

Death of an institution



SUNIL K SINHA

The controversy surrounding the release of the NSSO report on the status of unemployment in India and recent leak of NSO (earlier NSSO) report on household consumption have seriously eroded the credibility of the Indian Statistical System. A look into the working of the NSSO is needed at this moment.

The Indian Statistical System was developed to capture a wide variety of data on our very large and decentralised economy. Despite the system's impressive achievements, there has been growing concerns regarding the quality of data. To address problems of data collection, tabulation and interpretation the Indian Statistical Service (ISS) took shape in 1961. Subsequently in line with the recommendations of the Rangarajan Commission the present National Statistical Commission (NSC) came into existence on July 12, 2006. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) has been tasked to undertake large scale household and enterprise surveys on various aspects of the economy.

The NSS was established in 1950 by the government on the advice of late Professor P C Mahalanobis, then statistical adviser to the Cabinet, with support from Jawaharlal Nehru. The National Income Committee had found large gaps in the statistical data for the computation of national income aggregates. The main objective of NSS was to fill these data gaps. In April 1961 the Department of Statistics was set up and NSS became a part of it. In October 1999, the NSSO became an attached office in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

The National Sample Survey inaugurated its survey operations with a multi-subject enquiry conducted in the rural areas only from October 1950 to March 1951. By the 10th round NSS was firmly established. The Indian Statistical Institute, too, got a statutory status, with the passing of the ISI Act in Parliament (1959). An evidence of its general recognition was the interest shown by government organisations and autonomous bodies in using the NSS survey apparatus for collecting data needed by them.

As per an administrative order of the MoSPI in May 2019, the NSSO along with CSO have now been renamed NSO with no change in the status of the four divisions of the NSSO. The little autonomy which the NSSO enjoyed to produce analytical reports seems to have been eroded. No doubt there are working groups and technical committees and the National Statistical Commission (NSC), but their present roles remain purely technical. Some of the recent NSS reports were leaked to the print media before release leading to many accusations.

Next year the NSS will be 70 years old. As a well-wisher of the Indian Statistical System and part of the system for more than 37 years here are some suggestions to improve data quality.

- The government of the day should consider data collection as its priority area and avoid short term contractual appointments. Sufficient increase in regular data collection staff will increase employment opportunities. For more autonomy, NSSO should be placed under National Statistical Commission (NSC) with more legal teeth to the NSC;
- Data collectors should be part of the present Subordinate Statistical Service;
- The Subordinate Statistical Service should be renamed Supporting Statistical Service (SSS);
- The present cadre strength of SSS should include data collectors;
- The strength of data collectors could be determined on the basis of the sample size of surveys to be undertaken by the NSS as approved by the NSC. They should be posted to the states to which they belong and know the local language;
- Since the NSS has been providing estimates of parameters in terms of rates, ratios and percentages, the present sample size of recent NSS surveys is adequate to provide reliable estimates of basic parameters;
- The NSS should now adopt the panel sample approach as is being done for the SRS of the RGI. Such a change in the sample design may need further technical discussions;
- There is need for more stress on research for the SDRD of the NSO. So far they are primarily engaged in designing of survey schedule, tabulation plans, instruction manuals for field staff, training and preparation of analytical reports based on data collected by the Field Operations Division (FOD) and cleaned and tabulated by the Data Processing Division (DPD). They should take up more analytical studies based on unit level data;
- FOD of NSO should intensify field staff training, supervision and random checks of filled-in schedules, analysis of tour diary of supervisors.

The author is former DG and CEO of NSSO

Why little Gurupreet had to pay with her life

As long as Asian governments are moved only by greed, corruption and callousness, massive illegal immigration, domestic abuse and child labour will continue



WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY

The haunting tragedy of six-year-old Gurupreet Kaur from Hasanpur in Haryana who died of thirst in the blistering Arizona desert highlights the criminal negligence of a government whose empty rhetoric unmatched by caring policies forces despised and deprived Indians to vote with their feet.

Gurupreet entered the US from Mexico in June with her mother who was one of the five Indians dropped off by human traffickers at a remote and infamous location near Tucson. Apparently, the mother left her with another family to search for water but couldn't find any-one on her return. A border patrol eventually discovered Gurupreet's remains in the desert. The Sikh Coalition, an umbrella organisation for the community in the US, enabled the mother to join her husband who had been living in New York city while his asylum case made its way through the US immigration court system.

That horrendous report reminded me of Manmohan Singh telling P V Narasimha Rao in the early days of liberalisation that people were accusing him of selling India. "Who would want to buy this country anyway?" was Narasimha Rao's wry retort. That realistic assessment rebuts Amit Shah's proud vow to evict all illegal immigrants from India. Who would bother to smuggle into a country whose own citizens disgracefully head the global immigration list? Ireland's richest citizen is an Indian.

