same person. He was called the Visalia Ransacker, the East Area Rapist and the Original Night Stalker, depending on where and what crime he had committed. In 1981, after a brutal double murder in Goleta, there was a hiatus in his criminal activities until 1986, when he raped and murdered Janelle Lisa Cruz at her home in Irvine. Then, just as suddenly as it had started, it stopped.

For three decades, despite the best efforts of investigators to identify the perpetrator of these crimes, he evaded detection. It was not till 2001, when advances in forensic technologies made it possible, that the police were finally able to conclude that the Original Night Stalker and the East Area Rapist were

one and the same person. A decade later, they were able to link the Goleta double murder to the same criminal. It was not until 2018 that investigators were able to positively identify Joseph James DeAngelo, a former police officer and Vietnam war veteran, as the perpetrator of all these crimes.

What was it that had changed to make it possible for investigators to identify him after all these years?

In the first place, DNA technology has been advancing steadily over the past two decades, allowing forensic investigators to correlate the evidence collected from the scenes of his many crimes and identify them all as the work of a single person. However, even then, there was no way to reliably identify him. That was only possible far more recently, with the growth in popularity of commercial forensic genealogy.

Forensic genealogy services allow users to trace their lineage. Users submit tissue samples, usually saliva or a cheek swab, to these services, which then generate genetic profiles from them. The profiles are then uploaded onto GEDmatch, a public aggregator that correlates information from various sites to throw up matches. With the growing interest in these services over the last few years, GEDmatch is now able to locate dis-

tant relatives and map extensive family trees. What this also means is that it offers investigators a large pool of identifiable genetic information, against which they can match evidence recovered from crime scenes to help identify the perpetrators. This was how the Golden State Killer was finally arrested, 30 years after committing his last offence.

As effective as it is, the use of commercial genealogy services in this manner raises serious questions. Identification almost always takes place indirectly, because some distant relative innocently uploaded genetic information without intending for it to be used in this manner. As a result, the use of public genetic information ends up with innocent people—who almost always have nothing to do with the crime itself—getting embroiled in an investigation and serving as witnesses to the whereabouts of the suspect.

In the process, the investigation often uncovers private information about them that they did not want to know in the first

place, such as the fact that they are related to criminals, or that their parents are not biological, or that they were conceived through adulterous or incestuous relationships. Often, law enforcement agencies threaten them with the public disclosure of such information to push them into cooperating more satisfactorily.

Other relatives, who have not submitted genetic information, also find themselves swept up in the investigation. Once investigators have genetically identified the suspect’s relatives, their first job is to build up exhaustive family trees, turning everyone on those trees into suspects until otherwise eliminated. Very often, the harm visited upon these innocent relatives through the process of such investigations is excessive and far greater than what the perpetrator suffers. We need to ask ourselves whether these sort of incursions into the privacy of innocent bystanders is acceptable, regardless of how heinous the crime is that we are trying to solve.

While forensic genealogy is not yet a thing in India, we will have to contend with issues such as this once the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019, is enacted into law. While the express intention of this legislation is to establish DNA data banks to make it easier to identify offenders and suspects, given the US experience of what happens to genetic information when it is used in this manner, it is more than likely that the process will inflict significant harm on innocent relatives who have nothing whatsoever to do with the crime itself. Given how harrowing criminal investigation processes can be in this country, the fact that we might suddenly find ourselves dragged into an investigation just because we are remotely related to some criminal seems terrifying.

We will need to give these issues serious thought before the law is finally enacted. Given the number of sources from which genetic information is expected to be aggregated into this database, citizens could find themselves swept up in an investigation whether or not they had anything to do with the criminals who committed the crime. Our current draft law does not seem to have considered these second-order consequences. But it should.

MY VIEW | CAFE ECONOMICS

Time for the orchestrated use of three different economic levers

A nuanced combination of lower interest rates, fiscal expansion and a cheaper rupee could help India's economy recover



NIRANJANA RAJADHYAKSHA
is a member of the academic board of the Meghnad Desai Academy of Economics

There are three main mental models that can be used to understand moments of economic stress. These are worth reiterating a week after the government said that the Indian economy had lost momentum for a sixth quarter in a row and economic growth in the second quarter of the current fiscal year was the lowest in 26 quarters.

The first mental model tells us that governments that have gone on a fiscal splurge rapidly expand money supply to earn the seigniorage necessary to fund an unsustainable fiscal deficit. There is neither enough tax collections nor domestic savings to bridge the widening gap in public finances. The rapid expansion in money supply then leads to high inflation. Macroeconomic stress is thus rooted in an unsustainable fiscal policy, though the proximate cause is high inflation from monetary expansion. This has broad parallels with what went wrong in many Latin American countries in the 1980s and perhaps 1990 India as well.

The second mental model relates to the way the exchange rate is managed. Open economies that either formally or informally maintain fixed exchange rates, in effect, lose control over their monetary policy. A central bank dealing with a wave of excess global capital inflows will have to let its money supply expand once it has hit the limits of sterilized intervention. Otherwise, it has to squeeze money supply, and push up interest rates, to maintain an exchange rate peg when there are speculative attacks on the currency. The former is akin to what happened in many Asian economies in the 1990s, while the latter describes the difficulty that the UK had to face when it tried to remain within the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in 1992.

The third mental model differs from the other two by being focused on the finances of the private sector rather than the government sector, more specifically the stressed balance sheets of financiers as well as borrowers. There are two forces at work once the reality of excess leverage hits. First, companies and households use their cash flows to repay debt rather than spend. Second, lenders do not have the confidence to make fresh loans when their balance sheets are already groaning under the weight of bad decisions taken earlier. A balance sheet recession could be triggered by a drop in asset prices or some other factor. The classic case of a balance sheet recession is Japan after its asset bubble burst in 1992.

These three mental models need not be exclusive of each other and real world examples of economic stress may have elements of all three. These frameworks could be useful in analysing the sharp slowdown in Indian economic growth over the past six quarters. They also provide clues about what can be done, as each type of economic stress



requires a different policy response. Getting the diagnosis right is thus important.

The most startling fact about the Indian economy over the past few quarters is the collapse in nominal economic growth to its lowest level in two decades. The latest quarterly nominal growth rate is lower than the incremental cost of government borrowing, a flashing amber light for a country such as India that also has a primary government deficit. India is not necessarily headed into an internal debt trap and nominal growth is likely to recover. However, this is an early warning that should not be ignored.

A deep interest rate reduction should be a first line of defence. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) monetary policy committee should sharply reduce its assumption of the equilibrium real rate of interest in the economy, and thus move towards a zero real policy rate in the coming months, though a minor uptick in headline inflation is expected. RBI had helped bring down the yield on the benchmark government bond from 12.2% in November 1998 to 5.1% in December 2003, during a similar period of weak domestic demand. Among other things, this measure helped the government reduce its cost of borrowing and also provided banks with a buffer as the value of their bond portfolios went up.

However, lower interest rates will not suffice.

They can just be used by the private sector to further deleverage. The key will be to get banks, companies and households to change their behaviour, or reignite animal spirits. Central banks are generally more successful when they have to control the country's monetary levers while demand for credit is higher than the comfort level, and less successful when they have to use the same levers while demand for credit is very weak.

Fiscal policy will have a role to play in getting aggregate demand back on track. The example of the 2009 stimulus shows that the failure to pull back in time can lead to balance of payments problems down the line, so using fiscal policy aggressively is not without its risks. Also, bond yields will jump unless the government can credibly signal that its fiscal expansion is merely a temporary response rather than a new trajectory. Remember that total government borrowing is already soaking up most of the domestic financial savings of households.

A lower exchange rate can help reflate the economy too, but will also impose costs on firms that have large unhedged dollar borrowings. How to depreciate the exchange rate without being denounced as a "currency manipulator" is also a tricky question. The coordinated use of monetary, fiscal and exchange rate levers will thus be a nuanced act.

GUEST VIEW

The artificial intelligence frontier of economic theory

THOMAS J. SARGENT



is professor of economics at New York University and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution

Until recently, two big impediments limited what research economists could learn about the world with the powerful methods that mathematicians and statisticians, starting in the early 19th century, developed to recognize and interpret patterns in noisy data: Data sets were small and costly, and computers were slow and expensive. So it is natural that as gains in computing power have dramatically reduced these impediments, economists have rushed to use big data and artificial intelligence to help them spot patterns in all sorts of activities and outcomes.

Data summary and pattern recognition are big parts of the physical sciences as well. The physicist Richard Feynman once likened the natural world to a game played by the gods: "You don't know the rules of the game, but you're allowed to look at the board from time to time, in a little corner, perhaps. And from these observations, you try to figure out what the rules are."

Feynman's metaphor is a literal descrip-

tion of what many economists do. Like astro-physicists, we typically acquire non-experimental data generated by processes we want to understand. The mathematician John von Neumann defined a game as (1) a list of players; (2) a list of actions available to each player; (3) a list of how pay-offs accruing to each player depend on the actions of all players; and (4) a timing protocol that tells who chooses what when. This elegant definition includes what we mean by a "constitution" or an "economic system": a social understanding about who chooses what when.

Like Feynman's metaphorical physicist, our task is to infer a "game"—which for economists is the structure of a market or system of markets—from observed data.

But then we want to do something that physicists don't: Think about how different "games" might produce improved outcomes. That is, we want to conduct experiments to study how a hypothetical change in the rules of the game or in a pattern of observed behaviour by some "players" (say, government regulators or a central bank) might affect patterns of behaviour by the remaining players.

Thus, "structural model builders" in economics seek to infer from historical patterns of behaviour a set of invariant parameters for

hypothetical (often historically unprecendented) situations in which a government or regulator follows a new set of rules. The government has strategies, and the people have counter-strategies, according to a Chinese proverb.

"Structural models" seek such invariant parameters in order to help regulators and market designers understand and predict data patterns under historically unprecedented situations. The challenging task of building structural models will benefit from rapidly developing branches of artificial intelligence (AI) that don't involve more than pattern recognition. A great example is AlphaGo. The team of computer scientists that created the algorithm to play the Chinese game Go combined a suite of tools that had been developed by specialists in statistics, simulation, decision theory, and game theory communities.

Many of the tools used in just the right proportions to make an outstanding artificial Go player are also economists' bread-

and-butter tools for building structural models to study macroeconomics and industrial organization.

Of course, economics differs from physics in a crucial respect. Whereas Pierre-Simon Laplace regarded "the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future," the reverse is true in economics: what we expect other people to do later causes what we do now.

We typically use personal theories about what other people want to forecast what they will do. When we have good theories of other people, what they are likely to do determines what we expect them to do. This line of reasoning, sometimes called "rational expectations", reflects a sense in which "the future causes the present" in economic systems. Taking this into account is at the core of building "structural" economic models.

For example, I will join a run on a bank if I expect that other people will. Without deposit insurance, customers have incen-

tives to avoid banks vulnerable to runs. With deposit insurance, customers don't care and won't run. On the other hand, if governments insure deposits, bank owners will want their assets to become as big and as risky as possible, while depositors won't care.

There are similar trade-offs with unemployment and disability insurance—insuring people against bad luck may weaken their incentive to provide for themselves—and for official bailouts of governments and firms.

More broadly, my reputation is what others expect me to do. I face choices about whether to confirm or disappoint those expectations. Those choices will affect how others behave in the future. Central bankers think about that a lot.

Like physicists, we economists use models and data to learn. We don't learn new things until we appreciate that our old models cannot explain new data. We then construct new models in light of how their predecessors failed.

This explains how we have learned from past depressions and financial crises. And with big data, faster computers and better algorithms, we might see patterns where once we heard only noise.

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GLOBAL VOICES

A journalist's murder tests Maltese democracy

Journalists are sometimes accused of giving disproportionate attention to crimes against their own. The reason they do so is not self-aggrandizement; it is that the increasingly frequent murder or repression of reporters is most often the work of people in power seeking to extinguish an unwelcome light on their corruption. To report on the fate of silenced journalists is to continue their work. Daphne Caruana Galizia was such a reporter. When she was blown up by a car bomb in October 2017, the prime minister, Joseph Muscat, acknowledged that the list of potential suspects was very long... Last week, one of Malta's most prominent businessmen was arrested as he was trying to leave on his yacht. He offered to testify against two senior government officials and others "close to the prime minister" in exchange for a pardon... Thousands of Maltese turned up outside Castille, the seat of the prime minister, demanding his resignation. Finally, on Sunday, Mr. Muscat said he would resign—but not until his Labour Party selected a new leader on Jan. 12. Malta is a full member of the European Union enjoying a period of robust economic growth. If reporters can be killed there with impunity, they can be killed anywhere...

It is to be hoped that the investigation of Ms. Caruana Galizia's death will make the situation on Malta and beyond a bit less desperate. At a demonstration outside the prime minister's office, one of the signs read, "Daphne, you were right!"

The New York Times

Nato's troubles: The limits of solidarity

These days, the bar for success at a North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit is very low. The last gathering, in Brussels last year, ended in farce when [US President] Donald Trump mused out loud about pulling the United States out of the alliance, berated fellow leaders for spending too little on defence and then walked out in the middle of a statement by German chancellor Angela Merkel...

The alliance is riven by internal tensions, its members openly at odds over how it operates and what it should stand for... Disharmony within Nato is nothing new. But the current splits are serious because they go to the heart of Nato's role at a time when the strategic map of the world is changing rapidly... The biggest internal threat the alliance faces comes not from the US but from Turkey, whose actions in Syria had the effect of undermining a military campaign (against Islamic State) that Nato states were actively involved in. Erdogan is now looking for Nato to classify as terrorists the Kurdish militias who defeated Islamic State (also known as Isis) on the battlefield alongside western allies. Meanwhile, he provokes his allies by testing a Nato non-compatible air defence system he recently bought from Russia. This week's gathering would do well to remind Erdogan that solidarity goes both ways.

The Irish Times

A new conflict looms 30 years after Cold War

Thirty years have passed since the Malta Summit where U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev declared an end to the Cold War between the Eastern and Western blocs. The now defunct Soviet Union's policy of military expansion and the United States' efforts to contain the former split the world into the two alliances and brought it to the brink of a nuclear war at one point. It was viewed as a historic milestone when the world believed that democratic politics and capitalism had won over dictatorship and communism, freeing the globe from animosity and leading to permanent peace. Then President Bush described a "new world order" to pursue following the end of the Cold War as "a world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak."

Liberal world order has been damaged and the fear of a nuclear arms race is spreading throughout the world again... If the highly interdependent global trade system were to be destroyed, it would adversely affect each economy's benefits... Now we must realize that the world has reached a more dramatic historic milestone... If major powers were to act self-righteously, the free and just world order would collapse and the weak would be at the mercy of the strong.

The Mainichi, Japan

Australia needs to boost productivity

Australia has created a lot more jobs over the past year. But that has not shown up nearly enough in the extra goods and services produced by the nation's workforce. Despite 2 per cent-plus jobs growth, gross domestic product increased by only 1.4 per cent in the year to the June quarter. Productivity has gone backwards. Partly, it's the drop in farm production from the drought. And many of the extra workers are in sectors where it's hard to measure their economic production, such as in disability services, or inside banks cleaning up after the Hayne royal commission. But last financial year's startling productivity decline reflects a deeper structural problem that will weigh on even the gentle recovery that the Reserve Bank hopes to detect in [the latest] national accounts.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg understandably wants Australian companies to invest more of their profits into future growth. But multi-factor productivity, which measures the extra output from increased inputs of capital as well as labour, also has turned negative... As former Productivity Commission chairman Gary Banks says, the issue has gone past demand-stimulus measures Australia could tap all the demand it can handle out of Asia... The longer the political class fails to reverse the nation's productivity slowdown, the greater will be the costs on the ordinary Australians the politicians seek to woo.

The Australian Financial Review

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE ABDICATION

Legislators’ call for mob-like justice for sexual assault is a symptom of their own failure — to frame problem, find answers

EVERY DAY, MILLIONS of Indian women confront the possibility of sexual violence at home and in the wider world. It shapes their gait on streets and their silence in bedrooms, it decides the jobs they can and cannot do, and the limits of liberty they set for themselves. It makes them doubly vulnerable to caste and class impunity; it makes them fall in line. Those brave enough to seek justice often end up doubly violated by the police and judicial processes. What would these women hear if they turned to Parliament? A wall of bloodthirst that periodically — and cynically — passes itself off as an answer to endemic violence.

In the Rajya Sabha, Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan, while expressing her anguish about the gang rape and murder of a vet in Hyderabad, proposed that the accused “should be brought out in public and lynched”. Justice, if it can still be so called, was reimaged in no less gory terms by P Wilson, a legislator from the DMK, who suggested surgical and chemical castration for rape convicts. Rajya Sabha chairman M Venkaiah Naidu wondered aloud if the country should consider changes to the legal system that walled off any possibility for “mercy or appeal” to those punished for rape. In the Lok Sabha, Trinamool MP Saugata Roy asked for laws that make rape punishable “only by death sentence”. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh expressed the government’s openness to making stringent laws more stringent. In the Delhi assembly, too, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal spoke in favour of hanging rape culprits “within six months”. A charitable view of this disturbing desire in legislators for “instant, on the spot” mob-like justice could be that it is an expression of their helplessness in dealing with sexual crime. But more realistically, it is law-making that is abdicating its responsibilities for making considered, sober interventions in public life. Instead, it is channelling the worst of society’s instincts.

Sexual violence and assault on women do not take place in a comic-book world of “lynch-worthy” bad guys and the Hangman as saviour. It is seeded in homes and societies, in grossly unequal power relationships, in the imagination of sex and desire that shuttles between the extremes of repression and rape videos. It gets its vicious velocity from existing caste and religious inequalities. It makes it easy to bay for blood when poor men are accused of the crime and easier to fall silent when the victim is a Dalit or the accused a religious head. The Justice Verma Committee, which submitted its report in the aftermath of the December 2012 anti-rape protests, argued that the state’s role was not to fashion more stringent punishment — and definitely not the death penalty — but to work towards creating cities and public places that make space for women, and justice systems that assure effective punishment, whatever the quantum. Since 2012, the political class as well as many institutions, from the judiciary to the media, have only faltered in addressing the patriarchal inequality inscribed in daily life. The women, who set out every day, on lonely toll plazas, and to hostile workplaces, against all odds, deserve better answers.

A TURNING POINT

Tariff hikes are not sufficient for telecom sector’s sustainability. Government must re-examine its approach

ON SUNDAY, MAJOR telecom operators announced tariff hikes in the range of 15 to 40 per cent across different plans, marking an end to the brutal price war that has bled the incumbents dry. For Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, the new tariffs will come into effect on December 3, while for Jio, the hikes will be effective from December 6. This decision, which comes against the backdrop of both Bharti and Vodafone Idea reporting massive losses in the second quarter, after the Supreme Court upheld the government’s position on what constitutes adjusted gross revenue (AGR), could potentially mark a turning point in the fortunes of the beleaguered sector. That tariff hikes were inevitable is beyond debate. Failure to do so would have further weakened incumbents, increasing the possibility of a duopoly with a weak second player. Statements by telcos which indicated that liquidation was the only option, unless the government eases off demands for spectrum fees, underline the seriousness of this scenario playing out. Developments over the past years — both the manner in which a price war that bled incumbents was unleashed and the seemingly coordinated manner in which the tariffs have been hiked — raise questions. They call for closer supervision of an already over-regulated sector to ensure that healthy competition exists, not the mere semblance of it.

Tariff hikes alone are unlikely to be sufficient for long-term sustainable growth. The government needs to reexamine its approach towards the sector which is driven purely by considerations of revenue maximisation. While a cash strapped government will welcome any additional revenue, sticking to its position on what constitutes AGR in the Supreme Court has grave consequences for the sector’s health. The government has tried to soften the blow by announcing a two-year moratorium for telcos in making their spectrum payment for past auctions. While this would positively impact telcos’ cash flow in the short run, it alone is not enough. The current situation calls for an overhaul of the current licensing regime. Telcos have filed a review petition against the Court’s order on AGR seeking waiver of penalties and interest. One step towards restoring the health of the sector would be for the government to give up its demand of interest and penalties. It should also reconsider lowering the licence fees, and rethink its stance on spectrum pricing.