A small victory in Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal is of far greater relevance to Indian conditions than the sizzling pro-democracy riots and scorching election results that gripped the world's attention. A 32-year-old Pakistani who was referred to only as Zn to protect his identity said he was tricked into going to the city under a valid domestic helper visa and then subjected to beatings, abuse, threats and endless labour and all for no pay at all. He was sent home at the end of his tenure, but returned illegally to

Hong Kong to complain to the authorities.

Zn might easily have been an Indian who is driven abroad by persecution or neglect and is at the mercy of human traffickers who exploit poverty and trade in the hopes of men and women aspiring to a better life. The same poverty that drove him to Hong Kong forces hundreds of thousands of Indian victims of deprivation to take horrendous risks every year in the search for the decent livelihood that *Bharat Mata* denies them.

Noting that Indians account for one in 20 migrants worldwide, the American Pew Research Centre says that many Indian migrants complain of persecution by the Hindu nationalist authorities. Economic conditions are said to have worsened under the Bharatiya Janata Party. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime finds that dismal job prospects at home forces young Indians to seek employment abroad so that Indians account for about half the 11 million illegals in the US. The number of Indians caught spiralled from 77 in 2008 to 8,997 in 2018. Driven by hardship, these adventurous souls mortgage their homesteads in Punjab or Haryana, pawn the family jewellery and borrow heavily to satisfy the greed of the criminal traffickers who organise their trips.

Gurupreet's family are among them. "We wanted a safer and better life for our daughter

and we made the extremely difficult decision to seek asylum here in the US," the parents said in a heart-wringing statement. "We trust that every parent, regardless of origin, colour or creed, will understand that no mother or father ever puts their child in harm's way unless they are desperate."

Returning to Zn, after serving six months in jail for illegal entry he sued the authorities for ignoring his complaints and failing in their obligations under the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance. Upholding Zn's complaint, Justice Kevin Zervos said last week while Hong Kong laws prohibit certain acts under the umbrella of human trafficking — from prostitution to assault — it does not have legislation targeting human trafficking itself. Zn's lawyers want the law revised in line with international standards to suppress the "evil" of trafficking that has become "a colossal problem everywhere".

Deterrent punishment might curb the criminal activities of traffickers. But the demand for their services will remain as long as Asian governments are moved only by greed, corruption and callousness. That is the root cause not only of massive illegal immigration but of domestic abuses such as bonded and child labour. Both are also rampant in India. Little Gurupreet paid with her life for the lust for power that is the only motivation of India's politicians.

LUNCH WITH BS ▸ J J VALAYA | ARTIST

Fashion's lensman

Fashion photographer? Photographer fashionista? J J Valaya tells K S Shekhawat why he's an artist with a camera

When, in December 2017, fashion designer J J Valaya took a hiatus, the unkind word on the street was that the 25-year-old brand had run out of steam. "I was bored," the affable couturier tells me, stirring a sugar-free sweetener into his *gajar halwa* at the end of our *ghar ka khana* laid out over an expansive marble table. But it was more than inspiration — or its lack — that troubled him. "I love elaborate clothes for people to get married in; embroideries, textures, the whole shebang excites me," he tells me, "but let's face it, I am a lousy businessman."

It was the businessman who took a break to restructure his production, evaluating his core competency — "design" — exiting the manufacturing space by outsourcing it to focus on the creative and retail side. The result was a comeback show in September this year, and the announcement of an eponymous luxury store, spread over 25,000 sq ft, that will come up in New Delhi's Chatarpur in April 2020 combining his three passions: fashion, home and photography in one unified space.

Earlier this week, J J saw the capital's beautiful people beat a tattoo for a glimpse of his third photography exhibition as much out of curiosity about what he was up to as to see whether they featured in his portfolio. And it is the reason I've self-invited myself to his "studio in the city" in a leafy south Delhi colony for a home-cooked lunch. The studio where he does his "creative thinking" would be the envy of any well-heeled millennial — a fully equipped den with a well-stocked bar, capacious sofas, and the trimmings of a well-travelled life.

Shyam, his major-domo, has laid out a vegetarian meal — a fragrant *dal* tempered with ghee and *jeera*, *aloo-methi*, cabbage with peas, a *baingan raita* (all of which I help myself to), *palak-paneer* (who even eats that?) and a *bharta* I'd like but can't reach because it's placed beside J J who, well, isn't one for fussing about what you're eating — or not. At any rate, I promise to come back for more of what Shyam has to offer — the J J kitchen is an exemplar of why we should be eating at home rather than out.

Fashion designers are often dismissed as dilettantes because of the mindscape they

occupy in popular culture — self-styled curators of art, gourmands of exotic viands, purveyors of travel to lands from which they seek inspiration, consumers of literature, creatures as much of PR hype as of their own imaginations. But J J surprised everyone with the contents of his first exhibition of photographs in 2011. Yes, there were all the frills of what you'd expect of a designer — good looking models, known faces, great costumery, greater locations. He shot his images in crowded places rich in history as mis-en-scene. "I hadn't realised until then that I was always taking pictures, all the way back since my student years at NIFT in 1989."

He was certainly around photographers shooting his clothes on models, styling his own shots. In a sense the progression was almost organic. Did he have it in him to be considered a serious "art" photographer — a photographer as artist? One problem was, he thought that artists were "pretentious". He laughs, a spoon of *pulao* poised before him. "And I'm sure all artists think designers are pretentious." At any rate, that first exhibition pulled in celebrity-watchers, but brought him his first viewership without the struggle of a newbie "artist". It was mounted sans a gallery, but J J says the first print was sold to Peter Nagy of Nature Morte, who gave him his next exhibition of architectural photographs.

His current show, *Lalaari*, two-and-a-half years in the making, is different for being studio-staged. The title — dyer in Patiala lingua franca — is accompanied by the expected jingoism around a blank canvas that can be filled up at will, more designer-speak than artist-speak. "I spoke to my sitters at length, I sent them questionnaires," J J says, explaining the depths he plumbed for information surrounding their lives, including facts and memories they may have hidden from themselves. "All of us wear multiple faces, multiple masks," he says, reaching for the *aloo-methi*, tearing off half of a *khasta roti*, "but who are we really?" He eliminated "beauty for its own sake", finding it "bland", but also seeking to avoid the burden of vanity that accompanies it. There was no logic to how he chose them — "friends, strangers, staff", drawn by first impressions, their eyes, an instinctive connection, a sense of character, and their ener-

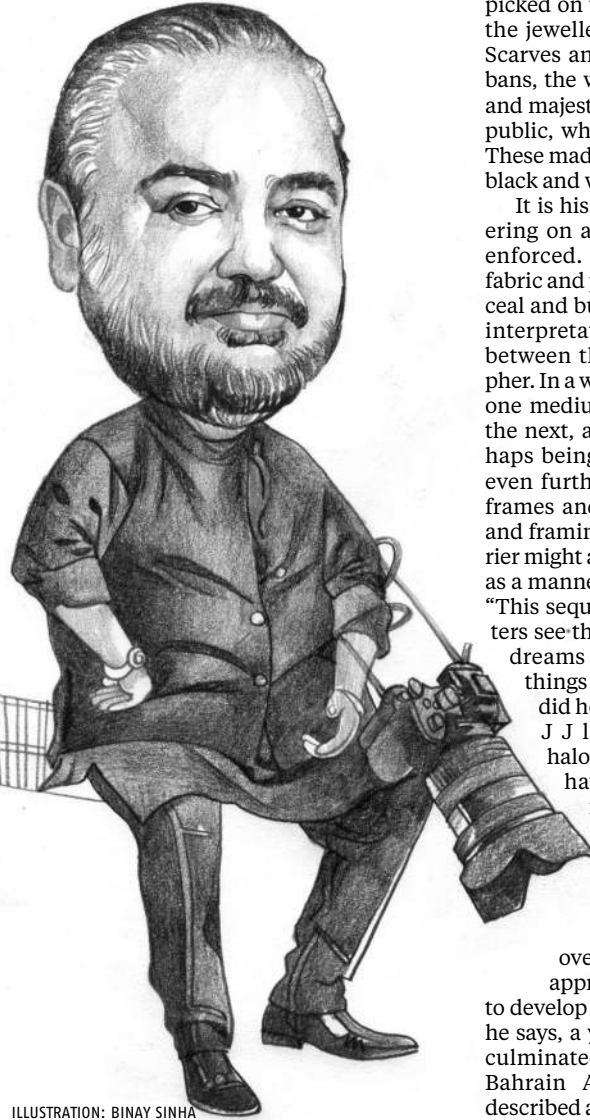


ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

gies. Shoots took up to six hours, post planning the details. "I remember (photographer) Prabuddha Dasgupta telling me that if in a day's work you can get one good shot, you know you've been successful, and you know it the moment you have it. The perfect shot can never be rehearsed."

J J's sitters spanned the spectrum of society, from the old to the young, from the rich and famous to the socially marginalised. I spot friends, acquaintances and celebrities among them, amidst which are portraits of the unknowns — of weavers, dyers, maids —

people invisible to us. "I photographed them as I saw them," J J muses. Even pre-planned, he let events take their course, waiting for Henri Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" to kick in. Clothes — costumes, really — were picked on the spur of the moment, as also the jewellery and other embellishments. Scarves and fabrics were draped like turbans, the whole J J ensemble of opulence and majesty that he purveys to his adoring public, which now sheathed their bodies. These made up most of the ensemble of his black and white portraits.

It is his treatment of texturing and layering on a series of portraits that seems enforced. Using "sheer and opaque" net fabric and playing peekaboo to reveal, conceal and build a sense of "perceptions and interpretations", you see the segueing between the designer and the photographer. In a world where distinctions between one medium and another, one world and the next, are increasingly fluid, is he perhaps being prescient? For he has moved even further with experiments involving frames and jamewarmounts, dressing up and framing the portraits the way a couturier might a body, reducing it to its function as a mannequin. JJ doesn't see it that way. "This sequence is based on how these sitters see themselves, their aspirations and dreams beyond the small and large things that have affected them." How did he represent that, I wonder aloud. J J laughs. "Didn't you notice the halos over them," he asks, "which I have placed to signify incidents from their pasts that they have overcome?" I did, I say, though the interpretation had eluded me at the time.