CANT! WONT!

Acknowledging that the world doesnt give a tinkers cuss, the Apostrophe Protection Society has downed it’s shutter’s

AT THE AGE of 96, the keeper of faith in the apostrophe has admitted defeat to public apathy. John Richards of the UK, who founded the Apostrophe Protection Society in 2001, has bowed to the superior force of “ignorance and laziness”. Never mind they got off to a good start, winning the Ig Nobel for “efforts to protect, promote and defend the differences between plural and possessive”. And they’ve shown more stamina than the movement to put the ‘e’ back in ‘judgment’. More’s the pity. Mores the pity? Why not, it looks neater.

Fooling with the apostrophe, which has governed possessives like ‘Waterstone’s’ and contractions and elisions like ‘mustn’t’ since 1496, is sometimes deliberate. The book-seller Waterstone’s became Waterstones because according to the grammar of design (yes, such a thing exists, and it is quite implacable in action), shop signs and logos look nicer without that fiddly little character rearing up off the baseline. Harrods and Selfridges, too, have dropped it. And generally speaking, the English are deplorably prone to misplace their apostrophes in place names involving saints — St Johns, St Annes and so on.

Besides, the march of technology leaves ignorance and laziness eating dust. Consider the dreadful pidgin incubated by Twitter’s restrictions on the length of a message. F u cn gt away wid dis, you would ruthlessly shoulder apostrophes aside. A few years ago, there was widespread outrage when Tim Berners-Lee, father of the World Wide Web, admitted that the second forward slash in http:// was redundant. Millions complained about needless damage to their carpal tunnels. Now that Richards’ society has closed down, millions more may gaze irritably at the apostrophe key. Wouldnt you?

When the court kowtowed



KHALED AHMED

For a while, it was Supreme Court vs PM in Pakistan. But in the end, court was kind to Imran Khan

SERIOUSLY ILL EX-PRIME Minister Nawaz Sharif, in prison for corruption, was allowed by Prime Minister Imran Khan to go to the UK for treatment. Soon, however, Khan started fearing a backlash from his supporters on the Pakistani street and took to criticising the judiciary for letting Sharif go. He had allowed the ex-PM to leave provided he sign an indemnity bond of Rs 7.5 billion as guarantee for his return. But a high court decision ruled this out and Sharif flew out to London. Khan, in reaction, lost his cool and publicly rebuked the chief justice of Pakistan for not making justice “even-handed” in the country.

This led to a tiff between the executive and the judiciary. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Asif Saeed Khosa, in a televised repartee, reminded the PM that he had himself okayed Sharif’s journey; only the high court had disallowed the indemnity bond. He asked Khan “to be careful”. This was in November. But Khan had notified an extension of three years in Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa’s service due to end the same month. The chief justice must have known the dubious nature of this extension when reprimanding him.

The three-year “extension” given to General Bajwa was challenged at the Supreme Court by an eccentric lawyer of Rawalpindi who had been censured repeatedly in the past by the court for “frivolous litigation”. Lawyer Riaz Rahi tried to withdraw his plaint at the last minute but the Supreme Court refused to let the matter go. Now it was the Supreme Court vs Prime Minister. The notification of extension to General Bajwa was found to be against the rule that ordained that the said notification be made public by the president after being recommended by the PM.

What followed was farcical. The notification was rewritten and forwarded to President Arif Alvi, who hurriedly signed it and made it public. This time, the court found fault not with the procedure but in the law. Rule 225 of the Pakistan Army Act of 1956 did not contain the clause that would enable extension to an army chief retiring at the designated age of 60.

It appears that the Khan government in general, and his Law Minister Senator Farogh Naseem in particular, were not aware that

Khan’s ministers came on TV to say that in case there is no clear law allowing a practice then practice itself became what they called ‘convention’ — but that cut no ice with a rather voluble court whose insulting reprimands to the PM’s bureaucracy and cabinet were daily heard on the TV news. Three drafts laboriously composed by the government thereafter were ridiculed by the court on November 26 and rejected with the advice that the law under which the extension could be given was to be enacted first. There was much fluttering in the dovescotts after that because General Bajwa was to retire at the midnight hour of November 29.



MANISH TEWARI

AIR POLLUTION, NOW a public health emergency, is not a problem unique to Delhi. As per the World Health Organisation, 14 of the 15 most polluted cities in the world are in India. Nearly all of them are in the Indo-Gangetic Plain — in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and Haryana. However, air pollution goes beyond state borders and political divisions. Reflecting the seriousness of the issue, the country recently witnessed both Houses of Parliament deliberating on air quality and climate change at length. This recognition by Parliament has been long overdue and is welcome.

Let us first raise an obvious question. When air pollution touches these severe levels every year in Delhi and other cities like clockwork, why must the Supreme Court give instructions on what steps the Union or state governments need to take? It is because the elected government did not take adequate steps. It is because the legislature did not raise its voice. The courts, often blamed for their activism, have only filled up the void left by an indifferent political executive.

Many cities in the world have experienced high pollution levels, and have made substantial progress with sustained effort. Beijing is a case in point, which adopted an intensive air pollution control strategy in 2013 — by the end of 2017, levels of dangerous fine particulate matter (PM2.5) had reduced by 35 per cent. As per a report by Climate and Clean Air Coalition, “most of this reduction came from

Who’s TAKING OUR BREATH AWAY?

Tackling air pollution requires a holistic approach, not scapegoating farmers

When air pollution touches these severe levels every year in Delhi and other cities like clockwork, why must the Supreme Court give instructions on what steps the Union or state governments need to take? It is because the elected government did not take adequate steps. It is because the legislature did not raise its voice. The courts, often blamed for their activism, have only filled up the void left by an indifferent political executive.

measures to control coal-fired boilers, providing cleaner domestic fuels and industrial restructuring”. If Beijing and other cities across the world affected by pollution can make such progress, why do we lack the intent or the resources to do the same?

In January 2019, the Union government launched the well-intentioned National Clean Air Programme, but provided a financial outlay of merely Rs 300 crore. This paltry funding will not clean the air in our country. The Centre needs to back announcements of action plans with funding that is proportionate to the magnitude of the problem, especially when states like Punjab are bereft of funds.

Like in Beijing, the government needs to take greater strides in controlling emissions from large sources like industries and power plants burning coal, and not dither from enforcing pollution norms within clear and aggressive timelines. Within Delhi-NCR, there are 10 thermal power plants that are yet to comply with the environment ministry’s standards from 2015, despite the deadline of December 2019, barely weeks away.

It is also important to strengthen the Air Act of 1981. The Act should better reflect the impact of air pollution on public health and empower pollution control agencies with teeth and resources. Further, a new standing committee for air pollution and climate change should be created to facilitate regular parliamentary oversight on policy efforts.

ject. A wheedling President Zardari had opined that “General Kayani’s extension strengthened my government as well as the parliament”. Finally, when General Kayani left at the end of his extension, a smear campaign described him as “buying a ranch in Australia before migrating there”. He, however, went enveloped in the familiar odour of corruption clinging to most usurping generals in Pakistan.

But Kayani’s extension was challenged too. The petitioner was none other than convener of an ex-servicemen’s legal forum, Colonel (retd) Inam-ur-Rehman, who said to the high court in Islamabad: “The Forum is of the opinion that the extension given to the army chief is immoral and unconstitutional because there is no provision for it in the Pakistan Army Act of 1956 and in the rules under which an extension of complete tenure could be granted to any person subject to the Army Act.” What was the court’s reaction to the petition? Daily Dawn noted: “Chief Justice Iqbal Hameedur Rahman has directed the petitioner to satisfy the court about his locus standi (being aggrieved) and to submit copies of relevant documents annexed with the petition and adjourned the hearing.” The case petered out, as was expected. Imran Khan, then agitating against the “corrupt” governments in power, had opposed the Kayani extension, saying extensions weakened institutions.

Was the court kind to Imran Khan, in the end? Yes it was. It allowed the extension but only after the required laws for it had been passed; and gave General Bajwa six months of free passage which will be “regularised” after the needed laws are in force. Imran Khan was beholden to him for the 2018 election which he won amid rumours that the deep state had “fixed” the polls. The current Interior Minister Brigadier (Retd) Ijaz Shah is said to have actually helped stage Khan’s famous sit-in in Islamabad in 2014 from his privileged position inside the army’s powerful ISI. And Khan has returned the favour by declining to prosecute Shah’s close friend, the exiled ex-army chief General Musharraf, for treason.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan



DECEMBER 4, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

ELECTION NOMINATIONS PRIME MINISTER CHARAN Singh and Mrs Indira Gandhi were among the first to enter the poll arena as nominations opened in 542 parliamentary constituencies for the seventh general election. Singh filed his nomination papers in the Baghpat constituency of Uttar Pradesh while Mrs Gandhi did so in the Rae Bareilly constituency that rejected her the last time. The other prominent leaders who filed their nominations on the first day included Karan Singh, C M Stephen and N G Goray.

JANATA-MNF ALLIANCE THE RULING LOK Dal-Congress alliance received another setback with the communi-

cations minister, Zulfikarulla, announcing his decision to resign from the caretaker cabinet following an alliance between the Muslim National Front and the Janata Party today. Jagjivan Ram announced the Janata Party’s alliance with the Muslim National Front, which includes the Muslim Majlis and the Muslim league.

UP ENGINEERS’ STRIKE THERE WAS NO change in the strike situation despite the president of the Power Engineers’ Association having been won over by the state government. The announcement of the withdrawal of the strike by the president, through governmental sources, created

a confusion among the engineers. But subsequently, the striking engineers decided to continue their agitation till there was a negotiated settlement with the government and the state electricity board. The striking engineers offered themselves for arrest but the authorities refused to arrest them, apparently to give credence to the government version that the strike was fizzling out.

DHYAN CHAND DIES HOCKEY WIZARD DHYAN Chand, who had delighted the world for over three decades with his brilliant stickwork, passed away at 4:25 a.m at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi. He was 74.

Between the lines of a survey

Surveys measuring the impact of government programmes have become less reliable — Respondents deny receiving benefits in the hope that they may avail of them again



PRAVIN SRIVASTAVA AND PARAMESWARAN IYER

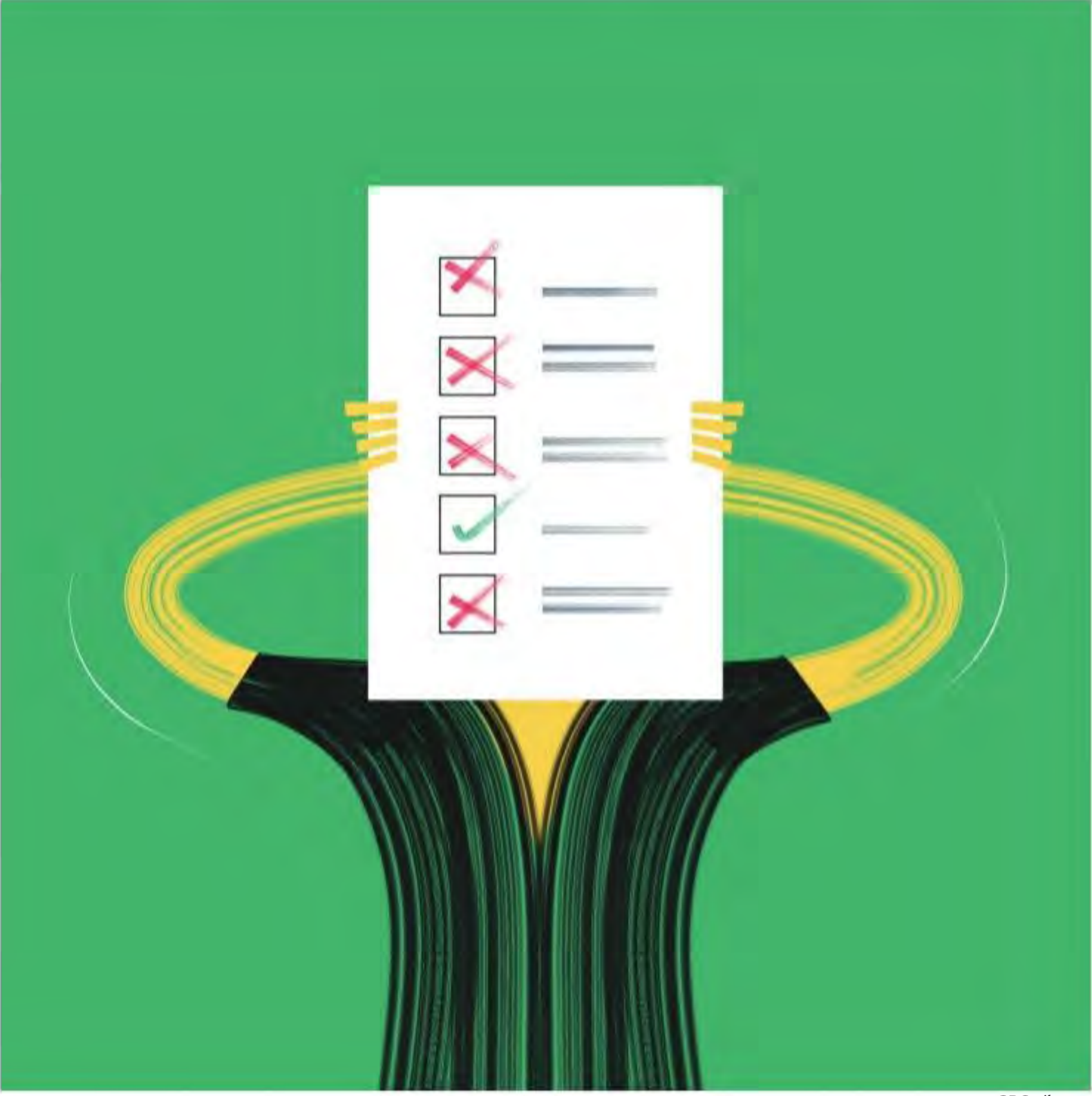
“THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY” has always been among the most preferred and reliable tools to collect authentic information on almost anything — who has access to what facilities, which brands are better than others and everything in between. After all, what better way can one arrive at what a person has, wants or feels than just asking the person, right? Wrong.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has been conducting large-scale and nationally-representative sample surveys, which rely on soliciting information from respondents through canvassing by field enumerators of the National Sample Survey. The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) also has some experience in running large sanitation surveys over the past few years. In our combined experience, we have observed that over the past few years, the responses received during some of these large surveys are not always realistic. This is especially true when we attempt to gauge access to services for which there are ongoing and popular government schemes which are linked to monetary or other benefits like subsidised food, free clean cooking fuel, housing or sanitation infrastructure. The respondents are not always truthful, and seem to want to conceal the extent of benefits that they have received. But why?

It all boils down to basic behavioural economics. Although field enumerators attempt to elicit genuine responses, people respond favourably to incentives, either direct or perceived. A genuine response based on a sense of nationalism is diminishing.

When a person is asked a question about whether or not he or she has access to a facility that the government has promised to provide, there is an inherent incentive to deny having access to or receiving a benefit for the facility, in a hope that this may allow him or her to receive the benefit of the scheme again. This is even more relevant if the people have seen the actual delivery of the promised benefits for themselves, their kin or neighbour. In the past, when government schemes were more on paper and less on the ground, the incentive to conceal was lower, and would usually fit the acceptable margin of error in surveys. But today, when the benefits of government schemes are actually reaching the intended beneficiaries much more than ever before, the incentive to deny having facilities is at its highest. On the contrary, what does the household gain by acknowledging that it in fact does have access to the facility? Nothing.

We are not the first to be speaking of this phenomenon. Recent articles by columnist Swaminathan Aiyar and academic Neeraj Kaushal have also alluded to this deliberate respondent bias in many national surveys. Both our ministries, however, have experienced this play out first hand. In 2017-18, the DDWS commissioned the Quality Council of India to conduct a national survey on access to sanitation facilities. The QCI did a round of basic training of their field enumerators — typically local youth from the region to be surveyed, before starting the survey of 1.4 lakh randomly selected households. Midway through this exercise, they found that the numbers on access to toilets reported during the survey in some states in North India were significantly lower than the administrative



CR Sasikumar

records. They brought the findings to DDWS and decided to send some senior, well-trained enumerators to re-verify if the situation on the ground was really the way it was being reported.

And so, with a fresh round of training, a small group of senior enumerators from the QCI team went back to some of the villages and visited the same households. It is during this exercise that they found clear evidence of the inherent respondent bias during surveys. Many households denied having a toilet, but upon further probing and on convincing them that the findings of the ongoing survey would have no bearing on whether or not they received the government benefit for a toilet, most of them accepted that they in fact did have access to a toilet. Some had a toilet within their household premises, some had it as far as 100 meters away from their home which no enumerator would have known about! The re-survey team returned with photographs of these toilets, and in some villages the number of toilets were more than twice the initial estimate.

This exercise taught us two very important lessons. One, there is no incentive for people to correctly report their well-being during a survey, especially if there are specific ongoing government schemes to provide products and services. In fact, there is a clear incentive to under-report in such circumstances. And two, the enumerators may not have the capacity or the commitment to probe for genuine responses. More often than not, they will simply accept the first response that the household gives and are not trained to extract the facts. If we are serious about soliciting genuine responses, we need to invest a lot more time and effort to train our enumerators to probe for the truth.

The recently released report of the 76th

In the past, when government schemes were more on paper and less on the ground, the incentive to conceal was lower, and would usually fit the acceptable margin of error in surveys. But today, when the benefits of government schemes are actually reaching the intended beneficiaries much more than ever before, the incentive to deny having facilities is at its highest. On the contrary, what does the household gain by acknowledging that it in fact does have access to the facility? Nothing.

Round of NSS on “Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition” recognises this problem of deliberate under-reporting and mentions it in the report alongside the results. In this particular case, the under-reporting may have been accentuated even more as the survey also had a question on whether the household has received a benefit for toilets in the past three years. One can safely conclude that the moment a question on benefits received from the government for sanitation was asked, it would have conjured up an image of the Rs12,000 financial incentive linked to a toilet in the mind of the respondent, and this would have likely influenced the response itself, irrespective of what the reality on the ground was. There may also be a need for greater sensitisation of respondents to faithfully report information as responsible citizens, on the assurance that confidentiality of the data reported is maintained.

The MoSPI is committed to further improving the quality of data that it collects and presents and has made it an integral component in its Vision Document. It has also engaged with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to design skill training courses for survey enumerators, supervisors and data quality personnel who could then be used for such surveys. In addition, the MoSPI is evolving contemporary instruments and tools to better capture information and reduce respondent bias. It will take time for these efforts to bear fruit.

Srivastava is secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, and chief statistician to the Government of India. Iyer is secretary, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti. Views expressed are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

In the middle of an election campaign there is the inevitable temptation for politicians to say whatever they think will burnish their reputation. Over the weekend, in the wake of the attack, Boris Johnson vowed to end early release for terrorists. —THE INDEPENDENT

An Ayodhya story, from 1857

A lesser-known narrative of the holy city — and the dispute



ANAND PATWARDHAN

DURING THE MAKING of *Ram Ke Naam*, we had followed L K Advani’s air-conditioned Toyota truck, dressed up by a Bollywood set designer to resemble Lord Ram’s war chariot. The rath yatra traversed the Indian countryside, whipping up Hindu frenzy to build a Ram temple on the exact location of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. In the wake of their anti-Muslim slogans, clashes erupted all along the route and many were killed. Finally, Advani was arrested in Bihar and the rath yatra halted, but kar sevaks continued on to Ayodhya for their day of action on October 30, 1990.