Now firmly back in the designer's seat, what did he do over his two-year sabbatical? "I was approached by the queen of Bahrain to develop a line with Bahraini craftsmen," he says, a year-long curatorial project that culminated with his participation in the Bahrain Art Fair earlier this year — described as "the coolest place to be" by the cognoscenti. He's also open to more collaborations of the kind he has for FCML (flooring) and Swarovski (jewellery), and his Home line should soon introduce furnishing textiles. Travelling every month to Bahrain, he seized the opportunity to photograph the kingdom extensively, something that will be published as a book, the third in a series of memory books he has created "for gifting to friends". The earlier volumes, on Istanbul and Goa, sit by my bedside, a token of friendship from J J who — practicing meditation, juggling meetings — is engaged with "aligning myself with myself". Amen.

Jewellery with hidden strings



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

In the picturesque Madhya Pradesh village Ghatgara in Dhar district, I came across an older woman wearing the most gorgeous silver jewellery. Even in rural MP, where women customarily wear bangles, rings, earrings and necklaces, her distinctive demeanour stopped me in my tracks. A large gold nose ring adorned her wrinkled face while multiple strands of silver necklaces glistened on her chest. Her arms were equally bejeweled and tattooed to boot, but it was her feet that had me riveted. Gorgeous toe rings tinkled gently as she walked, while solid, hand-crafted silver anklets encased her ankles. "Are you dressed this way for a wedding," I asked. She cackled, showing

off her missing teeth. "What wedding?" she said. "This is what I wear everyday to do my household chores."

Her name was Jada Bai and she belonged to the Bhil community, a fiercely independent tribe spread across Western India. "I've been wearing these ornaments since the day I got married," she told me. "They are now a part of me." Her mother-in-law had given them to her. She pointed to her shy young daughter-in-law standing nearby and said, "Soon I'll pass it on to her." The tribe, she said, has strenuously preserved their old ways to safeguard their tradition. Till date, Bhil youths mostly marry within their community, which also ensures that the family silver stays intact.

"We as a community don't like putting whatever little money we have in banks, so we wear whatever we possess," she laughed when I asked her whether wearing so much jewellery everyday was uncomfortable. "One gets used to it — I'd feel quite naked without it all." Bhil families displayed their social status and wealth this way, she told me. Even their men wore earrings, pendants and bracelets.

In the past, and even to some extent today, silver jewellery used to be an accurate indicator of a family's creditworthiness. "Since we as a community rarely own land or other assets, families would

use silver as collateral when taking loans from moneylenders," she said. Perhaps that was why they preferred designs that were simply hammered out of pure silver. "Embellishments often reduce the purity of the metal," she said showing me her anklets that were solid silver bands. "Our designs are such that they can be sold for the price of pure silver."

Jada Bai kindly allowed me to inspect all her jewellery, assuring me that I couldn't afford to buy most of it. "Do you know, these anklets are one and half kilograms of pure silver each," she asked. They had been twisted round her ankle with pliers and couldn't be taken off. "They say that women's gaits develop a seductive sway when they wear these anklets, but that's only because they are so heavy," she said recalling how hard it was to initially get used to carrying around such extra weight. "Luckily, tradition forbids us from going outside the house freely and wearing these anklets ensured we were physically unable to go very far," she said cackling mirthlessly. "We don't call them *bedis*, shackles, for nothing!"

And just like that, my lust for the Bhil anklets that I couldn't afford anyway, evaporated. I did buy a short chain though, just to remind myself that a taste for jewellery comes with many hidden strings attached.



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

Sometimes two Indias collide — surprisingly, giddily, happily. Case in point: When one woman gave another a hug and a peck on the cheek, a simple, spontaneous gesture of affection as we looked on. Except: one was a royal dowager, regal in her chiffon and pearls; the other a dancer, part of a troupe to entertain wedding guests. As receptions go, it was an intimate affair, ridiculously small by Delhi standards, making up in bonhomie what it lacked in numbers. That odd bonding warmed our hearts more than alcohol that cold night. Where, once, women of the *zenana* would look through those to the margins born, the

easy acceptance of the other was a marker of the distance India has come since independence, a moment of quiet triumph and celebration.

India exists on so many levels that one runs the risk of generalisation. Take the case of millennial couples who think little of toting a nanny along with their kids to a restaurant, but the *ayah* will not be offered a seat, her duty being to spoonfeed the little *babas* and *mis-sy-babys* while remaining standing; and any meal — it won't be leftovers if she's lucky — will be served on a separate table away from the family. How hypocritical that those who wash and cook for us should be considered unclean company. Yet, how often have we asked a driver to share a table when out on a highway, even in a *dhaba*? The thought of the house help sitting on the sofa is galling to most, so having the major domo run through house accounts, or the cook list the ingredients for a party menu while standing up, is not just acceptable, it's desirable.

How many of us care to provide the domestic staff furniture in the kitchen? Do we know the condition of their bed linen, the state of their bathrooms? Are we so tightfisted that we can't think to bring a little cheer into their lives with gifts of snacks (they

can suffer midnight pangs too) or half-decent toiletry? Must they take care of our privileged lives from a state of unhappy drudgery? Can we bridge the difference between the lives of their children and ours by ensuring basic hygiene, education — and the chance of a *chukker* in the sports field? Let us not think of it as charity as much as gratitude, for we owe our working lives to their unflinching support. They have our backs; do we have theirs?

To understand their aspirations and joys, peek into their cameras (with their permission, of course) to see the selfies they've clicked, the songs they've stored, the serials they watch. You'll find photos taken while posing against the family car, the sports bike, the strange sculpture, the lavishly laid table in a celebration of the family's good fortune. Their song list will consist of favourites they cook our meals to; they watch serials on their phone to discuss with their friends and families while waiting in the summer heat or winter cold for us to get off Netflix so they can serve us dinner.

As 2019 winds down and we get busy with our bucket lists and New Year resolutions, don't forget to make a wish for a little more equality for them. Dignity and grace? They have that in abundance.

NATO is full of freeloaders

BRET L STEPHENS

With the conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's 70th anniversary summit in London, it's fair to say that Donald Trump thinks that most alliance members, starting with France and Canada, are a bunch of ungrateful and unhelpful freeloaders. Fair to say, also, that most of those members see Trump as an erratic, pompous, dangerous simpleton.

There's no reason they both can't be right.

The tone of the summit was set several weeks ago, when Emmanuel Macron gave an interview to *The Economist*, warning of the "brain death" of NATO and wondering whether the alliance's mutual defense commitments still meant anything. "If the Bashar al-Assad regime decides to retaliate against Turkey, will we commit ourselves under it?" the French president wondered, imagining a scenario in which Ankara could demand that other NATO members play a supportive role in its barbaric adventure in northern Syria.

Macron was widely rebuked for the remarks, most of all by Trump, who this week called them "very disrespectful," "very, very nasty," and "insulting to a lot of different forces."

Yet they were also very true. Trump announced his withdrawal from Syria without bothering to consult France or Britain, both of which had special forces on the ground fighting the Islamic State. It's Trump, not Macron, who once called NATO "obsolete," just as it's Trump who has repeatedly cast doubt on whether the US would defend NATO states from an attack.

Words have consequences. Trump's domestic political base may think it's just fine to take the president seriously but not literally. Treaty allies like France can't be so cavalier. If Macron is now exploring France's options by talking up the prospect of a European army while talking down the threat from Russia, it's because that's where Trump's wild rhetoric and behavior have led him.

But then we get to the other side of the ledger.

Canada, for instance, spends just 1.27 per cent of its gross domestic product on defense (the NATO target is 2 per cent) and cannot meet its obligations to defend North America's airspace. When Justin Trudeau was overheard at the summit belittling Trump for taking too long with his press conference, the Canadian prime minister sounded to many Americans like a child whining that a working parent had kept him waiting for supper.

All of this means that when Macron and other European leaders muse about creating an autonomous European defence force, they are, as one seasoned Parisian observer put it to me, "playing with cards they don't have." Even sizable increases in defense spending wouldn't fill the gap that an American departure from Europe would leave: Roughly half of European defense spending goes to salaries and pensions, not warfighting capacity.

This is worse than brain death. It's a philosophical failure, the result of a long-term attenuation in the idea of an Atlantic community — the West — united not only by a shared history or common enemies, but also by a unifying set of ethical and political ideals, and the sense that those ideals entwine our destinies. That attenuation preceded Trump and Macron, and it has causes that go beyond any two leaders, including fundamental changes in the demographic makeup of both sides of the Atlantic. Even so, it is being accelerated by them. On Trump's side, through his coarse nationalism, crude transactionalism, and soft spot for strongmen. On Macron's, from an excess of political opportunism and a dearth of strategic sense. Anti-Americanism will always find a receptive audience with much of the French public. But a Europe without American protection is a continental disaster waiting to happen.

The good news is that an institution as large as NATO can run on autopilot for a long time, certainly beyond either Trump's or Macron's tenure of office. At some point, however, real pilots will be needed.

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Weekend Ruminations will resume next week

Divide and win

CAB plus NRC is an idea that's dead on arrival. But it's the BJP's next Ram Mandir that will be used to polarise and expose the party's rivals

For seven decades now, the Pakistani establishment has had one mantra: "Kashmir is just one unfinished business of Partition. You settle that, and we (Pakistan and India) could live as friends, just like Canada and the US."

The consistent Indian response has also been a mantra: Partition was final, and is over. Only fools or suicidal revanchists would talk of reopening that wound.