The entrance of the Babri Masjid bore an inscription that it was built by Mir Baqi, commander of the Mughal emperor Babur in 1528. Up to this point in time, the Valmiki Ramayana was known only to scholars and priests who knew Sanskrit and Lord Ram was not a popular deity. Later, in the 16th century, Tulsidas composed his *Ramcharitmanas* in the Awadhi dialect of Hindi, making his Ramayana accessible to ordinary people for the very first time. For his efforts, Tulsidas, a poor Brahmin orphan, was attacked by the Brahmin orthodox and is said to have taken refuge in mosques to write his epic. During the reign of Emperor Akbar, as Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas* became popular through recitals and folk performances known as Ram Leelas, Ram temples began to be built.

Our two-person film crew had reached Ayodhya well before the arrival of the kar sevaks in October 1990. We found more than 20 temples there that claimed to be Lord Ram’s birthplace — as this would attract more pilgrims and donations. A point to note is: Tulsidas, who often stayed in Ayodhya, never mentions in his epic or anywhere else, that a temple marking the birthplace of Lord Ram had just been demolished by Babur. In fact, the temple-mosque controversy would not begin for another 300 years! The Supreme Court states that the earliest record of Hindu-Muslim clashes around the disputed site was marked by the British colonial power in 1856-57, when it erected a six-foot brick wall dividing the site to grant the inner portion of the mosque to Muslims and the outer portion to Hindus. Why does the year 1857 ring a bell? Because it also marks the First War of Independence (named the Great Mutiny by the British), when Hindus and Muslims heroically united and almost defeated the British. In other words, even

as Hindus and Muslims joined hands in the battlefield to oust the British, the latter found it convenient to stoke a potential religious conflict in Ayodhya.

The Supreme Court does not seem alerted by the date, 1857, or by the conflict-creating role of the British, nor does it go into the reasons why the conflict did not take root. Records show that back in 1856-57, Hindus led by Baba Ram Charan Das and Muslims led by a local Muslim landlord of Ayodhya, Achhan Khan, decided to maintain communal harmony and made a pact to pray within the temple-mosque site in two demarcated portions. This harmony remained unbroken till December 23, 1949. That is when Hindu miscreants broke into the Babri mosque at night and installed Ram idols there. As filmmakers, we recorded the evidence of one of those miscreants who personally installed the idols in the mosque citing a dream in which Lord Ram appeared to him as well as his other accomplices. He was jailed for his act but soon released on bail. Years later, Vishwa Hindu Parishad made, and widely distributed, a video depicting multiple images of a baby boy dressed as Ram “miraculously” appearing inside the mosque. The local district magistrate, K K Nayar, refused to remove the idols citing “law and order” reasons. He later joined the Jana Sangh (the precursor to the BJP) and became a Member of Parliament. The Court barred Muslims from the mosque after 1949 but appointed a series of Hindu priests to conduct prayers in one section. We interviewed the most famous of these priests, Pujari Laldas, who expressed great sorrow after the first attack on the mosque on October 30. He stated that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and RSS elements had never prayed at the Ram temple and the entire campaign was run purely for money and political power, and also cited many examples of corruption in the name of religion.

On December 6, 1992, with the BJP in power in UP, Hindu militants destroyed the Babri Mosque. Many Muslims in the region were killed including the son of the Imam who had last offered prayers at the Babri Mosque in 1949. A year later, Laldas was found murdered. There is another telling footnote to this story: Achhan Khan and Baba Ram Charan Das, who had forged the unity that allowed Hindus and Muslims to pray in harmony within the Babri compound for almost a hundred years, were charged with sedition by the British after the defeat of the freedom struggle of 1857. Both were hanged. On November 9, 2019, those who had demolished our national monument, effectively causing the deaths of thousands across the Subcontinent, were legally granted the very objective of their crime. Secular democracy was finally laid to rest.

The writer is a documentary filmmaker

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RIDING HIGH SEAS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘A new mould for Mauritius’ (IE, December 3). The island nations in the Western Indian Ocean are going to play a very significant part in India’s vision for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The process of commissioning coastal surveillance radar systems and listening ports in the sub-region is extremely critical to our security architecture. The 2018 Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the IOR is a significant document in which France, a major power with a long-standing strategic presence in the sub-region, has called for closer engagement between India and the Indian Ocean Commission.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

A LONG HAUL

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘All’s not well with secularism’ (IE, December 3). In a plural society such as India, the concept of secularism will always remain foggy to those that do not comprehend the subtleties of democratic norms and practices. The prospects of co-existence of liberal secularism with religious groups seems to be bleak. It seems that the conflict between social democracy and fundamentalism will continue to plague Indian society for the foreseeable future.

Soubik Pochhali via e-mail

WRONG FEARS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘The fight for dignity’ (IE, December, 2019). The Protection of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 is a progressive piece of legislation that aims to end the varied forms of discrimination faced by the transgender commu-

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 or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

nity in India. The author of the article criticises some of the provisions of the Bill — quite unfortunately — on the basis of imaginary fears. In any case, if there are difficulties in implementing some provisions of the new law, there is an option of bringing amendments to it. At least a beginning has been made in right earnest.

Anoop Srivastava, Greater Noida

NEIGHBOURLY TASKS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘A time to rebuild’ (IE, December 2). China’s growing clout in the Indian Ocean Region, in which Sri Lanka is located, threatens to undermine India’s geopolitical interests. During his first overseas tour to New Delhi after taking over as President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaska assured India that he would take his country’s bilateral relationship with its northern neighbour to a “very high level”. India should fulfill its commitment to Sri Lanka’s development and security to wean it away from China.

SS Paul, Nadia



VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

MAHARASHTRA DRAMA

THE SHIV SENA breaking away from the NDA to form a government in Maharashtra with the support of the NCP and Congress is the focus of the editorials of *Organiser* and *Panchjanya*. While *Panchjanya* calls it a betrayal, *Organiser* calls it “maha-natak” or grand drama.

Organiser says that “as of now curtains are pulled down on more than a month-long drama, what was the mandate, who betrayed the mandate, whether the Shiv Sena has compromised with its core ideology, should (the) Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have experimented with an alliance with Ajit Pawar and what will be the future of this government, etc — these questions will haunt the political pundits at least for some time”. It adds that the Shiv Sena had to hang on to political power “by hook or by crook” because its political space was shrinking “not because of the BJP but due to series of divisions and deteri-

oration in organisational structure after the demise of Balasaheb Thackeray”.

The editorial asserts that the three parties in power now have compromised on their morals and for the electorate, the BJP is still a moral compass.

Panchjanya says in its editorial that compared to any other party, the voters of Maharashtra had chosen the BJP, “but in its victory and defeat of others, (the) BJP forgot that its rise gives others a heavy heart”. It says though the NDA alliance had remained the same, the Shiv Sena has changed: It is “not the Shiv Sena of Balasaheb Thackeray who gave the clarion call for Hindutva”.

DEMANDING UCC

ANOTHER TOPIC THAT features prominently in *Panchjanya* and *Organiser* is the Uniform Civil Code. *Organiser* has two articles on the subject. The first is a report on “legal experts, scholars, academicians and social workers” coming together on November 23 to “press upon the demand for the immediate enactment of Indian Civil Code claiming that implementing uniform civil code will ensure equality of citizens irrespective of religion”. It mentions that the speakers at the event had asked the government to direct the Law Commission to study the common civil codes of developed coun-

tries and the one in Goa to come up with a draft “acceptable to all”.

The second article is about what B R Ambedkar had to say about the civil code. It says that Ambedkar had countered the argument that in a country as diverse as India there cannot be a single code and that Muslim personal law was “immutable and uniform throughout the nation”. It concludes by saying that the “present government has momentous opportunity to undo the crimes on the Constitution perpetrated over the ages and to reinstate Dr Ambedkar, and the document that he so passionately architected, into their glorious magnificence”.

In *Panchajanya*, Chancellor of the Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Firoz Bakht Ahmed, writes about one code in one nation. Bakht says that “today when India’s stature is growing in the world... there needs to be one Indian personal code, which includes the good things of all sides and aligns with everyone”.

MAMATA AND NRC

AN ARTICLE IN *Panchjanya* claims that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s opposition to the NRC in the state is to provide protection to “infiltrators” who are part of her vote bank in the state. It says that Banerjee’s “anger and frustration over implementing the

NRC in West Bengal is natural because she knows that the moment NRC is implemented, Muslims who have infiltrated from Bangladesh in hordes will be identified”.

The article is titled ‘Inhein Ghuspaithh Pasand Hai’ or “She likes infiltrators”.

It says “infiltrators” are a national and international security threat, and intelligence agencies have been warning about them, “but despite all this, the secular groups in the country are brimming with love for Muslims and infiltrators”. The communist parties, Congress and TMC are protesting against a nation-wide NRC in the Rajya Sabha, the article says.

West Bengal has more than 30 per cent Muslim voters, 70 per cent of who, according to the article, vote for the TMC. It mentions eight districts in the state which it claims are “bastions of Bangladeshi infiltrators” and they have “completely distorted” the population in these parts.

It mentions that the Hindu population of West Bengal has come down to 69 per cent from 80 per cent earlier and that “nearly 15 to 20 per cent illegal Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators have made the state their bastion”. Beyond these people, other Muslims too vote to Banerjee as a unit, *Panchjanya* says. These are the reasons, it that Banerjee “appeases the Muslim community” in the state.

Compiled by Krishn Kaushik

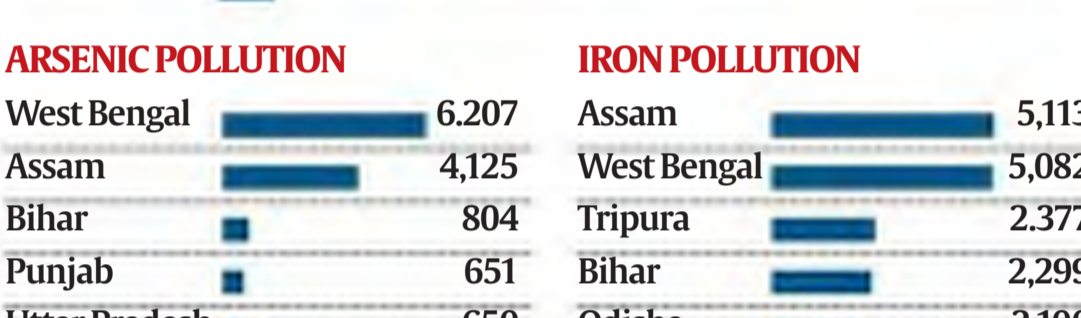
TELLING NUMBERS

Arsenic and iron in water: 30k rural habitations, 20k in 2 states

AMONG RURAL habitations in Indian states, 55,511 face quality issues with drinking water. As of November 27 this year, 3.22 per cent of rural habitations across all states and UTs, accounting for 3.73 per cent of the population, were consuming drinking water with quality issues, according to data tabled by the Ministry of Jal Shakti in Parliament.

Iron is the most common contaminant of drinking water, with over 18,000 rural habitations affected, followed by salinity that affects roughly 13,000 rural habitations, arsenic (12,000), fluoride (nearly 8,000) and heavy metal. Rajasthan has the highest number of rural habitations affected by contamination overall, at 16,833. Most of these - 12,182 - are affected by salinity in drinking water, at 12,182.

RURAL HABITATIONS WITH WATER QUALITY ISSUES (ALL INDIA: 55,511)



Source: Ministry of Jal Shakti

TIP FOR READING LIST

THE SCIENCE OF WHY REST MATTERS

IN 2014, British journalist Claudia Hammond carried out a worldwide radio survey, seeking responses what activities people find most restful. 'The Rest Test' was described as the largest ever survey on rest, with 18,000 people responding from 135 countries - and two-thirds of them saying they would like more rest. From the responses, Hammond compiled a top ten restful activities, which are now the chapters of her new book.

The Art of Rest: How to Find Respite in the Modern Age argues that people are not resting enough. They want to say they are busy - as though it were a badge of honour - even when they feel exhausted. Hammond argues that people should start taking rest seriously as a method of self-care citing her findings that the amount of rest one gets is directly linked to one's sense of



well-being. While much has been written about the importance of sleep, rest is different - it is about how we unwind, calm our minds and recharge our bodies.

Based on her survey, the book takes readers through the top ten activities which people find most restful. These are listed in reverse order, beginning with mindfulness, followed by watching TV, daydreaming, having a bath, taking a walk, doing nothing much, listening to music, being on your own, spending time in nature, and finally reading as the most restful activity. Hammond explains why rest matters, and examines the science behind the results to establish what really works. In its review, *The Guardian* says "*The Art of Rest* ought to be equivalent to a scientific siesta", and adds: "The only trouble is that this outstanding book is far too stimulating to be restful."

SIMPLY PUT

Kerala's ISIS connection

Security agencies estimate 100-120 individuals from Kerala either joined, or tried to join, ISIS. Investigators have identified three distinct modules of the ISIS in the state, each with its distinct network and mission.

SHAJU PHILIP
KOCHI, DECEMBER 3

AN NIA court in Kochi last week sentenced six accused in a case related to the so-called Islamic State to rigorous imprisonment of up to 14 years. Reports from Afghanistan's Nangarhar province suggest that ISIS fighters from Kerala are among the 600-odd militants who have recently surrendered before government forces.

Ten of the 30 cases that have been investigated - or are under investigation - by the NIA in Kerala are ISIS-related. Several accused have been arrested, and chargesheets have been filed in some of these cases. Some of those arrested were brought back to India from the Middle East and Afghanistan, and some were picked up for allegedly planning terror attacks in Kerala.

Recruitments allegedly happened through networks of families and friends; recruits typically came from particular rural pockets, where a local sympathiser of the terrorist group had influence. In some cases, brothers living under the same roof left for the "pilgrimage" together, along with their families.

ISIS's Kerala numbers

Security agencies estimate that some 100-120 individuals from Kerala either joined, or tried to join, ISIS. Some of them moved to Syria or Afghanistan from the Middle East, where they were employed; others migrated from Kerala. Even in 2018, when ISIS was largely in retreat in Syria and Iraq, 10-odd people from Kerala made the journey.

Many of those who joined the supposed holy war were killed over years. In August 2019, the family of Mohammed Muhsin, an engineering student from Malappuram, got a message that their only son had been killed in a US drone attack in Afghanistan.

In 2014-15, security agencies identified 17 Indians who were suspected to have joined ISIS. Three of them were from Kerala - they had moved to Syria in 2013-14, when they were employed in the Middle East. In May-June 2016, some two dozen people from Kerala, including women and children, left to join ISIS. Investigation unearthed the Kasaragod module of the ISIS (most of those who went missing belonged to that district) and led to other modules, involving separate networks, each with its own traits and mission.

■ Members of the Kasaragod module moved to Afghanistan with their families "to escape from the land of the kafirs (non-



600-odd ISIS followers recently surrendered before Afghan government forces in Nangarhar; recruits from Kerala are reportedly among them. Reuters

Muslims)".

■ Members of the Kannur module went, or attempted to go, to Syria to physically join the war on the side of the ISIS.

■ The third module is the so-called Omar al-Hindi module, named after Manseel Muhamed of Chokli in Kannur, alias Omar al-Hindi. Members of this group - who were convicted last month - were allegedly spread across India and the Middle East, and wanted to establish an ISIS "vilayat" in Kerala known as "Ansar-ul-Khilafa KL".

The Kasaragod module

Security agencies stumbled upon this group in June 2016 after 24 people, mostly professionally qualified young men and women, went missing. Most of the men had suddenly turned deeply religious after learning about Islam from the Internet and social media. They followed the hardline Salafi Islam, kept away from mainstream Muslim society, and had no links with any political party. The core group converted three women and two men to their understanding of Islam, arranged for their weddings, and travelled to Afghanistan.

The NIA identified Abdul Rashid, an engineer and education activist, as the leader of this ISIS module. He was accused of converting a Christian, Sonia Sabastian, and taking her to Afghanistan. Yasmeen Mohammed Zahid from Bihar, who was arrested in Delhi in 2016 while trying to go to Kabul with her child, was Abdul Rashid's second wife. An NIA court found her guilty last year; the Supreme Court upheld her conviction in August this year.

The NIA named 14 other members of this

module. Many of them were, however, believed to have been killed in Afghanistan.

According to the NIA, Rashid and several others were expelled from the Al-Quma Arabic College in Colombo for advocating violent jihad. In Kerala, Rashid secretly worked to build support for ISIS, and motivated the other accused by showing them online propaganda material such as the ISIS magazine, *Dabiq*.

After reaching Nangarhar, Rashid remained in touch with several individuals in Kerala, encouraging them to leave India to join the outfit. Nashidul Hamsafar of Wayanad, who had tried to join Rashid, was deported to India by security agencies in Kabul in September 2018. This year, Riyas Aboobacker of Palakkad and Habeeb Rahman of Wayanad were arrested for their links with Rashid over encrypted social media platforms. Aboobacker had been in touch with Safran Hashim, the leader of the Easter terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka.

The Kannur module

Intelligence sources estimate some 40-50 individuals from Kannur, mainly from the Valapattanam region, have joined the ISIS in Syria. The men of this module were activists of the rightwing Muslim outfit Popular Front of India (PFI), and several families went *en bloc* to Syria. According to intelligence officers, militant elements within the PFI decided to break away after the Front's political wing, the Social Democratic Party of India, was formed in 2009.

The key figure in the Kannur module is Shajahan Valluva Kandy, who had twice tried to go to Syria, but been sent back along with his wife and two children. Shajahan told the NIA he had joined the ISIS to establish Islamic Shariah law in the subcontinent.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

How to plant seeds with aircraft and/or darts

to plant crops, or spray pesticide. It is quick, and reaches otherwise inaccessible areas. It has been used with varying degrees of success around the world.

In the US, the use of aircraft for agricultural purposes dates back to an experiment in Ohio in 1921, when US Army pilot Lt John A Macready, under the direction of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, used a modified Curtiss JN-6 to spray lead arsenate dust over catalpa trees to kill sphinx moth larvae, according to the US National Agricultural Aviation Association (NAAA). Such aircraft used to be called crop dusters - an expression made familiar worldwide by Alfred Hitchcock's 1959 film *North by Northwest*.

In Indian markets, methods available for seeding include seed balls, which have seeds packed inside a ball made out of mud and

clay. Such balls can be aerially dispersed.

Darts for seed transfer

Dart seeding is used with the same broad objective as aerial seeding: plantation in inaccessible areas. The process involves throwing darts containing seeds onto an open ground.

A method used in Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in the late 1990s, described as a variation of dart seeding, did not engage a helicopter, Delhi Forest Department sources said. The department used a long iron rod to access ground that could not be reached due to shrubbery. Seeds were put into the rod; when the rod was inserted into the ground and then removed, the soil would cover the seed, unlike in aerial plantation when seeds are thrown into open ground. In aerial seeding, many seeds fail to germinate, sources said. If dart planta-

tion is done from a low-flying helicopter, seeds can reach deeper into the ground.

Plantation with both aerial and dart plantation is carried out close to the onset of monsoon as watering the seeds is often challenging in inaccessible areas.

The case in Delhi HC

The High Court has been issuing orders relating to air pollution from time to time, and discussed several ideas with the Chief Conservator of Forests. On Monday, it asked: "Have you thought of throwing darts from helicopters in order to sow seeds in areas which are generally inaccessible?"

An officer of the Forest Department contended that in Delhi there is no part of the forest that is inaccessible. He also submitted that there is no need for such technology.

THIS WORD MEANS | NARWHAL TUSK

The mysterious spiral: once 'unicorn horn', now weapon that thwarted terrorist

SAURABH KAPOOR
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 3

AS THE breaking bad news around Terror Friday in London diminishes, the story - and pictures - that continues to travel is that of the Polish chef brandishing a mythical 'unicorn horn', seemingly threatening to skewer the knife-wielding attacker shrouded in firefighting foam.