That script is now changing on the Indian side. Over the past several days we have heard many defenders of the latest amendments to the Citizenship Act, 1955, or the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 (CAB), hark back to Partition. And while they do not use the expression "unfinished business", they leave nothing to chance by using expressions like full justice, closure, and fair deal to non-Muslim minorities. The CAB, they assert, only redeems the promise implicit to the minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

What that promise was, however, is debatable. There is no doubt that Pakistan was imagined, fought for, and achieved as a "homeland" for the subcontinent's Muslims. It did not, however, follow that India could no longer be their home.

It is also true that there was an extensive exchange of population on religious grounds and it was bloodied and embittered by massacres and rape. In a couple of years, however, on the western side, this exchange was over and almost complete. Very few, if any, Muslims remained in Indian Punjab or Hindus and Sikhs on the Pakistani side.

Some trickles did continue until the mid-1960s. Cricketer Asif Iqbal, for example, who captained Pakistan, migrated only in 1961. Until then he was playing in the Hyderabad team, which was later captained by Tiger Pataudi. There was a minor surge in the wake of the 1965 war, and then it ended.

The picture in the east was quite different.

For a variety of complex reasons, the exchange of population between what was then East Pakistan and India's West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura was far from complete. Large sections of Bengali Muslims stayed back in India as did Hindus in East Bengal (Pakistan). But bouts of riots continued, each followed by a tit-for-tat exodus from either side.

It was to stop this that, in 1950, Jawaharlal Nehru and his Pakistani counterpart, Liaquat Ali Khan, signed a detailed agreement of great clarity, known

to history as the Nehru-Liaquat pact. You can read the text here (https://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PA50B1228.pdf). The pact rested on five essential pillars:

1. Both countries commit to not only protect their minorities but to give them all the rights and freedoms including in government jobs, politics, and armed forces.
2. Those who have been displaced/migrated temporarily because of the riots and want to return to their homes will be given due facilitation and protection.
3. Those who did not want to return will be accepted as citizens like any other "migrants".
4. There will, meanwhile, be freedom of movement on both sides and those who still want to migrate will be given protection and help.
5. Both sides will sincerely try to restore order, so people feel secure enough to stay put.

It was following this that India carried out an enumeration and built the first (and so far the last) National Register of Citizens (NRC) in 1951.

In the CAB debate, we often hear BJP leaders refer to Nehru-Liaquat pact to argue that while India kept its part of the commitments, Pakistan didn't. It is difficult to argue with this. The population data shows that while in India the overall population of Muslims has risen, even at a rate marginally higher than that of the Hindus and Sikhs, in the two wings of former Pakistan the minority population has declined steeply. It is a safe conclusion that the minorities have continued to leave Pakistan (and later probably Bangladesh for some time) and settle in India.

Here is, therefore, the reason why the BJP now calls the CAB its answer to what it sees as the unfinished business of Partition: Pakistan didn't keep its commitments under the Nehru-Liaquat pact and, by implication, India became the natural home of non-Muslim minorities still being persecuted there. And there is no reason why a Muslim should feel persecuted for her religion in Islamic states.

Then we start running into complications: First, because Jinnah's two-nation theory is not what India's founders wanted their secular republic to be. Second, at which point does old history end, and the new one begin? And third, is "national" synonymous with "indigenous", "religious" equal to "ethnicity" and "language"?

Since we raised the question of old and new history, it might be necessary for us to go back a few decades to understand the nature and complexity of



NATIONAL INTEREST
SHEKHAR GUPTA

Nithyananda's Kailaasa



VIEWPOINT
DEVANGSHU DATTA

An apocryphal story features a meeting between Queen Victoria and Cecil Rhodes in the late 19th century. The empire builder had returned to Britain after years in Africa.

The Queen asked, "What have you been doing since we last met, Mr Rhodes?"

Rhodes replied, "I have added two dominions to your majesty's empire." (Northern Rhodesia and Rhodesia, now Zambia and Zimbabwe).

The Queen responded, "Oh thank you, Sir Cecil!"

The global political map was malleable then. It continued to see major changes until the 1990s. Apart from the nations

that emerged from the Soviet Union, South Sudan, East Timor and Kosovo have also been carved out in the recent past.

The latest attempted addition is an island called Kailaasa. A fugitive fleeing from rape charges in India has bought an island off the coast of Ecuador. He's set up a website which calls it "nation without borders created by dispossessed Hindus who lost the right to practice Hinduism authentically".

Kailaasa's owner, Nithyananda, used delaying tactics to avoid trial in a case filed back in 2010. An inmate of his *ashram* claimed she had been repeatedly raped over a period of five years. Along with the godman, five of his *chelas* faced charges under Sections 376 (rape), 377 (unnatural sex), 420 (cheating), 114 (criminal abetment), 201 (disappearance of evidence, giving false information), 120B (criminal conspiracy) and so on.

Along with disappearing evidence, the main accused himself disappeared. He ended up in Ecuador, which doesn't have an extradition treaty

with India. Although India could make an extradition request, there are no guarantees the request would be granted. The Latin American nation has also historically been sympathetic to requests for political asylum. This is why Julian Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorean Embassy when he was facing rape charges.

It is quite likely that Nithyananda will claim political persecution claiming he's not being allowed to practice Hinduism "authentically", whatever that means. Given good legal counsel, and as the owner of significant real estate, he might well escape extradition, even if the Indian government makes any serious effort to bring him back.

Kailaasa would be technically described as a micronation. There are many such examples, set up in various places by sundry criminals and eccentrics. *The Lonely Planet* actually has a Guide to Home-made Nations among its publi-

cations.

Some micro-nations such as Christiana in Copenhagen, Denmark, are seen as great tourist destinations. The 1,000-odd "citizens" of Christiana have Danish passports. Similarly, Parva Domus in Uruguay has been around since 1878. It's commemorated in Uruguay's stamps and treated much like an Indian housing society, in terms of local recognition.

Other micronations such as Celestia, Asgardia and Lovely are "concept-nations" created for some quirky purpose. Celestia, or the Nation of Celestial Space, claims the entire universe minus Earth. It was founded in 1949 and claims to have over 19,000 citizens. The founder wished to prevent large nations from hegemonical domination of space. Celestia citizens used to routinely protest nuclear tests, which polluted "their" territory. Asgardia, on the other hand, sees the launch of space vehi-

cles as its major goal. It has so far, launched one private satellite.

Lovely was founded by British comedian, Danny Wallace, as an exemplar for his 2005 TV Show, "How to Start Your Own Country." Lovely claims the territory of Wallace's flat in London. It has a flag and motto. The Principality of Sealand claims an offshore platform off the English coast. It has a royal family and sells titles to interested individuals. The Sealand dollar is tied to the US dollar.

It's a moot point if Kailaasa will ever evolve beyond being a haven for a fugitive from justice. But the website lists three official languages, English, Sanskrit and Tamil, and says it will have a cryptocurrency. It already has its own passport which offers entry to "all eleven dimensions and fourteen lokas". It also claims a population of "2 billion" practicing Hindus from "56 original Vedic nations". No, the numbers don't add up but what does that matter? At least one must admit that Nithyananda has more imagination than the average rape accused.

industrial output and its consumption, and therefore some services, have slowed down or perhaps even turned negative. All we know for sure is that they have.

Having seen the gravity of the situation the government finally seems to be on the right track. It has settled down to play a plodding innings after the flurry of policy announcements in September and October. Mercifully it doesn't have the money to indulge itself. Otherwise who knows what it might have done.

But now not only is it tightening its own belt, it is forcing everyone else to follow suit by not paying their bills. As a result everyone is broke.

In that sense it's very nearly a financial emergency of the Article 360 type. Very nearly, because the only ones not suffering income decline are current and former employees of the government. Ironically, 360 mandates that payments to them be stopped first.

This expenditure forbearance — remember I coined this term — will bear fruit soon. Until then may I request my fellow busybodies for some advice forbearance as well, please?

Fighting for Urdu

EYE CULTURE

UTTARAN DAS GUPTA

On Monday, December 2, lovers of Urdu in the national capital were surprised to find that Rekhta Foundation, organisers of Jashn-e-Rekhta — a popular festival celebrating the language every winter, had dropped "Urdu" from its posters. Instead, the three-day festival beginning on December 13 at the Dhyan Chand National Stadium sent out posters that read: "Jashn-e-Rekhta: The Biggest Celebration of Hindustani Language & Culture." This prompted several writers and historians — as well as lovers of Urdu literature — to lodge protests through an online campaign till Rekhta Foundation, which did not issue any statement on the matter, to revise the poster by the evening to: "A Festival of Urdu Celebrating Hindustani Culture".

In March this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said it was necessary to make Urdu popular all over the world. The National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, an autonomous body under the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development, had also revealed plans to get Bollywood stars, such as Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, and Katrina Kaif to promote the language, accepting that it had fallen behind private organisations such as Rekhta Foundation in this task. The move had, however, received mixed responses with some detractors even ridiculing Kaif's less-than-adequate Hindi. The efforts on the part of the government were perhaps prompted by data revealed by Census 2011.

Among languages spoken by 10 million or more people, Urdu was the only one that registered a decline — falling below 4.2 per cent of the population. According to the 2001 Census, Urdu was the sixth most spoken language in the country, but by 2011 it had slipped to the seventh spot, with Gujarati overtaking it. In Uttar Pradesh, the traditional bastion of Urdu, it had seen a decline, with only 28 per cent Muslims in the state (the language is popularly — and erroneously — associated with the religion) registering it as their mother tongue. At the same time, however, the language continued to maintain its pan-Indian identity, with 21 million speakers in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, and more in West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Jharkhand.