The hero chef, identified only as 'Lukas' in media reports, snatched a 1.5-metre tusk of a narwhal off a wall of the historic Fishmongers' Hall and chased after the terrorist Usman Khan, confronting him on London Bridge along with another member of the public carrying an admittedly less storied weapon - a fire extinguisher.

Khan had just fatally stabbed two University of Cambridge graduates, Saskia Jones and Jack Merritt, at an event inside the Hall. The fightback - which brought the terrorist down before the police arrived to shoot him dead - has triggered admiration and interest around the world, as much for the

heroism of Lukas and his comrade as for the intriguing tooth-spear at the centre of it.

Whale with the tusk

One of the most mysterious of whale species, the narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*) is of medium size among the giant mammals, and inhabits the freezing waters of the Arctic around Greenland, Canada and Russia. It's the only whale that has a tusk; and the narwhal's tusk is the only one in the animal kingdom that protrudes straight like a lance. The tusk has a spiral - the thread runs counter-clockwise along its length, and can be swivelled by the whale up to 12 degrees.

The narwhal's tusk has fascinated humans for centuries, and was at one time sold as the horn of a unicorn. In fact, it is a hollow tooth that grows through the whale's lip, reaching up to nine feet in length, according to the Polar Science Centre at the University of Washington.

The tusk is almost always a male privilege, grows through the whale's lifetime, and can weigh around 10 kg. About one in 500 narwhals grows a double tusk.



The narwhal's mysterious spiral tusk is believed to work as a giant sensor to help it test water qualities and to smooch other narwhals. HO/Reuters

For sex and feeling

Scientists are not agreed on the point of the tusk. Given that the average female narwhal lives longer than the average male, it is not believed to be a critical survival tool, or one that significantly impacts the ability to feed.

A 2014 study concluded the tusk was a sensory organ with millions of sensitive nerve endings, used by the Arctic mammal

to feel fluctuations in its surroundings. But most scientists agree that it is primarily a sexual trait used by males to compete for mates and to determine rank in pods.

The stuff of legend

The narwhal's legend thrives on its narrative connection with the mythical unicorn. And that's a story that began long ago.

In his *Narwhals: Arctic Whales in a Melting*

World (2014), McLeish Todd referred to the writings of the Greek physician Ctesias of Cnidus, who is believed to have lived in the fifth century BC, and produced an account titled *Indica* (c. 398 BC). Ctesias gave a vivid description of a unicorn, which he believed was found in India. For many centuries thereafter, unicorns were thought to be for real, and they rose in popularity as a potent religious symbol linked to Jesus Christ.

The first records of narwhal tusks in Europe date to around 1000 AD. The Vikings likely hunted the ice whales, or acquired the tusks from Inuit hunters. This was the beginning of a high-end market that was exploited by traders who sold narwhal tusks as unicorn horns. It was only around 1620, when Arctic exploration had progressed significantly, that the narwhal was identified as the source of the "unicorn horns".

Even so, the tusks were coveted as a symbol of power and prized by European monarchs. In *Lore of the Unicorn: The Evidence and Reported Sightings of Unicorns Throughout History* (1930), the American author Odell Shepard estimated that around 50 whole

tusks existed in Europe in the middle of the sixteenth century.

The narwhal tusk of Queen Elizabeth I of England and Ireland (1558-1603) was considered to be worth as much as a castle at the time, and the one belonging to one of the Kings of France at twice that. In 1671, a narwhal tusk throne was used in the royal coronation ceremony in Denmark, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (Karl V of Austria) was said to have paid the nation's entire debt with two tusks.

The masses believed the "horn" had the power to cure disease and act as an aphrodisiac. It was only around the mid-eighteenth century that the demand for the tusks started to ebb in Europe.

Fighting for survival

Besides polar bears, walrus, sharks, and orcas, the 'unicorn of the sea' faces a threat from humans who harvest it for its skin, meat, and tooth. Climate change is impacting the Arctic, the narwhal's habitat, with unfavourable consequences. Many subpopulations are already in decline.

The dance of the media elephants

As the big boys of media push for consolidation, scale is emerging as the killer app



MEDIASCOPE
VANITA KOHLI-KHANDEKAR

Sony to acquire Viacom18; Subhash Chandra resigns as chairman of Zee Entertainment. What does all the action in India's ₹1,67,400 crore media and entertainment industry last week mean?

It means that the fundamental changes in the way media is distributed and consumed are finally catching up in corporate structures. That the

convergence of media, telecom and technology is complete and that scale is the killer app at this stage of market evolution.

In 2017 Rupert Murdoch sold most of Twenty First Century Fox's entertainment assets to the \$69 billion The Walt Disney Company giving up control of a group he'd nurtured ferociously for six decades. It was, say observers, a result of the realisation that as the entertainment market was being redrawn, at under \$29 billion in revenues, Fox would end up fighting for relevance. The new competitors were simply bigger and had more staying power. These include the \$260 billion Apple, \$233 billion Amazon, \$184 billion AT&T and \$137 billion Alphabet (parent of Google and YouTube). These tech and telecom heavies are blowing up billions to capture an audience that the \$16 billion Netflix has so far walked away with. As cord-cutting grew the margins in the pay TV business which drove bottom line were bound to

go down. Most analysts hailed the move — Murdoch had future-proofed Fox, they said.

The internet and the on-demand entertainment it offers, however, operate in a global market. While India is decades behind on corporate maturity or an evolved media ecosystem, the internet took off in the country in 1995, with the rest of the world. And it grew discontinuously skipping several stages of market growth to become one of the largest video consuming countries in the world — not just online but on TV too.

More than 836 million Indians watch just under four hours of linear TV every day, a number that keeps rising. And there are over 600 million of them online watching increasingly large amounts of drama series, films and user generated stuff. Google's YouTube (275 million unique visitors), the Times Group's MX Player (95 million), Disney's Hotstar (91 million) among others are

the biggest gainers going by comScore data. Unlike the US where a bulk of OTT consumption happens on cable pipes, in India, it happens on telecom pipes. Broadcast TV is 45 per cent of India's total media and entertainment market. The top two media groups, Zee and Star are primarily broadcasters that also own other media assets.

Disney's acquisition of Fox meant that Star India is now owned by a company that is over two times Fox in size. There is the threat from a rising Jio owned by the \$90 billion Reliance Industries, the \$12 billion Bharti Airtel and of course, Google. At roughly ₹10,000 crore in India revenues (this includes over ₹2,000 crore for YouTube) it is among the country's largest media firms. For broadcasters then the push for consolidation has become urgent.

Late last year when Zee needed to pare down debt at a group level it decided to bring in a strategic investor. The

\$84.5 billion Comcast and \$78 billion Sony were reported as probables but eventually the pressure from debtors meant that over 95 per cent of Zee Entertainment ended up with a clutch of financial investors. These are bound to sell to a strategic one soon. Zee, one of the most profitable broadcasters with a leading audience share, will be a great asset for any tech or telecom major.

Sony that has been on the prowl in order to plug the gaps in its portfolio will probably acquire a majority in Viacom18 making it the second largest media firm. Disney Star, Sony-Viacom18, Google, Times Group and Zee Entertainment — that is how the list of India's top five media firms would read if events play to script. That leaves Kalanithi Maran's Sun TV, a tiger in the south, particularly vulnerable.

Notice the top line numbers for the global and Indian companies — they are huge. And all of them are in the land-grab phase. For now, the media and entertainment game is about pure scale. It will take several more mergers and acquisitions and the burning of a few billion dollars before the real winners emerge.

<http://twitter.com/vanitakohlik>

NTPC's new power play

Why the country's largest thermal power generator is buying two state-owned hydro-power units

SHREYA JAI & ARUP ROYCHOUDHURY

On November 20, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved a number of key decisions on divestment. Among them was the strategic disinvestment of the Centre's entire stake in Bharat Petroleum, Shipping Corp, THDC India Ltd and NEEPCO Ltd, and most of its stake in Container Corp, relinquishing management control in these companies at the same time. It also gave in-principle approval for the government to reduce its stake in certain state-owned companies to below 51 per cent but retain majority stake and thus management control.

These major divestment decisions were taken as the government races against time to meet its highest-ever divestment target of Rs 1.05 trillion for 2019-20. Although the focus has mostly been on the privatisation of marquee names such as BPCL and Air India, what has gone unnoticed is the sale of the Centre's stake in TDHC and NEEPCO to power major NTPC Ltd.

THDC — formerly Tehri Hydro Development Corporation Limited — operates 2,400 Mw of hydro power projects including the Tehri Dam. The centre owns a 74.23 per cent stake in the company, the government of Uttar Pradesh owning the rest. NEEPCO, or North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited, operates power stations in the north-east, totalling around 1,457 Mw

of output. The centre owns 100 per cent stake in this company.

The Prime Minister's Office has made it clear that BPCL, Concor, Shipping Corp, Air India and others will be sold to private players. NEEPCO and THDC, however, were earmarked for consolidation within the public sector space from the start.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management is still to hire transaction and legal valuers for the deal, but internal estimates suggest that NTPC's acquisition of the Centre's stake in two companies could be worth around ₹8,000 crore. This is a fraction of what the exchequer needs to garner this year, but the acquisitions mean a lot more for the power sector in India, and for NTPC.

The public sector unit (PSU) is India's largest thermal power-generating company, so why it acquiring two hydro-electric power companies? This is principally to fuel its renewable energy targets and blend clean energy sources. NTPC's current capacity stands at 57,106 Mw of which coal-based power accounts for the lion's share of 42,900 Mw.

By 2022, the company plans to add 20,000 Mw of thermal and renewable capacity. For this, it is planning mega solar power projects in arid areas of Gujarat and Rajasthan and constructing solar plants near its existing thermal units. Renewable energy now comprises about 3 per cent of its power generation mix, including hydro (see

chart: Generation Shift), but NTPC needs a balancing energy source against solar and wind energy — solar runs for 8-10 hours a day and wind power is seasonal. NEEPCO and THDC are expected to provide this balance (since hydro-power can, unlike coal or gas plants, be switched on and off rapidly).

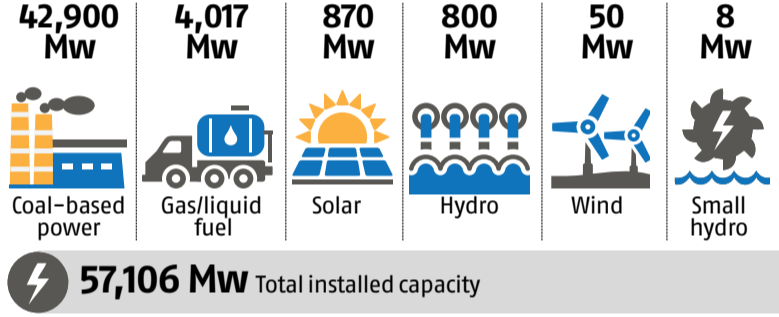
At present, NTPC has only one hydro-power project — the 800 Mw Koldam plant in Himachal Pradesh. It had earlier held talks to acquire the Centre's stake in SJVN Limited, a joint venture with the Himachal state government. But that fell through because the state government did not agree to a stake sale to another power generator. With THDCIL and NEEPCO, NTPC will not only expand its hydro portfolio but also a footprint in the north-east.

In fact, as part of the broader plan, NTPC is backing down thermal power in places where it is easier to make room for renewable power. To this end, it has tendered for 2Gw of solar and wind power. Also, as *Business Standard* had reported, NTPC's larger plan is for its pithead plants (that is, those near coal sources) to run at over 90 per cent plant load factor (PLF or operating ratio) and non-pithead ones will act as peaking plants — which means they will be scaled up when demand peaks over average consumption.

Executives said the rate at which power is sold to power distribution companies (discoms) would remain unchanged. The tariff would be same as the generating unit is currently selling power to a particular state/discom. The schedule and amount of power supply would also remain unchanged.



GENERATION SHIFT



However, given that both solar and wind tariffs have fallen below ₹2.5 per unit in the past year from ₹3 per unit a year before, NTPC is hopeful of supplying cheaper power.

Logically, the state-owned hydro-electric power company, NHPC Ltd should be buying these hydro assets. However, at a market cap of ₹23,957 crore as on last Thursday, the company is dwarfed by NTPC's financial muscle with a valuation is ₹1.14 trillion.

This isn't the first time that the

Centre has turned to the power sector for a PSU-to-PSU stake sale. Last year, the state-owned financial institution Power Finance Corporation Ltd acquired the Centre's 52.63 per cent stake in the rural electrification company REC Ltd for ₹14,500 crore, which was 17 per cent of the year's divestment proceeds of ₹84,972 crore. Unlike the somewhat weak logic for that transaction, NTPC's buyout of NEEPCO and THDC has some strategic rationale.

CHINESE WHISPERS

Time for officers to move



Madhya Pradesh is in for an administrative reshuffle. Chief Minister Kamal Nath (*pictured*) might replace Principal Secretary Ashok Barnwal "by someone close to him". Barnwal, who was in the same position under the previous government, was retained by Nath for almost a year. He is likely to be shifted to some other department. And, as was reported on Tuesday, Forest Minister Umang Singhar and Additional Chief Secretary A P Shrivastava, who is in charge of forests, are not on good terms. Shrivastava has "appraised" the chief secretary about his discomfort in working with Singhar. According to sources, the latter might be transferred to the finance department.

From virtual to real



As if to prove Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's comments about her waging a social media war wrong, Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra (*pictured*) has decided to pitch camp in Lucknow to oversee preparations by the party's Uttar Pradesh unit for the December 14 rally to take on the Narendra Modi government. The rally will be held at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi and focus on issues related to the economic downturn, unemployment, farm distress, inflation, and so on. To ensure state unit members participate in the rally in large numbers, the party will raise a dedicated volunteer force, apart from setting up a call centre to mobilise party workers.

Dealing with pornography



On the suggestion of Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu (*pictured*), MPs have constituted an information group on dealing with the challenges of regulating the access of children to internet pornography. The 14-member group held its first meeting on Monday and briefed Naidu about it on Tuesday. The MPs have decided to invite representatives of various stakeholders, including government agencies, like the Computer Emergency Response Team and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, to discuss the issue. It will also ask content publishers, social media companies like ByteDance (TikTok), WhatsApp, Google, Facebook, Sharechat, and Microsoft. The members voiced concern over the generation of online Child Sexual Abuse Materials, which is accessed by anyone on the internet.

INSIGHT

AI: Snake oil or a promise pill?

The clamour to get attention and be noticed as experts in the absence of proof points is causing people to question the credibility of all the applications AI promises



PRADIPTA BAGCHI

Digital technologies like social media and AI were supposed to deliver a sustained dividend that made human lives richer. Instead 'Big Tech' is increasingly seen as the villain whose ubiquitous social platforms now work to divide people and target vulnerable communities than bring them together. Now its AI after Princeton's professor Arvind Narayan last week threw shade on the evolving use of Artificial Intelligence in different sectors and called out most AI firms for peddling "Snake Oil" — an 18th century American euphemism for deceptive marketing of miracle elixirs.

His key takeaway: AI excels at some tasks but can't predict social outcomes and commercial interests (read Big Tech and start-ups) are trying to obfuscate this fact. More importantly, he showed that in many use-cases, manual techniques were more accurate and transparent and worth continuing with.

According to Narayan, AI models that try to predict social outcomes — in criminal recidivism, job performance, predictive policing, predicting terrorist risk, predicting at-risk kids —

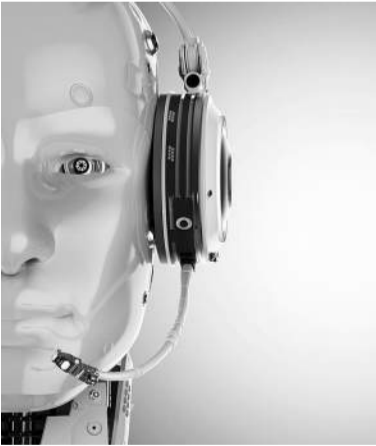
are fundamentally dubious. Can one really tell if someone is a terrorist or a useless job applicant from screening faces or phone messages for 10 minutes? What is more worrying is that the ethical concerns about use of these technologies are further amplified by inaccuracies in the output of these AI-based software.

That's a tough call on an emerging technology where global spending is rising at 44 per cent and is forecast to reach \$35.8 billion in 2019, says IDC. This is a growing reputational problem for AI as the eco-system feeding on the budgets allocated to this important technology — start-ups, Big Tech, Big Six, VCs — looks to grow exponentially by seducing their business customers with the promise to bring futuristic concepts from Hollywood films to life.

AI's crisis of authenticity in terms of what it is able to deliver is reaching a stage of peak PR. Narayan says that commercial interests are trying to obfuscate the fact that many AI firms are only selling the digital equivalent of snake oil. Thus, those selling AI solutions are having trouble going beyond thought pieces and customer surveys that highlight the bleeding obvious: AI promises to change our lives forever — take care of all our mundane tasks, freeing up our time to be more creative and use our intellect to drive value.

Other advisors are cleverly muddying the waters with definitions of AI expanded to include everything from low-end RPA (robotic process automation) to higher-end intelligent robotics.

Despite this, there is no dearth of AI in our lives. As consumers, we are used to AI-based algorithms that recommend what (more) we should buy —



"Customers who bought this item also bought" — or watch next on Netflix. AI is good business, when it works. Netflix says that AI-based recommendations saves the company about \$1 billion each year. More importantly, three-fourths of customers only watch content based on those algorithmic recommendations. We are also at home with AI-based facial recognition on our phones or the speech-to-text software that are embedded in search engines and communication platforms.

The trouble is that the money lies elsewhere. For instance, AI continues to improve rapidly and scale up in some areas like remote medical diagnosis from scans, automating customer service through chatbots or helping spot "deepfakes". But AI diagnosis of medical scans will only reduce patient costs in mature markets — something the bloated western medical establishment will not encourage.

In India, the potential for such AI applications like remote medical diag-

nosis can have more impact as it can help increase access to crucial medical services, for instance, for those unable to do so due to proximity or cost reasons. N Chandrasekaran, the Tata Chairman in his new book *Bridgital Nation* estimates that such AI-based models can be used in the Indian economic context to increase access and generate jobs — potentially 30 million new jobs by 2025 and as a result increase access to basic services for millions of Indians. From healthcare and education to courts and governance, AI-based model can be applied to improve access and create new jobs.

However, the money lies not in democratising health care in emerging economies but in designing predictive outcome models, where the AI technology is the weakest and the PR noise the loudest. This clamour to get attention and be noticed as experts in the absence of proof points is causing people to question the credibility of all the applications AI promises.

While two thirds of 2019 global spending is going to such 'safe' use cases like automated customer service agents (\$4.5 billion) and sales recommendation and automation (\$2.7 billion) the other third is being spent on less proven solutions in predictive social outcomes like automated threat intelligence and prevention systems (\$2.7 billion), said IDC.

Therein lies the rub. To restore its reputation and chase higher valuations, AI firms and the surrounding 'sales' ecosystem have to find new success stories that defeats the 'snake oil' smear. Till then, chill and Netflix! At least AI's got that right.

The writer is a communications professional

LETTERS

Freedom to speak



Apropos your editorial "The sound of silence" and letters to editor "A veiled threat?" (December 3), the fact that Rahul Bajaj (*pictured*) spoke openly in front of Home Minister and two other senior Union Ministers criticising the present government is actually a testimony to the fact that people can criticise the government boldly and get away with it. His own son, Rajeev, had criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet project of demonetisation, and has confirmed that there was no retribution. The kinds of Anu Aga, Deepak Parekh and Azim Premji have not been afraid of criticising Modi. Honest people can criticise any government in India and get away with it.

The second category of people, who are not honest themselves, will certainly be wary of criticising a strong government. Actor Raj Kumar's famous dialogue "*Jo shishe ke gharon mein rahne hain, woh dusron ke ghar par patthar nahi phenkte*" (people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones) works well for such people. And in a democracy such people must get full freedom to speak their mind.

Shiva Kumar Gurugram

Monitor round the year

Apropos "Smoke and mirrors" by Sunita

HAMBONE



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A world without rules

India will suffer from US' subversion of WTO courts

The current United States administration, under President Donald Trump, has been at its most intransigent when it comes to the institutions that underpin the global trading system, particularly the appellate body at the World Trade Organization (WTO). The appellate body is supposed to have seven judges, who rule on cases brought by a WTO member against another suspected of flouting trade rules. But the US has blocked new appointments to the court — a process that predates Mr Trump, but sped up under his administration — and this month the court will likely lapse because of a shortage of manpower. Two of the last three judges are due to retire, and cases cannot be heard with just one judge. This would have global consequences. Since 1995, the appellate body has been central to the larger project of ensuring that global trade does not turn into a might-makes-right dystopia where larger countries such as the US and China can flout agreed-upon rules at will, and intimidate smaller countries into compliance. Such countries would not win a bilateral trade dispute, but have a chance of getting their way at the WTO. This is, of course, precisely why the “America first” Mr Trump disdains the system.

For smaller trading countries like India — which is one of the world's larger economies, but accounts for only 2 per cent of world trade — the exit of the WTO appellate body would be a disaster. It is already embroiled in a trade dispute with the US. And, like with other developing countries, it has many complaints about Beijing's non-market economy bending, if not breaking, the rules. India has to share some of the blame; it has not tackled Beijing enough at the WTO, instead allowing its China-focused trading barriers become causes for disputes with other countries, including the US. Nor has the Indian legal preparation for WTO cases always been top-notch. And it is also true that WTO reform is overdue. Nevertheless, unless Mr Trump is replaced by a pro-trade president, there is little chance of the appellate body being revived. So New Delhi must prepare for a world without rules, and one in which its new isolationism will incite retaliation rather than litigation.

Under such circumstances, the decision to turn India's back on multi-lateral or bilateral rules appears particularly doubtful. For example, New Delhi's decision not to sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) appears short-sighted in the context of this approaching debacle. If New Delhi was concerned about being left excessively open to trade distortions from China, then at least the RCEP provided a dispute settlement mechanism, which might not be available for much longer at the WTO. India will have to now take a pro-active approach and seek other methods to ensure that it retains the freedom to manoeuvre when it comes to trade policy. But, in general, this cannot be taken as another excuse to turn inwards. India must take the lead in finding other arrangements that suit its interests, not alter its policies in a manner that hurts Indian companies and workers.

After the tariff hike

Telecom sector is still far from the desired stability

Both private-sector incumbents in the telecom sector have raised tariffs and the latest entrant is expected to follow suit. While most consumers will not be happy, the tariff hike is expected to bring back some financial sanity in the telecom business, which has witnessed a fair bit of disruption in recent years. Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, the incumbents, have increased tariffs by an average of about 30 per cent for the prepaid segment, effective December 3. Reliance Jio has indicated it would follow suit later this week. According to analyst estimates, the hike is expected to boost the average revenue per user by ₹30 for both the incumbents and enhance profits at the operating level by ₹7,000-9,500 crore. The tariff hike became essential for the incumbents after they posted a combined net loss of about ₹74,000 crore in the second quarter of the current financial year. While at one level, incumbents were struggling because of the price war unleashed by the entry of Jio, their problems became more striking after the Supreme Court upheld the government's definition of adjusted gross revenue, resulting in a demand of about ₹1.4 trillion from the sector.

From the financial viability standpoint, the first tariff hike in many years is a step in the right direction, but it may not solve the problem for the incumbents. Prices are expected to go up further, though the extent would depend on how consumers and telecom players react to the evolving situation in the coming months and quarters. With increasing tariffs, consumers would move to operators with better-quality services. In this context, Vodafone Idea could suffer on account of network capability in some circles. Although Airtel is in a comparatively good position, paying regulatory dues and sustaining investment in an immensely capital-intensive business would remain a challenge.

Now that the industry has bitten the bullet, it is time for the government and the telecom regulator to deliberate upon what they expect from the sector. The government can't be seen to be supporting inefficient state-run telecom companies while pushing private-sector operators to the wall. This is an extremely capital-intensive business and investments made by telcos will have wider benefits for the economy in terms of improving efficiency, raising productivity, and attracting investments. Further, if one of the incumbents decides to leave the market, it will affect future investment and the quality of services. This is not to suggest that the government should go out of its way to save operators, but value destruction in the sector has not happened because of competition alone. Both the government and the telecom regulator need to create an enabling environment to facilitate growth in the sector. At the same time, the competition watchdog will need to ensure that telecom players don't act as a cartel to raise tariffs indiscriminately. In short, even though telecom operators have decided to raise prices, the sector is still far from the desired financial stability to be able to make next-generation investments. The future, to a large extent, will depend on the policy and regulatory environment.

Ludhianvi's life in poetry



BOOK REVIEW

KANUPRIYA DHINGRA

In the epilogue, Surinder Deol exclaims, “No wonder readers can't get enough of Sahir!” That could be one of the reasons this book can be considered an important read for any curious reader. As it is, curiosity has always surrounded the enigmatic personality that is Sahir Ludhianvi, the poet and lyricist, something that Mr Deol seems quite convinced about. Throughout the book, Mr Deol draws the connection between Sahir's literary and

his personal life, something that has paradoxically remained quite public. And why not, if not largely owing to the literary genius and the public appeal of Sahir's lyrics.

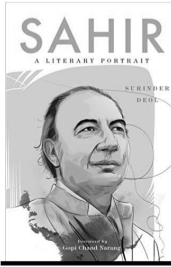
In the absence of an heir, Mr Deol says, Sahir's literary repertoire is his legacy. As he writes in the epilogue “Every poem or *ghazal* (that (Sahir) wrote mirrored some facet of his own life. It was a tapestry into which he wove the fabric of his aspirations, his success and his failures, and the bitter and sweet lessons of his life; there is no way to separate his biography from his poetry.” This is precisely what Mr Deol achieves in this biography.

Mr Deol's critical view of Sahir's poetry makes way quite often to disclosures about Sahir's life and writing. Instead of weaving a chronological story about Sahir, the author has chosen to

divide the poet's biography in four sections. These sections are based on the genres into which Sahir's magnum opus of poetry can be largely categorised into: Poems Bitter and Sweet; Poems War and

Peace; Ghazals Melody and Meaning; and, Bhajans One Above, One Below. Selecting poems from each of these genres, and discussing them vis-à-vis their creative mannerism, Mr Deol relates the poems to the personal and political events that may have enabled or motivated each of them.

Mr Deol consciously evades



addressing film songs as a separate category, although cautiously mentions their inevitability to what makes up to be Sahir's collected literary output.

However, he does include film songs if they have been written in the form of a poem before being incorporated into a film as a song. Mr Deol discusses how songs form an exclusive place in Sahir's creative repertoire, defending his interest and ability to write songs well, so much so that Sahir and Majnu Sultanpuri were the only two lyricists who would get credits for their contribution to the making of the music of a film, which

otherwise would only go to the film/music directors.

Throughout the book, as Mr Deol describes Sahir as a people's poet, as an

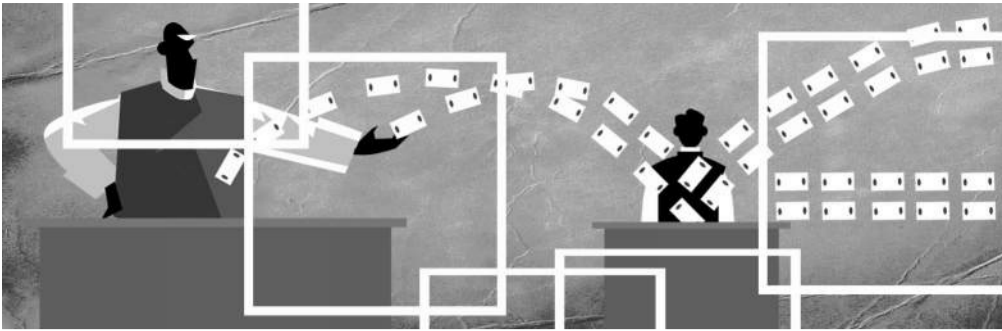
uncommonly popular lyricist for Hindi film songs, or as a much sought-after celebrity. In other words, he thoroughly recognises his literary and creative calibre but also credits his popularity to the mystery and enigma that surrounded his personal and political life. Unavoidably, he also discusses Sahir's relationship with Amrita Pritam, among other love interests that influenced the poet-lyricist's love lyrics. Further, he places Sahir in the network of his contemporary poets, lyricists, and most importantly, among the progressive poets. He mentions Faiz more than just often, either vis-à-vis Sahir's lyrics and his political affiliations, or also more generally as the flagbearer of the lyrical and political thought dominant at the time when Sahir was writing. Frequently and expectedly, Mr Deol suggests both Amrita and Faiz and their idea of love and politics have been muses for Sahir.

Mr Deol has complemented Sahir's original Hindustani/ Urdu poems (published in Roman script in this book)

by his own translations of them into English. In the introduction, the author defends his attempt to bring in his own voice into the translations, suggesting that as it is, it's a challenge to translate the appeal of Urdu poetry into English. In his attempt to “draw the same level of aesthetic satisfaction as the native reader”, at places, Mr Deol's translations are more literary and exact than they need to be. But because they give a much-needed access to Sahir's poetry to readers who may not know Urdu, the translations do, nevertheless, come across as beautiful and quite absorbing.

Mr Deol makes no claim of suggesting that this is an authoritative biography on Sahir. And, fairly so. What the book instead claims to be is being a “literary portrait”, and it fulfills that promise. Given my own persistent fascination with Sahir Ludhianvi, I could find what I was looking for in the book; several of the few ways in which I have known Sahir: *Pyasa*, Pritam, and a deliberation on *Ae Shareef Insaano*.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Hidden inter-linkages hurting growth

How fiscal pressures on state budgets are more pro-cyclical and weak imports push up bond yields

Economies are complex systems, with inter-linkages that usually do not get adequate attention, but which can have a strong effect on economic momentum and the severity of economic cycles.

Let us start with state government spending. In popular imagination, “government” stands for the Union government in Delhi, and when companies complain of delayed payments, everyone looks to Delhi for recourse. However, not only do state governments on a net basis spend 90 per cent more than the Centre, they have much more discretion on their spending than the Centre. Nearly a fourth of central government spending, for example, is interest payments, and another fifth is salaries and pensions — delays to these are unlikely, if not impossible. Add to that defence spending, transfers to states and subsidies (this year fertiliser and food subsidy payments appear to have been made thus far), and three-fourths of the Centre's expenditure is accounted for.

The probability of state governments delaying payments is much greater, however, and not just for political reasons as seen in some large states where the ruling party has changed recently. Aggregating state budgets, one finds that they are budgeted to spend ₹38 trillion in this fiscal year, 19 per cent higher than last year's expenditure, and nearly 1 per cent higher as a share of GDP. Capital expenditure is budgeted to grow 21 per cent over the prior year to ₹6.3 trillion. But these numbers are subject to significant downward revisions. States miss receipt and expenditure targets set in their budgets in most years: While there are execution challenges, as shown by states borrowing less than what they are allowed to in recent years, lower-than-expected receipts also constrain spending. In recent years, a meaningful part of the



TESSELLATUM

NEELKANTH MISHRA

slippage in receipts has been due to weaker-than-budgeted tax transfers from the Centre. This year, the problems could be much worse than usual. We estimate that total spending growth could slip to as low as 7 per cent year-on-year, implying a drop in the state spending-to-GDP ratio compared to last year.

As the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) releases monthly data for the central government, analysts track the slippages on central taxes and the impact on central deficits and spending. However, given that 42 per cent of central taxes automatically flow to states, and account for 40 per cent of total state spending, their impact on states is very significant too. More so as states have no flexibility on their fiscal deficit targets. This is hard to track however, as monthly data on all states is not available on the CGA website. As a slowing economy hurts states' own receipts, in addition to central transfers, states with a budgeted

deficit close to the permitted threshold of 3 per cent of GSDP will be forced to cut spending. Even those where the deficit is budgeted to be below 3 per cent of GSDP would be constrained by the quantum of borrowing approved for them, as this is set by December, whereas the extent of central tax shortfall would be disclosed only in February 2020.

The issue of goods and services tax (GST) compensation may worsen the situation. When GST started, states had been promised 14 per cent annual revenue growth for five years: Any shortfall in collections would be made up by the Centre through payments from the compensation cess being collected (mainly a surcharge on coal, cars, tobacco and fizzy drinks). Until last year, states were beneficiaries of GST, as the slowing economy did not affect their revenues meaningfully, and they saw a sub-

Mr Bajaj does BJP a good turn

Senior industry leader Rahul Bajaj has posed an important question for the Narendra Modi government. Why is industry afraid of speaking out on the government's economic policies? Why is there an atmosphere of fear under the Modi regime so much so that industry leaders are reluctant to make critical comments about the government? In comparison, the same industry was not afraid of asking questions about government policies when Manmohan Singh was the prime minister. Mr Bajaj has noted.

The Modi government has taken the observations made by Mr Bajaj quite seriously. Home Minister Amit Shah has responded by saying that there is no reason for industry to believe that there is an atmosphere of fear. But since such comments have been made, the government would examine them to see what improvements can be brought about.

There have been other responses as well from senior Union ministers. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said it was always better to seek an answer to one's question and that approach was always better than spreading one's impressions, which could hurt national interest. Railways and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said there was no need to fear. The fact that such a question could be raised showed that there was no atmosphere of fear, he said. Housing, Urban Affairs and Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri suggested that statements such as those made by Mr Bajaj were fake narratives.

It is important to examine the context and implications of what Mr Bajaj said in Mumbai last week in the presence of a galaxy of Indian industry leaders and senior ministers seated on the dais from where he spoke out his mind. Note that the octogenarian industrialist prefaced his critical comments by saying that the Modi government was doing some good work. But what hurt him was that industry leaders were not sure if their critical comments about the government would be appreciated and received in

the right spirit.

This is a slightly different narrative from the general criticism of the manner in which the Modi government has handled the challenges faced by the Indian economy. Mr Bajaj's comment was not on the way the Modi government was dealing with the challenges that have arisen out of the current slowdown. He was a founder member of the Bombay Club that in the early 1990s had demanded a level playing field for domestic industry to help it face the challenges from the opening up of the Indian economy. Today, Mr Bajaj could not have been uncomfortable with the Modi government raising tariffs or even pulling out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or RCEP, which would become the world's largest trading arrangement.

Thus, the criticism was not for the Modi government's economic policy stance, but for the manner in which it had shut itself off from any feedback from industry, which was now afraid to make any critical comments. Biocon Chairperson and Managing Director Kiran Mazumdar Shaw endorsed Mr Bajaj's observations and hoped that the government would now reach out to India Inc to discuss how economic growth could be revived. So far, industry leaders were all pariahs and the government did not want to hear any criticism of the economy, Ms Shaw said in a social media comment.

What Mr Bajaj, therefore, was actually pleading for was that the Modi government must revive the communication links between India Inc leaders and the ruling political establishment. He seemed to be articulating the desire of India Inc leaders that the terms of engagement between industry and the Modi government must be reset. Those terms had been reoriented early in the life of the first term of the Modi government. Indian industry had hailed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government because it believed that its leader, Narendra Modi, would usher in more economic reforms. True to such expecta-



NEW DELHI DIARY

A K BHATTACHARYA

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Ailing Railways

National transporter must boost revenue, curb expenses

A REPORT tabled in Parliament by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has highlighted the grave financial situation of the Railways. The national transporter recorded an operating ratio of 98.44 per cent in 2017-18, the worst in a decade. It spent Rs 98.44 to earn Rs 100, way above the figures in 2010-11 (Rs 94.6) and 2011-12 (Rs 94.9). The net revenue surplus dropped alarmingly by 66.1 per cent from Rs 4,913 crore in 2016-17 to Rs 1,665.61 crore in 2017-18. The CAG noted that the decline in generation of internal resources resulted in the Railways’ greater dependence on gross budgetary support and extra budgetary resources for meeting its capital expenditure.

The ‘Give Up’ scheme, started in 2017 to encourage senior citizens to forgo their train fare concession, has flattered to deceive. Of the 4.41 crore elderly passengers, only 1.7 per cent opted to give up 50 per cent rebate and just 2.47 per cent did not avail a fare waiver. The dismal numbers show that the Railways has failed to generate awareness among senior citizens about the initiative aimed at enhancing revenue. The sorry state of affairs is a far cry from the days of Lalu Prasad Yadav as Rail Mantri in the UPA-I government. His tenure was not controversy-free, courtesy the IRCTC hotels’ tender allotment scam, but he is credited with turning around the Railways’ fortunes. Lalu’s homespun management model even attracted Harvard and Wharton business schools, though the CAG was unimpressed by his ‘cash and investible surplus’ claim. He took the populist route by neither hiking passenger fares nor retrenching workers, while allowing overloading of freight wagons and simplifying the freight tariff.

Even as an empowered group set up by the NDA government is looking into the feasibility of upgrading 50 railway stations to world-class standards and allowing private players to operate 150 trains, the Railways needs to walk a tightrope — rationalise its workforce on the one hand and scale up services to meet passengers’ expectations on the other. Timely replacement of old assets and curtailing wasteful expenditure would be in order too. The nation’s lifeline awaits a new lease of life.

Haryana, recruit teachers

They are the key to socio-economic uplift

IT is a matter of grave concern that nearly one-third of the posts of school staff are lying unfilled in Haryana. At stake with this huge vacancy of human resources are many vital socio-economic components of the state. The future of children deprived of regular and quality teachers is compromised. This sorry situation is also a reflection of rising numbers of jobless qualified and trained teachers pushed to the wayside, and often to protests in streets. As the youth’s wait for employment stretches to never-ending periods, it is fraught with the danger of their talent and energies slipping into wasteful — or, even illegal or destructive — activities. In turn it has a deleterious impact on the economy of the state. By not filling the posts of teachers on priority, the state is losing out on a potential spur to its economy that can accrue from the spending power of a gainfully employed crucial section of society. The dearth of teachers is a sure recipe for untold misery arising out of a foundation weakened by the denial to kids of an optimal learning atmosphere.

Bearing the brunt of the staff crunch are rural children, who comprise nearly 70 per cent of the population. The Mewat region is particularly affected. With few teachers opting to work in this backward area, the endeavour to raise its standard is that much more difficult. Even as a former chief minister is cooling his heels in jail for a teacher recruitment scam, the state is not yet rid of the corruption-ridden and opaque methods of staffing, postings and transfers in schools. Efforts to cross over to a transparent system of functioning lack punch even as protracted litigation pulls them down.

The state School Education Department statistics of 2018 portray a stark lesson: of the 1,28,732 sanctioned posts of teaching cadre, only 86,246 are filled; of the 45,446 vacant ones, 13,731 are filled by guest teachers. What is more frightening is the consequent slide in the enrolment of schoolchildren: against 13,43,958 enrolments in 2012-13 in classes I to IV, they were 9,18,241 in 2017-18.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A boss has the title, a leader has the people.

— Simon Sinek

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1919

Kasur officer before the Enquiry Committee.