Jashn-e-Rekhta has played a significant role in promoting Urdu in recent times. So what prompted the Rekhta Foundation, which describes itself as the largest website of Urdu poetry, to change to "Hindustani"? In the absence of a statement, there was widespread speculation, with journalist and writer Ziya Us Salam telling *The Indian Express* that the change had been prompted right after the Delhi

High Court had asked Delhi police to not indiscriminately use archaic Urdu and Persian words in first information reports (FIRs). *The Times of India* reported that the Bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice C Hari Shaktar said: "Urdu/Persian words are being used mechanically by cops without knowing the meaning." While the court's intention might have been to weed out archaic words and make processes more transparent, attacks on Urdu have grown in recent times.

In 2016, two artists — an Indian and a French — were forced by a group of people claiming to be affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to deface an Urdu couplet they had painted as graffiti as part of a beautification project for the Delhi government. Urdu is one of the official languages in Delhi, along with Hindi, Punjabi and English. Their couplet had read: "*Dilli tera ujarna, aur phir ujjar ke basna. / Woh dil hai toone paya, sani nahi hai jiska* (Oh Delhi, you were ruined and you overcame your ruin to settle. No city has a heart like yours). And, earlier this year, Panjab University provoked widespread protests when its administration decided to make its Urdu department a part of the School of Foreign Languages, after merging departments of Russian, French, German, Chinese, and Tibetan.

The classification of Urdu in popular culture with Muslims and defining it as foreign has been challenged by several scholars over the years. Urdu poet and theorist Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in his essay *The Name and Nature of a Language: Would Urdu by any other Name Smell as Sweet?* claims that the source of this confusion is in the name itself, which in Turkish means army or camp. "Whose army? ...the Muslim armies, of course. They came from abroad with the view of conquering this country and naturally needed some means of communication with the locals." He claims that Urdu originally referred to the city of Shahjahanabad, now called Old Delhi.

Faruqi also argues that the word Urdu to denote the language started only in the late-18th century when there was no Muslim army in the subcontinent. The only army of the British East India Company. "The fact seems to have occurred to none of us that taking away the name Hindi from our language and letting a new name, Urdu, develop in its place was the first major step towards creating a linguistic-communal divide," he writes. The British, of course, did it to prevent any inter-religious unity among their colonial subjects — one wonders whom the denigration of Urdu now helps. The answer is not too difficult to guess.

Every week, Eye Culture features writers with an entertaining critical take on art, music, dance, film and sport

The backseat drivers



LINE AND LENGTH
T C A SRINIVASA-RAGHAVAN

I love our policy-wonking macroeconomists. They confirm my belief that I am not the only loser in the world.

Take the Great Indian Slowdown of 2019. All of them are accusing the government of not doing enough to reverse it. But none can agree on what is to be done, how, and how much.

Offering policy advice is risk-free, which is perhaps why, as Srivatsa Krishna, an IAS officer, has argued, it leads to a "tyranny of experts".

In 1991 Manmohan Singh was lucky. The IMF told him exactly what to do and how. He had to listen because the IMF was lending us a lot of money.

However, that's not the main thing. Even if everyone agreed on the what and the how much, the question of when, and in what sequence, would remain. But that is a job for managers, not economists.

The post-1945 consensus, as a result of Keynesian theory, is that a major slump in aggregate demand (which is the sum of consumption, investment and export demand minus import demand) can be countered by a steep increase in government demand.

For Keynes this was the only way of countering the growing appeal of communism to the unemployed. That's why I have maintained for long that the Keynesian solution was politics, not economics. Being a very clever man he dressed it all up in the plumery of economics. That gave it the much-needed intellectual respectability.

Print on, McDuff

But what if the government, like this one, doesn't have the money to do it? How can it increase demand?

Keynes said such governments should make up the deficit by printing notes. But he didn't say how much, and for how long.

And if that wasn't problem enough, he didn't answer another key question: What should these newly-printed notes be spent on? Consumption or investment or both?

Today half the macroeconomists say spend it on consumption, half say on investment. But the moment a finance minister seeks to do -- or does -- what they are saying, the same lot starts grumbling about the fiscal deficit, inflation, interest rates, bond prices and the rest. As all former finance ministers will tell you, they are damned regardless.

In the end, though, it's the finance minister who has to take a call. And for that he or she has to first identify the causes of the slowdown, which is not easy. In fact, it's impossible because everything is so highly connected.

Thus, why did people start suddenly consuming less? For

a mix of reasons, which means no one knows what to target, how, and how much. Simply throwing money at the problem, like carpet bombing, won't do.

Or, why did businesses start investing less? Again it's a mix of reasons — to which Mr Rahul Bajaj has now added fear — and the same problem arises: What to fix first and how.

Or again, why did exports stop growing? Slack global demand is one major reason but how do you fix that? Depreciate the rupee? How far and how quickly? Again there's no clear answer. You can only do it gradually — which is being done — but for the howling crowd that's bad policy.

Finally, there are all those non-economic structural and institutional reasons about which no one can do anything. They form the soft liberal infrastructure of the Indian reality.

Sit tight

This is the place India finds itself today. There's no clarity as to why the rate of growth of