ON the Disorders Enquiry Committee reassembling on Wednesday morning, with Sir Chimanlal back from Bombay, the Hon. Pandit Jagatnarain resumed his examination of Khan Sahib Ahmad Khan, D.S.P., Kasur. Witness said that he had no tangible evidence of pressure being brought to bear upon Kasur from Bombay and Karachi for the observance of hartal. From the three sources of information which witness had of the meeting on the 11th, it appeared that all the speakers at the meeting, Maulvi Ghulam Mohy-ud-din, Maulvi Abdul Kadir, Umadutt and others urged the people to be peaceful and it was only after they had left that one Nadir Shah made a speech asking people to take risk in getting the repeal of the Rowlatt Act. Before the 11th April, witness had no idea as to the possibilities of the things that happened afterwards, nor had he any information as to any secret conspiracy. No public meeting was held during the period that he was there, nor were any speeches delivered. There was in fact very little political life in Kasur. As for outside agencies inciting the mob on the 11th or 12th, witness said that no political leaders came to Kasur from Amritsar. The arrest of Maulvi Ghulam Mohy-ud-din formed the subject of a series of questions by Pandit Jagatnarain, in the course of which it transpired that the Maulvi had remonstrated and tried to dissuade the mob on the 12th from mischief. Questioned on the identifications of people implicated in the riot at the railway station, witness said that he himself could not identify more than half a dozen. He admitted that one of the reasons of people not coming forward to identify before the declaration of Martial Law was the fear that they might also be implicated. Witness further said that the conviction of 60 to 70 persons in connection with the riot was based mostly on the evidence of officials.

Dirty politics not for him

Remembering former PM IK Gujral on his 100th birth anniversary today



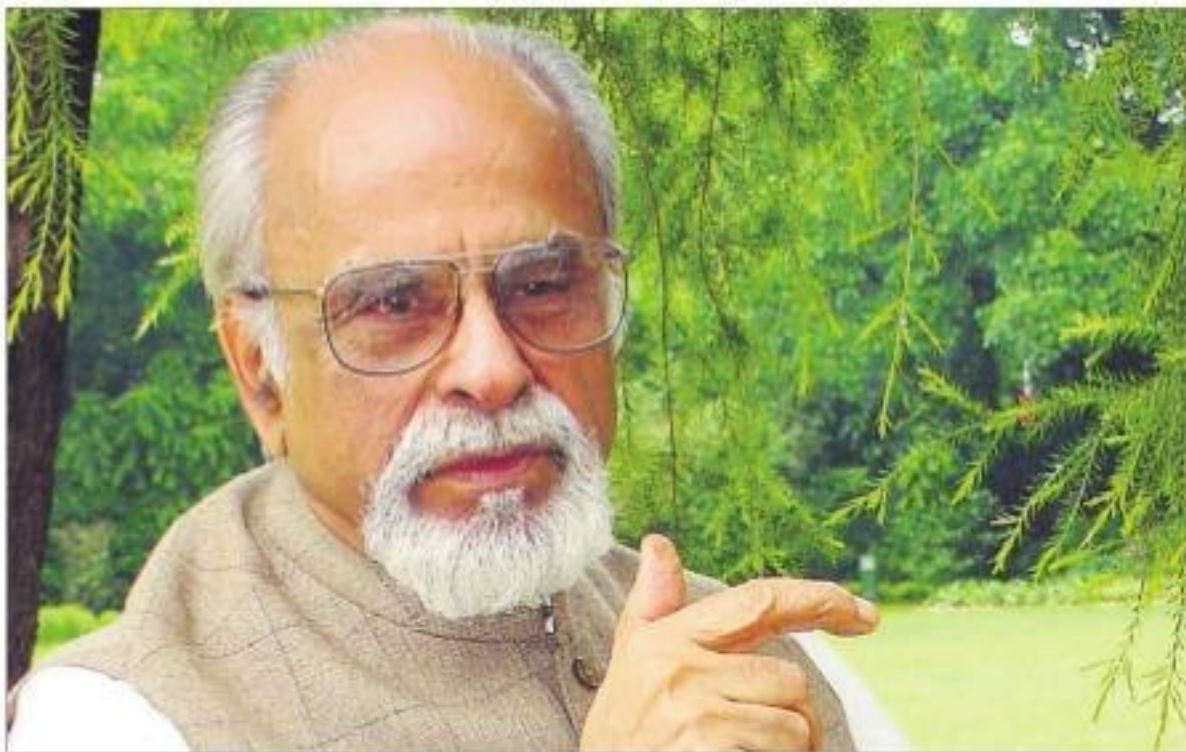
NN VOHRA

FORMER PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO PM IK GUJRAL

THE 1980s was a cataclysmic decade: grave internal disturbances in Punjab triggered by Pakistan-sponsored separatist demand for Khalistan; Operation Blue Star and the Army entering the Golden Temple; assassination of PM Indira Gandhi and Akali leader Harchand Singh Longowal; rumblings in J&K; thoughtless interference in J&K state Assembly polls in 1987; beginning of Pakistan’s proxy war, and grave internal disturbances had left the country scarred. The transition into the 1990s was gloomier still, marked by a debilitating financial crisis; the rumblings of Bofors and submarine scandals; assassination of Rajiv Gandhi; exposure of the fodder scam involving Bihar CM Lalu Yadav and the suitcase scandal involving allegations of delivery of large amounts of currency at PM Narasimha Rao’s residence; assassination of Punjab CM Beant Singh, and other problems which troubled the governments of the day.

This was the milieu during my tenure as Defence Secretary and Home Secretary in the governments headed by VP Singh and Narasimha Rao before I retired from service in mid-1994. Having had more than my share of working during a prolonged period of tensions, I had no appetite to return to the shop floor. However, as destined, I reported to serve PM Gujral as his Principal Secretary.

Looking back, I feel Gujral Sahib deserved far better than what was offered to him by his contemporaries — particularly by the kind of political personalities whose support he needed to survive, virtually on a day-to-day basis. Erudite, fond of Urdu poetry, courteous, and of urbane disposition,



IK GUJRAL
BIRTH CENTENARY

EVER THE GENTLE MAN: Suave and warm-hearted, Gujral Sahib had no talent for countering conspiracies of his political partners.

He faced serious issues during his tenure which could not be effectively dealt with because his hands were tied.

he was warm-hearted and had no talent for countering the conspiracies of his political partners. His wife, Pushpa, too, had a literary orientation and several books to her credit.

Having witnessed the spread of corruption at the highest levels of the government, he was determined to launch a ‘new satyagraha’ for socially boycotting the givers and receivers of bribe. Unfortunately, he did not enjoy a long-enough tenure to leave a mark in his favoured spheres of interest.

I recall his annoyance when I opposed his direction to establish an anti-corruption cell in the PMO. Years later, he told me with great sadness that perhaps I was right. Corruption cannot be attacked, much less weeded out, unless our polity and society are truly committed.

As Foreign Minister in PM Deve Gowda’s Cabinet, Gujral Sahib became known for the ‘Gujral Doctrine’ — an approach to achieve peaceful and friendly ties with our neighbours. His endeavours did not win him much applause. He was criticised for not dealing with Pakistan with a firm hand. His gentle demeanour strengthened the perception that he was ‘weak’, which

was altogether incorrect. Then or now, India cannot afford to have strained relations with its South Asian neighbours as Pakistan has emerged as an unabashed ‘state actor’ in continuing its terror activities against India.

I assisted the PM in dealing with an ever-increasing array of problems on varied fronts. I was the last Principal Secretary to the PM to have handled issues which have since been entrusted to the NSA. My immediate successor, Brajesh Mishra, was the first NSA.

While the PM faced many difficult situations, I recall one which was particularly troublesome. In UP, the BJP government led by Kalyan Singh had to seek a vote of confidence after unprecedented violence in the state Assembly. Governor Romesh Bhandari failed to make an objective assessment, and kept sending daily ‘situation reports’ to the President, PM and Home Minister. Mulayam Singh, then Defence Minister, wanted Kalyan Singh’s removal and imposition of President’s rule. He was supported by Congress president Sitaram Kesri. The PM faced increasing pressure to recommend President’s rule. I called on Home Minister Inderjit

Gupta, who after asking for my views as a former Union Home Secretary, observed that the Governor’s reports deserved to be rejected. When I reported this to the PM, he seemed inclined to agree but appeared uncomfortable. He accepted my suggestion to call on the President to brief him about the situation. When the PM and I met the President, he forthwith observed that there was no case for dismissing the government.

The next day, the PM called a Cabinet meeting to discuss the issue. As he was to proceed on a foreign tour the next day, the meeting was fixed in the forenoon. We also invited Attorney General Ashok Desai and Solicitor General TR Andhyarujina. The meeting was expected to conclude before lunch. However, with several breaks, the discussions continued for nearly eight hours. Late that evening (the PM’s visit to France and Germany was cancelled), the Home Secretary carried a note to the President, recommending President’s rule. After over an hour, the President’s secretary sent a note conveying rejection of the recommendation.

The UP issue illustrates that even though the PM was convinced that Kalyan Singh could not be dismissed, he had to carry through a prolonged charade which earned him no credit. He faced serious issues during his tenure which could not be effectively dealt with because, as in the UP case, his hands were tied and he had to heed the behest of his detractors. Ultimately, following the prolonged wrangling on issues relating to the leaked Jain Commission report, the Congress withdrew support to the Gujral government on November 28, 1997. He informed the President that his government had lost majority and he did not wish to continue on ‘moral grounds’.

Even after the fall of the Gujral government, there were several dramatic developments at the Centre. However, subsequently, especially since 2004, the successive governments at the Centre have enjoyed full tenures. Yet, the concept of ‘coalition dharma’ is still to evolve and achieve its required equipoise in national politics.

When *parali* wasn’t a dreaded word

RAJESH SHARMA

THERE is a material difference between the plant stems of wheat and rice. The dry stem of wheat is flexible and can be easily braided. But it is not so with wheat. Wheat chaff has nutritional value as animal fodder. Dry rice plant stems are non-nutritional fodder; a filler or dietary fibre for the cattle.

Pondering over the problem of *parali* (stubble) burning suffocating the northern plains, I remember the time when harvesting left no tall stubble. Those were the days when threshing was undertaken with a pair of bulls crushing and crumbling the dried harvest. The yoked bulls pulled a heavy crusher

going round and round over the dried harvest separating the grain from the ear. Wheat left chaff, paddy left *parali*. There was no *parali* burning of the present day, which started recently after combine harvesters began to leave a tall stubble.

Then, harvesting was a festival. It was a day of reaping the fruits of hard and long labour. The harvesters comprised of all able-bodied men from the village. People took turns harvesting their crops. The women of the family, whose crops were harvested, cooked lunch and dinner for the day. We, kids, looked forward to the harvest festival for riding the crusher attached to the yoked bulls. *Parali* and chaff, or *bhoosa*, were treasured as fodder for animal stock. Even

though dead-tired, the villagers enjoyed the evenings with songs of harvesting. It was almost utopian.

There was nothing like the burning of *parali*. Whatever little was reduced to ashes was the remnants of weeds only. A great use of *parali* stems was braiding and weaving the best quality of it into soft mattresses known as *man-jaris*. Also crafted from it were sitting cushions, known even today as *binnas*. They also created small, round and hollow platforms for the mounting of pitchers.

At that time few schools that existed were in the government sector only. Not to speak of benches and chairs for students, most of us would sit on jute mats spread on the

floor. However, the availability of mats depended on the funds available with the school, collected through nominal fee that was in paise and not rupees. Many students had to carry a personal sitting mat along with the school bag. For those who could afford, this mat was a used cement bag made of jute. For others it was a *binna* made of *parali*. Soft and cosy, it was kept in a corner of the classroom and was not carried home daily, for no one feared it being stolen.

Today, when the NCR is getting choked, my village grannies still craft *man-jaris* and *binnas* from *parali*. I wish the tradition continues even as a practical solution is found to deal with stubble burning.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don’t ignore the sentiment

Refer to the editorial ‘Hamara Bajaj’ (December 3); Rahul Bajaj is known for speaking fearlessly and his concern as a businessman and respected citizen of our country should not be ignored. Instead of the government going on the defensive, it would be wise on its part to address certain issues, especially the downward slide of our economy. As a layman, we don’t need big figures to tell us what is happening to our national economic growth. We are seeing it every day with the increase in inflation. In a democratic setup no one should live in fear for speaking against the demerits of the government. Economists like Abhijit Banerjee, Amartya Sen, Dr Manmohan Singh and Raghuram Rajan have warned the government time and again, and this time a respected businessman has spoken. Should their voices be ignored?

SAMITA KAUR, BY MAIL

Not anti-national

Refer to ‘Hamara Bajaj’; this is not the first time that someone has dared to convey such feelings about the government. All such people have been snubbed and treated as anti-nationals. It is high time for politicians in the higher echelons to gauge the pulse of fellow countrymen and invite their suggestions to improve the sta-

tus of our economy rather than criticising and ridiculing them.

BALBIR SINGH KAKKAR, JALANDHAR

Punjab’s gang culture

It is unfortunate for the so-called flourishing state of Punjab that its youth is getting involved in gang wars (‘Gangster shot dead outside Malout gym’, December 3). Every other day there is news about one gang member killing member of another gang. It is a matter of further concern when ring leaders of such gangs, sitting in jails, take responsibility for such killings on social media. The police appear to be a dwarf before them. This becomes the reason that they are heroes among youngsters, who then want to be a part of such gangs. The government should be harsh toward such anti-social elements and tame them, so that Punjab can be a peaceful state and not turn into ‘Chambal ghati’.

RAJAN BATTI, NABHA

No mercy for beasts

There has been a monumental rise in the incidents of rape. It shakes the conscience of the common man, further augmenting the trust deficit in the name of our celebrated judiciary, superintending power of the administration, and above all, our parliamentarians. Women safety has been

thrown to the wind, with false promises of serving justice at the earliest. Such incidents are a pockmark on campaigns and catchphrases like women empowerment, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, and Mahila Shakti Kendras. Time has come to sternly act against those who do not deserve any mercy. Chastise every offender to eliminate the notion that women are objects of use.

ACHLA BHATIA, JALANDHAR

Provide books instead

Reference to ‘Mobiles for students, but staff await wages’ (December 3); spending crores of rupees on mobile phones is not only a wastage of money, but also will spoil the life of students. The government is luring the young generation for votes, but forgets this is the age to make or mar them. Mobile phones and motorcycles are the two main reasons that are spoiling children, who indulge in bad habits, drive rashly and take to drugs, causing a great loss to parents and society. The government should provide such gadgets only to those 1 or 2% students who excel in studies, whether they belong to government or private schools. It should provide books to school libraries instead. We should have a discussion with educationists before buying mobile phones.

RAVINDER DHAND, BY MAIL

Pak politics & army

Refer to ‘Pakistan army prevails’ (December 3); democracy in Pakistan is simply a ‘mannequin’. Imran Khan is believed to have reached the podium through the ladder of the military. The extension to General Bajwa is seemingly a reciprocal gesture, a safety valve to Imran’s political existence. Recently some hardcore mullahs revolted against him, and gave him few hours to put in his papers, but he survived, apparently with the backing of General Bajwa. Imran might take the initiative to pass a new law with retrospective effect, through legislative strength, cutting the wings of the top judiciary.

BM SINGH, AMRITSAR

Telecom tariff hike

Refer to ‘Telecom stocks soar on tariff hikes, Airtel hits 52-week high’ (December 3); companies are thinking of their own benefits, but what about middle class people who can’t afford high price bills? Abrupt increase in prices is unfair. The companies say that they have introduced fair usage concept in their plans. But when people are unable to pay high prices for their services, what good is the concept? The plans should be beneficial for all classes of people and should be affordable, too.

NIKITA BHATI, RAJASTHAN

A pattern marks London terror attacks



LUV PURI
JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

THE man who carried out the stab attack at London Bridge on November 29 reinforces the pattern of extremist violence that the United Kingdom (UK) has witnessed in the last 15 years.

Twentyeight-year-old Usman Khan, the London attacker, was born to parents who hailed from Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir (PAJK), which is called PoK by India and ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ by Pakistan. He, along with another Nazam Hussain, also born to immigrant parents from PAJK, had plans to establish and recruit for a militant training facility under the cover of a madrasa (religious school) on land owned by his family in PAJK. Interestingly, his profile bears an uncanny resemblance with other extremists who have carried out attacks in the UK in the recent past.

In the 2005 string of suicide attacks on London’s public transport system, 56 lives were lost. Mohammad Sidique Khan, a 30-year-old married man and father to a daughter, was the head of the plot. Khan was born to parents who had migrated to the UK from the Poth-

wari-speaking area of Rawalpindi which adjoins PAJK. He had travelled to a camp in PAJK of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, a Kashmir-centric militant group. A year after the London bombings, a terrorist plot to blow up the 10 United States-bound flights from Heathrow with the help of liquid explosives was revealed on August 10, 2006. The foiled attack was the brain-child of 1981-born Rashid Rauf. His father Abdul Rauf had immigrated to the Britain from Mirpur town of PAJK, also known as Little England. Rashid grew up in Birmingham city, UK. After claims and counter-claims, the family of Rauf admitted that he was killed in a US drone attack in November 2008.

In this connection, a lesser discussed fact about the Britain’s ‘Pakistani descent’ population is the fact that over 70 per cent has a direct or indirect connection with the Pothwari-speaking PAJK, particularly Mirpur, or the adjoining linguistically akin areas like Rawalpindi, Jhelum or Gujarat areas of Pakistani Punjab. Migration from the region started in the early twentieth century when locals travelled to Mumbai to work, primarily as sea men. The second wave of migration took place during the construction of the Mangla dam, a mega hydel power project in the 1960s on the Jhelum river. The dam was designed and supervised by a British company, and constructed by a consortium of eight US firms.

The construction of the dam led to mass migration from the belt as all agricultural activity came to a halt.



EXTREMIST VIOLENCE: In the 2005 string of suicide attacks on London’s public transport system, 56 lives were lost.

The British government had initially granted 400 work permits to the displaced population of Mirpur. The migration continued in the coming decades, not just from Mirpur, but also from nearby areas. The grievance over the loss of their land to the dam became a source of political mobilisation for the Mirpuri diaspora, in favour of independence of the undivided state, including from Pakistan, that coincided with the start of militancy in the Kashmir valley in 1989. In fact, the diaspora was the backbone of the financial support to the pro-independence militant outfits in the early 1990s.

In the 1990s, the diaspora settled in different parts of the UK, particularly

In the 1990s, the Pakistani diaspora settled in different parts of the UK tried to internationalise the Kashmir issue. They found favour with a few British politicians, particularly from the Labour Party, mainly because the diaspora had a sizeable presence in a number of parliamentary constituencies in Britain.

Labour Party has a reference to Kashmir. It says: “The Conservatives have failed to play a constructive role in resolving the world’s most pressing humanitarian crises, including in Kashmir, Yemen and Myanmar, and the escalation of tensions with Iran.”

The political association with the ‘Kashmir cause’ may have given the first generation an opportunity to re-establish linkages with their places of birth. But for some members of the second and third generation young men facing identity crisis and manifold contestations or schisms such as familial traditions and western culture results have proved to be different. This is further exacerbated by

Islamophobia that has unleashed a vicious circle of hate in some pockets of the British society. French political scientist Oliver Roy, who has written extensively on the radicalisation within diaspora communities of the West, states that the overrepresentation of Pakistanis, read descent, in the British Jihadist movements is primarily because Pakistan defines itself outside the model of the territorialised nation-state and also the impact of faith-based schools which act as an obstacle for integration. This has resulted in the radicalisation of Islam which, according to Roy, is more due to globalisation and de-culturalisation than its diasporic nature.

In the early 1990s, the community settled in the UK, mostly the first generation settlers, supported pro-independence forces active in Jammu and Kashmir. A decade later, some members of the second and third generation living in the UK started looking at broader and universal Islamic causes to define their identity. For the radicalised youth, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir became part of the Islamic solidarity as they internalised the simplistic or binary interpretations from diaspora societies or online sources without contextual nuance. Tackling the radicalisation of this section of the British society would require a multi-dimensional response that also includes supporting efforts to wean them away from simplistic versions that they had internalised about the place of birth of their parents or grandparents.

Integrity, empathy were Gujral’s hallmarks



In the times of coalition politics, IK Gujral was called upon to take over the mantle of prime ministership, which at the best of times is no less than a crown of thorns. He gladly accepted the gauntlet. For, this challenge was an opportunity for him to prove that it was a new phase in the democratic evolution of the country. Perhaps, it was for the first time that true federalism, which was the experiment of our Constitution, was being worked out in real terms.

I first met Inder Gujral in 1980. I had then accompanied the Indian Olympic contingent to Moscow where Gujral sahib was India’s Ambassador. I, therefore, had to meet him as a matter of courtesy. I requested for a personal audience, and lo and behold! He sent his personal car to take me to him. I knew that he was not protocol-minded, but that he could be so warm and informal was far from my imagination. Hence, it turned out to be a very friendly tete-a-tete. The fact that I came from Jhelum district, I think, also made him give me the kind of attention generally reserved for someone who is one’s own kin.

Thereafter, in 1982, I became the PR chief of the Asiad. Gujral sahib had come back from his ambassadorial stint. As a leading citizen of the Capital and one of the nation’s leading intellectuals, I was often in need of his advice and guidance, which I found was always available to me without any reserve and in ample measure. It was then that I started knowing him as a gentleman par excellence. Though he lived in the rarefied world of books and ideas, I found him rooted as much in the soil of reality. With no pretensions of mine as an intellectual, my interactions were just matter of fact and mundane. But he took it all in his stride.

Soon afterwards, I became the press secretary to President Giani Zail Singh. This forced me into the thick of every kind of activity, moving as often as possible in the world of VIPs. Hence, I met Gujral sahib in several capacities and on several occasions. For, that was the time when the Punjab problem monopolised the attention of the nation. Gianiji was concerned with the day-



IK GUJRAL
TALL STATURE: IK Gujral courageously opposed the Emergency while serving as a Cabinet minister in the Indira Gandhi government and had to quit.

to-day happenings, both as a Punjab leader and a Sikh. Thus, in those days, I often interacted with a cross-section of Punjabis not only in Delhi but also the world over.

However, it was a great gain for me to know that Gujral sahib happened to be one of the finest Punjabis on the scene, in love with the culture and ethos of the land of his birth. Like many others, he, too, waxed and waned at each new twist and turn of events in Punjab.

Talking to him on Punjab was always a revelation because not only did he know so many finer points of the Punjab problem, but he was also a true friend of the Sikhs. In a point of fact, the two Punjabis, viz Inder Kumar Gujral and Kuldeep Nayar, had such a constructive approach to the whole imbroglio that I often make this point on every platform that if we had

intellectual and parliamentarian of the nation, he rubbed shoulders with some of the best minds of the world, even at a one-on-one level. But he wore his greatness so very lightly that he had friends from every walk of life. It was his boundless human empathy that made him so winsome in all possible situations.

That’s why, in the times of coalition politics, he was called upon to take over the mantle of prime ministership of India, which at the best of times is no less than a crown of thorns. He gladly accepted the gauntlet. For, this challenge was an opportunity for him to prove that it was a new phase in the democratic evolution of the country.

Perhaps, it was for the first time that true federalism, which was the experiment of our Constitution, was being worked out in real terms. And if that succeeded, it would have started a new era of political management in the country. To be able to satisfy the diverse aspirations of all kinds of people in different states was a mammoth task inasmuch as, most of these aspirations were kept bottled up. It was a role of destiny, which Gujral played with consummate ease.

At 80, the way he worked, he could have put people younger to him to shame. But by not shirking his onerous responsibility, he had the challenge of carving out a place for himself in India’s history as a man of the moment.

But the last and not the least important of his qualities was that he was an Ajatashatru, which means — a man without an enemy. Fortunately, at that time, we had both a Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition (Atal Bihari Vajpayee) who equally shared this quality between them. The parliamentary debate, which

took place on the 50th year of Independence, underlined this point so well, as brought out by these two stalwarts. Even when he was engaged in a bitter argument, as intellectuals mostly do, he remained so unruffled and pleasant that the one worsted in the argument was also happy at the outcome. That’s why even if he was so uncompromising in respect of his values and principles, he was flexible enough to take along with him even the worst of his detractors.

Now adding to his basic integrity and incorruptibility, as well as human compassion, you would find that there was no crisis from which he didn’t come out in flying colours. He took the courage to oppose the Emergency as a Cabinet minister of Indira Gandhi and had to quit. But this unusual step brought laurels to him. The Gujral Doctrine had already won him several friends and India was seen in an altogether different light. Hence, it was a matter of great luck of the nation that we had such a person who could lead us into the 21st century without jerks and jolts. He was always a man far ahead of his times.

At that point, India having a Punjabi Prime Minister was important for another reason as well. For the first time, we had a Punjabi and, that too, a refugee to deal with Pakistan. No one could have been more at ease while interacting with Pakistan’s Muslims. He had a rare command of the Urdu language and could quote Urdu poetry with such felicity that he could not but evoke a responsive chord in every heart in Pakistan.

He was convinced that these two young nations could or shall fulfil their trust with destiny only by burying the hatchet of mutual enmity and distrust.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Major annual horse race (5)

8 Incandescent (5-3)

9 Approximately (5)

10 A precious metal (8)

11 Perhaps (5)

12 To stitch (3)

16 Direction followed (6)

17 Transfix (6)

18 Trite quotation (3)

23 Kept in readiness (2,3)

24 During a journey (2,3,3)

25 To drive (5)

26 Warning signal (3,5)

27 A thin soup (5)

DOWN

2 Make glorious (8)

3 Small American thrush (8)

4 Put aside (6)

5 Condition (5)

6 Excel (5)

7 Distinctive character (5)

12 Complete collection (3)

13 Toupee (3)

14 Unrestricted admission (4,4)

15 Brief loss of consciousness (8)

19 Indifference (6)

20 Hidden stock (5)

21 Detailed examination (5)

22 Worth (5)

SU DO KU

	7				6	5	2
8				2		1	
	9		3		4		1
		2			7		
1	8			5		2	
			3				
	3		6				9
9	8	6				3	

HARD

CALENDAR

DECEMBER 4, 2019, WEDNESDAY

- Vikrami Samvat 2076
- Shaka Samvat 1941
- Margshirsh Shaka 13
- Margshirsh Parvishte 19
- Hijari 1441
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 8, up to 1.44 am
- Harsh Yoga up to 2.53 pm
- Shatbhisha Nakshatra up to 5.09 pm
- Moon in Aquarius sign.
- Shridurgashtmi.

YESTERDAY’S SOLUTION

1	8	6	2	7	5	9	4	3
7	9	5	1	3	4	6	8	2
4	2	3	6	8	9	5	1	7
8	7	1	4	6	3	2	5	9
9	3	2	8	5	1	4	7	6
6	5	4	9	2	7	8	3	1
3	6	8	7	4	2	1	9	5
2	1	7	5	9	8	3	6	4
5	4	9	3	1	6	7	2	8

FORECAST

SUNSET: 17:21 HRS
SUNRISE: THURSDAY 07:05 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	21	07
New Delhi	23	08
Amritsar	21	06
Bathinda	23	07
Jalandhar	21	05
Ludhiana	21	07
Bhiwani	22	07
Hisar	21	07
Sirsa	23	08
Dharamsala	15	07
Manali	15	01
Shimla	17	07
Srinagar	10	-01
Jammu	20	10
Kargil	-07	-13
Leh	-07	-14
Dehradun	24	08
Mussoorie	15	06

TEMPERATURE IN °C

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National shame

Gender sensitisation and wider societal changes are needed to end sex crimes

Last week’s brutal rape and murder of a 26-year-old veterinarian in Hyderabad has led to an outpouring of anger across the country and in Parliament. Several MPs questioned the adequacy of criminal laws and a judicial system that permits under-age convicts to get away with lenient punishment and others sentenced to death to escape the noose through mercy petitions. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the government was “ready to make more stringent provisions in law”. After the 2012 Nirbhaya outrage in Delhi, and on the recommendations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 was passed, by bringing in changes to the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. Key amendments were brought in to provide for death penalty for rape that led to death of the victim or reduced the survivor to a persistent vegetative state and anyone found guilty of rape more than once. In 2018, further changes introduced death as the maximum punishment for every perpetrator in a gang-rape when the victim is less than 12, and life-long imprisonment if the victim is less than 16. In the Delhi case, a fast-track trial court sentenced four to death in September 2013, while the only juvenile accused was freed after a stint at a remand home. The Supreme Court dismissed their appeals against conviction in 2017; two years on, the convicts have filed curative petitions in the court and one has already written to the President of India for clemency.

As protests rocked Hyderabad demanding speedy justice, four lorry workers, arrested on charges of raping and killing the veterinarian returning from work, were kept in solitary confinement. After the Nirbhaya incident, the UN Human Rights chief had called rape and violence against women in India a “national problem” which would need “national solutions”. Unfortunately, in the past week, rapes and assault have been reported from Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. The National Crime Records Bureau which released its 2017 data this October said a total of 3.59 lakh cases of crimes against women were reported, a 6% rise compared to 2016. Of this, assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty comprised 21.7%, and rape 7%. For every rape reported, there are many which go unrecorded as patriarchal mindsets remain unchanged. A suggestion by an MP that rapists “must be brought out in public and lynched” is hardly the answer. Better policing, fast-track courts, quick sentencing are the need of the hour as each can serve as a deterrent. What should be included in every curriculum is gender sensitisation, right from school. Public places must be made safer for all. Boys and girls should be raised right in an atmosphere of freedom and a culture of mutual respect. The cycle of rapes, outrage and amnesia must end.

Waiting for change

The BCCI is subtly pushing for a rollback of its reworked constitution

Indian cricket operates at two levels as its heroics on the field are often juxtaposed with a state of limbo off the turf. Virat Kohli’s men have relished a scalding hot winning streak and it is a contrast to the slow wheels of change that coursed through the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) over the last few years. The introspective bout started with the spot-fixing scandal that rocked the IPL’s 2013 edition. A few players and officials came under the scanner for under-performance and betting. The Supreme Court stepped in and appointed the Lodha Committee to devise corrective measures besides unveiling a set of administrative reforms within the BCCI. The Committee of Administrators helmed by Vinod Rai, oversaw the implementation of reforms that evoked dogged resistance from the BCCI’s old guard. Eventually, a new dispensation led by president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah took shape. And the much-delayed BCCI annual general meeting held at Mumbai, after a gap of three years, on Sunday, was expected to take the sporting behemoth forward. It partially did that by backing enhanced subsidies for State associations and a higher pay-scale for senior domestic cricketers. Yet, it turned out to be a sluggish exercise as the BCCI sought clarity from the Supreme Court on some constitutional amendments that the former seeks to make.

The powers of its office-bearers, the tenure of its president and secretary, a relaxation of the age-cap of 70 specific to its representative at the International Cricket Council and an exemption from seeking the Supreme Court’s approval for every amendment to its constitution are the various factors about which the board has requested a second gaze from the law. These issues were seemingly sorted through the Lodha Committee’s reworked constitution but in seeking the court’s clarification, the BCCI is pushing for a rollback without trying to be seen as confrontational. The Lodha reforms were aimed at removing the veil of bias that often blinds any old boys’ club. Transparency was its byword but some of its suggested rules were constricting. For instance the insistence that an office-bearer who has served two terms of three years each, be it at the State or board level, has to compulsorily take a three-year cooling-off period can go against the grain of cumulative wisdom acquired over the years. It is a rule that would mean the current president and secretary will have to relinquish office within a year as both Ganguly and Shah have already served five years in their respective State associations – Bengal and Gujarat. The Supreme Court may reshape some rules and its last word is essential to lubricate Indian cricket’s conveyor belt.

One state push for Israel and Palestine?

Any future solution must be one that rectifies past evils and offers democracy to all Palestinians



ILAN PAPPÉ

The recognition of the U.S. State Department of the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank is yet another indication that the two-state solution is dead. There are 600,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and they will soon be one third of the overall population. When the Zionist settlers in the 1930s became one third of the population, Palestine was doomed. This is when the Zionist leadership began to contemplate the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

The West Bank is under a similar danger. Vast areas have already been ethnically cleansed, and the rest are enclaved in spaces that at any given moment Israel can turn into inhabitable areas, as it did in the Gaza Strip. This policy has so far been immune from any significant international rebuke.

Imaginary homeland

The “Green Line” – the 1949 armistice line that separates Israel from the West Bank – is a figment of the imagination of those who support the two-state solution. It was replaced by a greater Israel, ruled by the Israeli nationality law passed in 2018 that states that only the Jews have the right of self-determination all over historical Palestine, sanctions the continued colonisation of the country and upholds its apartheid system.

This new reality requires a different approach by anyone caring for the future of the Palestinians and respects their basic rights.

This is now a struggle for a regime change. A regime that allows half of the population living between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean to have all the privileges and continue to rob the other half of its living space, lands, rights, dignity and life. Such an oppressive reality is not solved by a “peace process” but only by decolonisation that would reformulate the relationship between the third generation of Jewish settlers who arrived in the late 19th century and the indigenous population of Palestine on the basis of equality.

Decolonisation is rightly associated with processes that took place in the first half of the last century (such as the one leading to the liberation of India), but that does not mean colonisation disappeared from the rest of the globe. Even more importantly, the process of decolonisation, apart from two places, Algeria and South Africa, has not affected settler colonial projects which ended in the creation of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel, to mention but few of those cases.

Ongoing ‘catastrophe’

In some cases, the settler community acted upon the logic, defined by the late Australian scholar, Patrick Wolfe, as “the logic of the elimination of the native”. This led to the genocide of native Americans and aboriginals. But even there the struggle continues for recognition, restitution and equality. In Palestine, that logic was translated to an incremental process of ethnic cleansing, which the Palestinians call “the ongoing Nakba” (Nakba in Arabic is catastrophe and is used in the Palestinian narrative to describe the ethnic cleansing of 1948).

The Zionist movement succeeded in expelling half the Palestinian



FILE PHOTO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

population in 1948 and since 1967 led to departure of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from all over historical Palestine (the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Israel). Today, the Israeli government continues to dispossess land and take away resources from Palestinians, thus creating conditions that become more and more unsustainable for many Palestinians.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Palestinians resisted this policy of colonisation and dispossession with an armed struggle in their quest for freedom and liberation. In many ways, the Hamas in Gaza seems still to believe that this can be an effective tool in the struggle. But quite a few Palestinians seem to prefer a different kind of popular resistance, given the imbalance of power between the strongest military force in West Asia and the weakest one.

The “march of return” – the weekly peaceful demonstrations by thousands of Palestinians on the fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel is one example of a different kind of a popular resistance, which demands not only the end of the inhuman siege on Gaza and its two million people that has led to a human catastrophe there, but also the right of return of the refugees to their homes; 80% of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are refugees who live near their lands, villages and towns from which they were expelled in 1948.

Headwinds after a hard-line approach

With Xi Jinping and the Communist Party facing various pressures, Beijing could be tempted to deflect the attention



HARSH V. PANT

The challenges for the Communist Party of China and Chinese President Xi Jinping are mounting by the day. In a stunning rebuke to the Communist Party’s handling of the Hong Kong crisis, pro-democracy forces made massive gains in local elections held last month; 17 of the 18 district councils are now controlled by pro-democracy councillors. The election saw an unprecedented voter turnout of more than 71%.

Managing Hong Kong

This outcome is a strong show of support for the protesters in a first real test of sentiment in the territory since protests began early in 2019 over the introduction of a bill authorising extraditions to mainland China. In her statement, the embattled leader of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, said her government respected the results and would “listen to the opinions of members of the public humbly and seriously reflect”.

It is not clear, however, if the

voices of the Hong Kong street protests would be heard in Beijing where there is little incentive for Xi Jinping to change his approach. Instead he might just double down on his hardline approach as his options shrink faster than he would have anticipated when the crisis started earlier this year.

This is particularly problematic for Mr. Xi as he held the Hong Kong portfolio on the Communist Party’s Politburo Standing Committee before he became China’s de facto emperor. He seems to have an implicit faith in his unyielding tough stance, and as he has centralised power to an unprecedented level, there is no one else to share any blame for the policies enunciated by Mr. Xi. Not surprisingly, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has reiterated that “no matter what happens, Hong Kong is a part of China” and warned that “any attempt to mess up Hong Kong, or even damage its prosperity and stability, will not succeed.”

Uighur issue

Yet the inability of the Xi regime to exercise control came into sharp relief when a massive trove of classified Chinese government documents was leaked to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, showcasing a much more granular narrative of how



REUTERS

China is carrying out the mass detention of Muslim Uighurs and other minorities in its northwest Xinjiang province. These documents belie repeated Chinese claims that it is sending the estimated million or more people to vocational training schools with the notional goal of combating terrorism. What is even more of an eye-opener is that Chinese embassies and consulates worldwide had been instrumental in facilitating the mass detention. Every time such details emerge, they diminish China’s global credibility. It might not seem much on the surface but China’s global stature does take a beating.

For Mr. Xi, this growing global backlash has enormous costs back home. There are no good options for him in Hong Kong. If he continues his hard-line approach, he will make the ground situation worse in Hong Kong but making concessions also is not a very viable option for him as it is not readily evident how far the demands

might go. Though the extradition bill has been withdrawn, the demands of protesters in Hong Kong have grown to include genuine universal suffrage and an inquiry into allegations of police brutality. From Hong Kong to Taiwan where there are elections in January, there is only a short distance.

Effect on party dynamics

Mr. Xi’s reputation as a leader who will lead China’s emergence as a major power in the 21st century might also come under a cloud in so far as mainland Chinese is concerned. The delicate balance that the Communist Party has managed to evolve in the politics of China can be frayed if ordinary Chinese believe their leadership is incapable of managing turmoil.

There is also a chance of interne-rine rivalries within the Communist Party flaring up as Mr. Xi’s policies take a hit. He has made a lot of enemies in his drive to emerge as the supreme leader and he has been ruthless with his opponents. Some of them would be waiting in the wings to respond in kind. The Chinese economy is not doing well. There is growing internal criticism of Mr. Xi’s flagship Belt and Road Initiative and the costs China is having to bear for a grandiose project, driven more by Mr. Xi’s vanity than by sound economic logic.

China’s aggressive influence operations in other countries are also generating strong backlash, with new revelations coming out every few months. Most recently, the Australian media has reported on an alleged Chinese plot to plant a spy in the Australian Parliament which has been termed as “deeply disturbing” by the Australian Prime Minister and is being investigated now by the nation’s domestic spy agency. This along with reports that a Chinese spy has applied for asylum in Australia after providing information about Chinese operations in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia and suggesting that he was “personally involved” in espionage work has damaged an already battered Chinese global image.

As pressures mount on Xi Jinping and the Communist Party, there are dangers that Beijing might want to divert attention from its own internal failures by lashing out at the world. New Delhi should guard against any Chinese misadventures even as it prepares itself to deal with negative externalities emerging out of the multiple crises brewing in Beijing.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi and Professor of International Relations at King’s College London

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

War of words

It is unfortunate that the absence of seven members who raised starred questions led to the adjournment of the Upper House five minutes earlier on Monday. House Chairman Venkaiah Naidu is right in terming it a “sorry state of affairs” (Inside pages, “Venkaiah upset at absence of members”, December 3). Does their absence mean that the members who raised the questions were not so serious about their questions? It is only appropriate that suitable forms of punishment are meted out to such members.

Also, while it was unbecoming of Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury to have used an inappropriate word to describe the Prime Minister and the Home Minister it was indiscreet on the part of the Parliamentary Affairs Minister to have reacted by raising the Congress

president’s foreign origin in the Lok Sabha. This kind of tit-for-tat serves no meaningful purpose. Moreover, it is a sheer waste of time, energy and money (“BJP, Congress spar over ‘infiltrator’ comment”, December 3). It is a *sine qua non* that the level of conduct of our lawmakers and the standard of their debate require a marked improvement. It is time that they stopped being argumentative, acted as responsible lawmakers and became effective debaters too.

G.G. KURIKOSE,
Kothamangalam, Kerala

Meting out punishment

There is widespread protest in various parts of the country demanding capital punishment in connection for the perpetrators of the rape and murder of the woman veterinarian in Hyderabad. Some of our politicians too have voiced this opinion

(“Rajya Sabha in rage over rape”, December 3). At this juncture, my heart goes to the young girl of Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir who was abducted, raped for days and then murdered. At that time, the arrests of the accused saw some heartless and communal-minded elements oppose their arrest.

The gravest shock was the presence of persons with political affiliations take part in these protests. For long, I have been against capital punishment, but after reading about the Kathua case and now Hyderabad, I am doubly convinced that it is a must.

THARGIUS S. FERNANDO,
Chennai

■ The suggestion from some of our lawmakers and the public to impose death penalty for rape is fraught with danger. This may motivate rapists to murder all their victims, since the punishment for both the crimes (rape as well as

murder) is the same, and eliminating the victim gives them a better chance to avoid punishment, by removing the person who can testify against them. I feel that it may be better to introduce castration along with life imprisonment, since the social stigma of castration and the public humiliation thereof may act as a major deterrent. It may also leave the perpetrator suitably dampened and therefore less of a menace even if he is released after a sufficiently long sentence.

C. RAMESH,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ The Hyderabad rape and murder is a heinous crime no doubt but it is also disturbing that some of our parliamentarians got too emotional in Parliament on Monday and listed drastic options. One may appreciate their concern and their seriousness, but such statements would send out wrong signals as we are already witness to members

of the public taking the law into their own hands and indulging in acts of revenge at the slightest provocation. The reactions in Parliament also expose the Central and State governments – they still do not have clear cut policies for ensuring the safety of women.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

■ It has become customary for the government to talk about making more stringent provisions in the law for grave offences. There are already strict laws; enforcement is the question. Merely strengthening the laws to curb rape will have little effect if they are not enforced through fast track courts and the guilty punished immediately after the judgment. The slow pace

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The Editorial page article titled “India’s food basket must be enlarged” (Nov. 29, 2019), erroneously said globally there are 37 sites designated as GIAHS. As per the FAO website, globally there are 57 sites designated as GIAHS.

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of justice only emboldens the perpetrators.

D. SETHURAMAN,
Chennai

Uptick in tiger numbers

It is glad tidings that the tiger population in India has gone up from 750 in the last four years to 2,976 (December 3). However this would now mean the need for a corresponding vacation of human habitations near forest buffer areas. There is also the issue of inbreeding as with the rise in numbers, there has to be “better dispersal”. Such important details need to be clarified. Expanding existing sanctuaries and creating new ones are also crucial.

R. SAMPATH,
Chennai

INTERVIEW | RATHIN ROY

‘Structural policies needed for 7-plus % growth’

The slowdown is an outcome of supply-side constraints, says the economist



The official GDP growth estimate for the July-September quarter, at 4.5%, is the lowest in 26 quarters. Rathin Roy, Director of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, and former member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, discusses the causes of the economy's troubles and suggests possible remedies. Edited excerpts:

The Finance Minister says the economy is not in recession. According to the latest official estimates, GVA growth in the first and second quarters of this financial year were 0.6% and -1.0%. Going by the technical definition, isn't manufacturing very close to being in recession?

■ It's definitely close to being in recession but for different reasons. Measuring recession in terms of negative growth in two quarters is a developed countries concept. It applies when economies are in a steady state and recession is a departure from the steady state. [A state of fully tapped land and capital so that growth is possible in case of improvements in technology and productivity, as happens in developed economies. In developing economies, growth is possible by increasing use of resources.] The Finance Minister is correct that in terms of conventional economics this is a slowdown, not a recession.

In India's case, 6-7% is the achievable growth rate without doing much since we are a growing economy. With reforms we can aspire for even higher growth. We are now below 6%, that is below what I would expect the growing Indian economy to normally achieve without doing much. Therefore, in the sense of a developing and growing economy, I would say, and I hope the Minister is persuaded, that we are in recession.

The Chief Economic Adviser has said that growth will begin to pick up from the third quarter. Do you agree?

■ I think so, but what really matters



FILE PHOTO - R.V. MOORTHY

is that if India is to complete its development transformation, it must grow at more than 5%, even when things are bad. Sub-5% growth is a development disaster and cannot be tolerated.

What needs to be done to make sure that the full-year growth rate does not dip to sub-5%?

■ The first thing we need to understand is that we are not a command and control economy. We need to accept this recession is structural in nature. Therefore, getting the growth rates consistently up to 7-plus% will require structural actions. If these actions are taken, short-term-actions can be thought of to keep the growth rate above 5% over a two-year window, which is the maximum you can afford to keep such short-term actions in place because they are a bit like steroids.

What short-term actions and structural actions?

■ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) can quickly increase the amount of cash in the economy. Then banks, especially public sector banks, can use that together with interest rate policy to provide easy credit. A larger supply of credit should lead to cheaper credit. This will have to be supported by reduction of the administered price of credit, which is the RBI's repo rate. There could be hurdles to credit off-take due to fiduciary or prudential reasons, so those need to be tackled. Same for mismatched expectations. If these temporary measures for boosting aggregate demand - both consumption demand and investment demand - are the only mea-

If India is to complete its development transformation, it must grow at more than 5%, even when things are bad. Sub-5% growth is a development disaster

asures taken, and structural measures get neglected, then the threat of inflation is real. The inevitable result of that will be stagflation.

How can mismatched expectations be tackled? Many people will not take on loans even at 0% interest rate today because they can no longer see what the next few years hold.

■ The government needs to hold granular conversations with the private sector. For instance, we have a market for textiles that we are losing to Bangladesh. What is it that inhibits us from gaining that market through import substitution? What can we do in terms of credit and securing the running of a business in that specific sector? One reason we are not able to compete with Bangladesh is that we are not able to locate moderately priced medium-value high-volume textile factories in those States where labour is relatively cheap. Tirupur and Gujarat are high-wage geographies to produce ₹400 shirts. Why are we not able to locate the industries in Bihar, Jharkhand or Varanasi? So, if you kick-start investment in north and eastern India, you start taking advantage of India's biggest asset: an abundant pool of reasonably priced labour, which has over the years got fairly skilled because of migration. This is what I would call a skills and industrial policy. This is

complex policymaking. It requires political investment.

What other sectors are key to the structural actions strategy?

■ Agriculture, housing, health and education. What is the balance sheet of agriculture? We have never asked that question because our priority always was to take food to the hungry, a very laudable objective. But a consequence of that is farmers have been disempowered by multiple interventions. If I divide India into 14-15 agroclimatic zones, can I take a view of the viability of farming as a business? We never hear of farmer suicides in Bengal as we do in Maharashtra. Why does the business model in Bengal work better than in Maharashtra? The business model of agriculture was successful in Punjab but temporarily so. So, business model change is needed in agriculture.

Similar problems arise in healthcare and education. Healthcare for people like you and me is expensive but affordable. In the sense, a major once-in-a-lifetime intervention costs possibly three-four months' salary. Minimum wage earners face similar prices. We don't have a business model allowing them use of their earnings to buy reasonable amounts of healthcare which the government can then supplement. Either you get rationed healthcare after the entire machine of government has had its fill of the public health system...

Or you get bankrupted going to the private system?

■ Subsidies and welfare giveaways will not work because we do not have the supply of medical personnel to deliver affordable healthcare at this scale - not at subsidy, but at scale.

We have the same problem in education. Housing is simpler. The land is available with government. The question is, is there is willingness to deploy it for affordable housing and not golf courses and flyovers.

So, the slowdown is an outcome of supply-side constraints and not demand-side constraints.

■ Absolutely. If you produce things that Indians earning minimum wages can afford, aggregate demand will increase.

Puja Mehra is an independent journalist

Setting the clock back on intersex human rights

The Transgender Persons Bill does not distinguish between transgender and intersex persons



PRASHANT SINGH

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019, has continued to trigger protests across the country. Without addressing the concerns of the LGBTQ community and considering any amendment to the draft Bill, the Rajya Sabha has passed the same version of the draft law that was passed by the Lok Sabha.

Journey of intersex human rights

In April 2019, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court delivered a historic judgment in *Arunkumar v. The Inspector General of Registration*. This judgment marks the beginning of a normative journey of intersex human rights in India. The court took up the issue of validity of consent given on behalf of intersex infants for undergoing sex selective surgeries. It held that the consent of the parent cannot be considered as the consent of the child. Hence, such surgeries should be prohibited. This is a momentous judgment as it recognises the consent rights of intersex children and the right to bodily integrity. The judgment declared a prohibition on sex selective surgeries on intersex children in Tamil Nadu. Complying with the directions of the court, Tamil Nadu banned sex reassignment surgeries on intersex infants and children. As the Transgender Bill also deals with issues related to human rights protection of intersex persons, it needs to be examined in light of the developments of intersex human rights.

However, the title of the Bill itself is exclusionary as it does not accommodate all persons whose legal protection it seeks to recognise. It is instructive for the legislature to appreciate the nuances when it comes to distinguishing between transgender and intersex persons. Transgenders have a different gender identity than what was assigned to them at birth, while intersex indicates diversity of gender based on biological characteristics at birth. There are also multiple variations in intersex itself. The Bill is not in alignment with the evolving international human rights framework. Parliament will be well-advised to consider changing the title of the Bill to Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019. The Bill also conflates the

condition of intersex persons with transgender persons. Barring a few overlaps, the legal and welfare needs of intersex persons are different from those of transgender persons.

Therefore, the definition should highlight this distinction between transgender persons and intersex persons enabling them to exercise the rights which they are entitled to. Some persons born or living with intersex traits can live with a non-binary identity or may choose to live as gender fluid persons. The Bill fails to account for these possibilities. Neither does it provide for the definition of terms such as gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

The Bill doesn't say much about discrimination against intersex persons. Intersex conditions are termed in derogatory terms even by medical professionals. To address this, the Bill should have included a provision directing medical professionals to ensure that intersex traits are not characterised as "disorders of sex development". Intersex traits should not be considered as genetic defects/ disorders, and terms like 'gender dysphoria' should be used to characterise them.

Unnecessary medical procedures

As per court-based jurisprudence, medical procedures are not a necessity for self-identification. Still, the Union Health Ministry has admitted that medical procedure including sex reassignment surgeries are being performed on intersex children. The Ministry has given the justification that this is only done after a thorough assessment of the child, with the help of appropriate diagnostic tests and only after taking a written consent of the patient/guardian. When this response was presented before the Madras High Court in *Arunkumar*, the court slammed the Health Ministry for its poor understanding of consent rights and imposed a ban on the practice of sex reassignment surgeries on intersex infants/children. The Bill fails to protect intersex persons from unnecessary medical intervention.

World over, the discourse around gender and sexuality has evolved a great deal in the last decade. However, the current legislative discourse on this issue suffers from lack of foundational understanding. Intersex persons are particularly vulnerable and experience barriers in access to education, employment, marriage, etc. In its current form, the Bill turns back the clock on decades of positive change brought about by intersex activists.

Prashant Singh is an advocate at the Supreme Court of India

A critique of China, not Pakistan

Decoding Alice Wells's speech lambasting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

MICHAEL KUGELMAN

On November 21, Ambassador Alice Wells delivered an address at the Wilson Center in Washington lambasting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Why did Ms. Wells make this speech? And why now? After all, while several Trump administration officials have criticised the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), they have said little publicly about CPEC.

Additionally, Washington's relations with Islamabad have improved over the last year or so as the administration has sought Pakistani cooperation with the peace process in Afghanistan. With Washington not wanting to antagonise Islamabad, the timing may seem odd for a senior U.S. official to excoriate what Pakistan designates as its most high-priority development project.

Indo-Pacific strategy

In reality, why Ms. Wells made this speech, and why now, has more to do with China than Pakistan.

The speech was an incisive critique of Chinese policy, and of the development model embodied by BRI. It was not a critique of Pakistan. (Islamabad's relatively subdued response acknowledges as much.) Ms. Wells argued that America's development model is more desirable than China's - and that Pakistan and other nations receiving BRI monies can benefit more from American largesse.

The speech was an expression of the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, which aims to underscore a vision for Asia that facilitates more freedom and prosperity than that espoused by Beijing. To be sure, the Indo-Pacific strategy doesn't include Pakistan. Still, what better way for Washington to push back against Beijing than by calling out CPEC, the most operationalised and expensive component of BRI - and a project that raises concerns about financing, transparency, and sustainability?

It's also worth keeping the administration's broader China policy in mind. The White House has been relentlessly hawkish towards Beijing. It set the tone when its first national security strategy identified strategic rivalry as a national security concern -

and China, by extension, as a national security threat. While the administration has contemplated conciliation with some bitter rivals (North Korea and even Iran), it has been consistent in its hard line on China. Against this backdrop, Ms. Wells's speech makes perfect sense.

Challenge for the U.S.

It's easy to agree with her CPEC criticism; the concerns she articulated about cost, debt, transparency, and jobs are acknowledged by many, including some CPEC boosters in Pakistan. However, her suggestion that the U.S. can do development better - both in Pakistan and the broader region - is a harder sell. The U.S. may well promote "a vision for the Indo-Pacific region that is free and open," and it may pledge to partner with the region on "freedom, openness, and economic prosperity." Implementation, however, is the challenge.

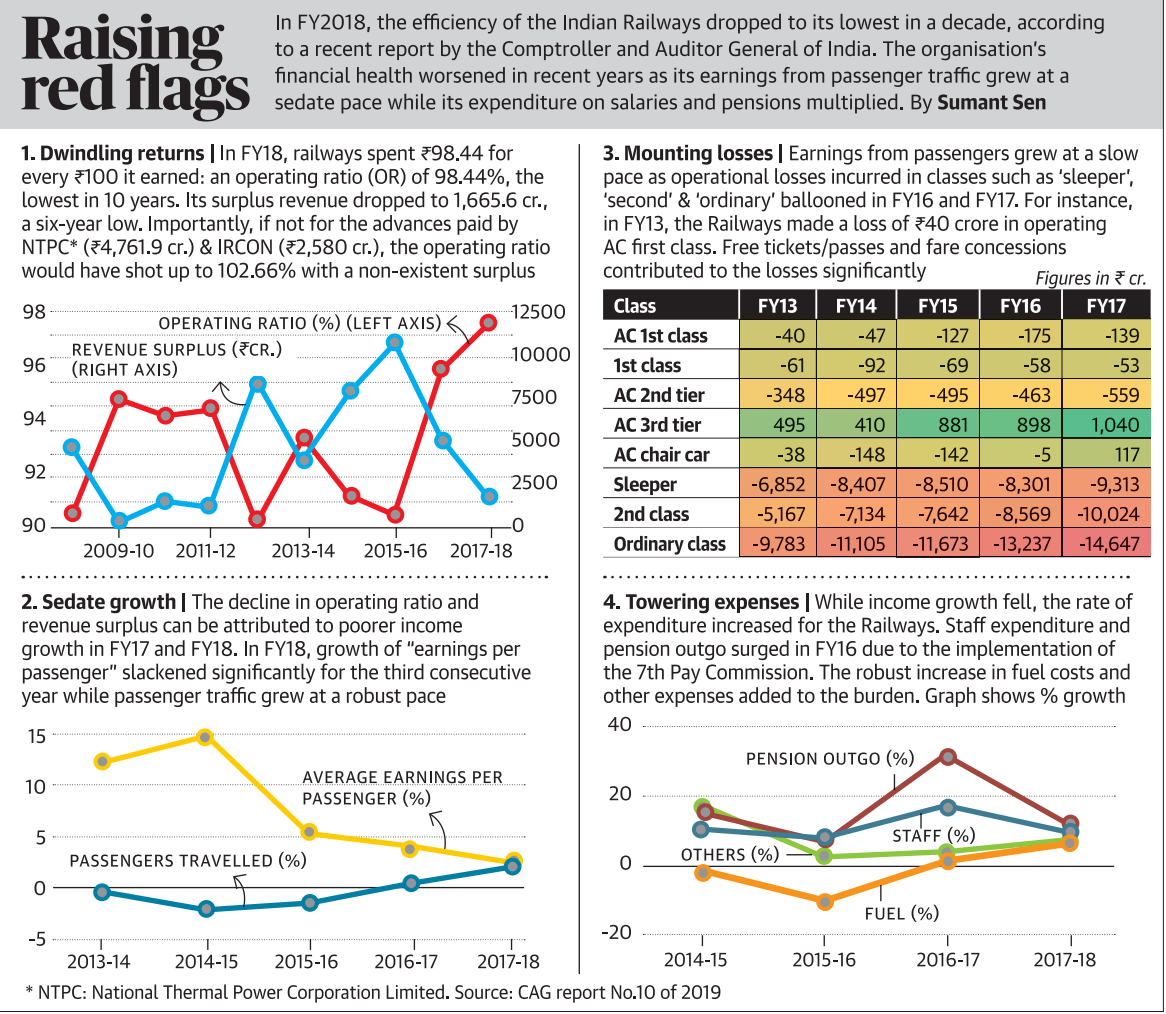
Yes, Washington has provided billions in development aid to Islamabad. It has long backed the fledgling Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. The Trump administration's first budget included the New Silk Road initiative - first articulated by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011 as an idea to better connect South and Central Asia - as part of its funding request for activities in both regions. Other opportunities abound, from engaging with development-focused regional groups like BIMSTEC to backing a potential electricity-sharing arrangement between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal. And yet, to date, the U.S.'s collective efforts on economic development in Pakistan and the region can't hold a handle to those of China. Beijing has more capital, presence, projects, and arguably popularity.

Still, Ms. Wells' speech is a wake-up call for Beijing about Washington's concerns about CPEC, and a reminder of the intensity of U.S.-China rivalry. We shouldn't expect smoother sailing for the world's two most powerful nations any time soon.

Michael Kugelman is the Deputy Director of the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington, DC



DATA POINT



FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 4, 1969

Ajoy wants Basu to quit

Mr. Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee, West Bengal's Chief Minister, to-day [December 3] called for the exit of Deputy Chief Minister Jyoti Basu from the Government. Sixty-nine-year-old Mukherjee is on hunger strike for the third successive day in a pandal at Curzon Park "to rouse the conscience of the people against the forces of violence in West Bengal". He asked the large gathering outside the pandal, "Is there any Government - rather a civilised Government - at all in West Bengal with inter-party clashes, killings, lootings and arson all around?" Mr. Mukherjee said that if the people wanted the lawlessness to continue in the State, the Bangla Congress would have to reconsider its stand as to whether it should remain in the United Front Government or not as it did not want to be a party to this state of affairs. "We do not want to be a party to the barbarism being perpetrated in the State." "We are not for power nor are we for the fishes and loaves of office. If the people demand we will give up our office as we do our worn out shoes." He denied the charge that he was attempting to take away the Home portfolio from the Deputy Chief Minister to wreck the Unified Front government.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DEC. 4, 1919.

The Frontier Situation.

Delhi, December 3. - A Press communique dated 3rd instant says: - On the afternoon of the first instant a raiding gang, thought to be Nomad Wazirs, attacked a train from Kohat near That. The train carried an escort of 24 rifles and 2 Lewis guns. Full details are not yet available, but many casualties are reported. The news was received at That late in the evening and a pursuit column was immediately sent out but it failed to get into touch with the gang. Waziristan Sadda Khan, the most influential Tochi Wazir Malik, is said to have changed anti-British policy and to be doing his best to ensure that the two main sections of the Tochi Wazirs comply with our terms. Parties of militia deserters continue active in the Tochi. One of those parties recently came into conflict with a gang of raiding Mahsuds and both sides suffered casualties. Our air operations against the Mahsuds continue effective and in consequence there have been latterly only a few raiding gangs in Derajat, as the tribesmen are too concerned about the fate of their homes to concentrate attention seriously on raiding.

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