

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

AFTER TRUMP'S '52' THREAT, ROUHANI SPEAKS OF '290'. WHAT DID HE MEAN?

The nominal GDP worry

The estimated growth of 7.53% in 'nominal' terms is the lowest since 1975-76. Also, this is the first time since 2002-03 that nominal GDP growth is projected to be in single digits. Why is this a major concern?



AFTER PRESIDENT Donald Trump posted on Twitter a threat to target "52 Iranian sites" if Iran attacked US citizens or assets, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has responded by reminding Trump of "the number 290" and "IR655".

At 10.47 am, the US Navy detected an "aircraft headed directly for Vincennes on a constant bearing at high speed". The NYT report quoted Adm. Crowe as having said. Beginning 10.49 am, several warnings were sent "on both military and civilian distress signals", according to the US account, "but the aircraft neither answered nor changed its course".

"Those who refer to the number 52 should also remember the number 290. #IR655 Never threaten the Iranian nation," Rouhani tweeted late on Monday (India time). In his tweet, Trump mentioned that the targeted 52 Iranian sites "represent(ed) the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago" — a reference to the 1979-81 siege of the US embassy in Tehran.

Meanwhile, radar operators aboard the Vincennes had concluded that the plane was an F-14, one of the world's most powerful fighters at the time. "The aircraft was declared hostile at 10.51 am," Adm. Crowe said. "At 10.54 am, when the aircraft was about nine miles away, Vincennes fired two Standard surface-to-air missiles, at least one of which hit at an approximate range of six miles."

ROUHANI'S 290: The 290 mentioned by Rouhani is the number of people killed after a US warship in the Strait of Hormuz shot down an Iranian passenger airliner — Iran Air Flight IR655 from Bandar Abbas, Iran to Dubai — over Iranian territorial waters on July 3, 1988. Among those killed were 66 children.

AFTERMATH: In a diplomatic note sent to Iran, President Reagan described the incident as a "terrible human tragedy", and expressed "deep regret", "sympathy and condolences". However, he defended the action taken by the commander of the Vincennes, William C Rogers III, saying the airliner was "headed directly" for the warship, which had fired to protect itself.

The US said the airliner had been targeted after the commander of the warship mistook it for an Iranian fighter jet on a hostile mission. President Ronald Reagan expressed "deep regret" for the loss of lives. According to a report and timeline published by *The New York Times* (above) on the morning after the mishap, based on a briefing at the Pentagon by then Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William J Crowe Jr, this is what happened:

A US Navy investigation board concluded that the downing had been a mistake, but that "Iran must share the responsibility for the tragedy by hazarding one of their civilian airliners by allowing it to fly a relatively low altitude air route in close proximity to hostilities that had been ongoing for several hours, and where IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) boats were actively engaged in armed conflict with US naval vessels."

IR655 took off from Bandar Abbas at 10.15 am local time, on the second leg of its Tehran-Bandar Abbas-Dubai journey. The USS Vincennes was in the Strait of Hormuz, along with the USS Montgomery. The Iran-Iraq war was still on.

Iran too, had several ships out on the water — and according to the American account, about five minutes before IR655 took off, one of a group of Iranian gunboats had fired at a helicopter from the Vincennes. The boats had then rushed towards the Vincennes, as if to fire, according to the US account, prompting both the Vincennes and the Montgomery to open fire, sinking two of the boats.

NUSHAIBA IQBAL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

ON TUESDAY, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released the first advance estimates of the national income that projected growth in India's GDP at market prices for 2019-20 at 4.98% in "real" terms, the lowest since the 3.89% in the global financial crisis year of 2008-09. But even more significant was the estimated growth of 7.53% in "nominal" terms, which is the lowest since the 7.35% for 1975-76. Also, this is the first time since 2002-03 that nominal GDP growth has been in single digits.

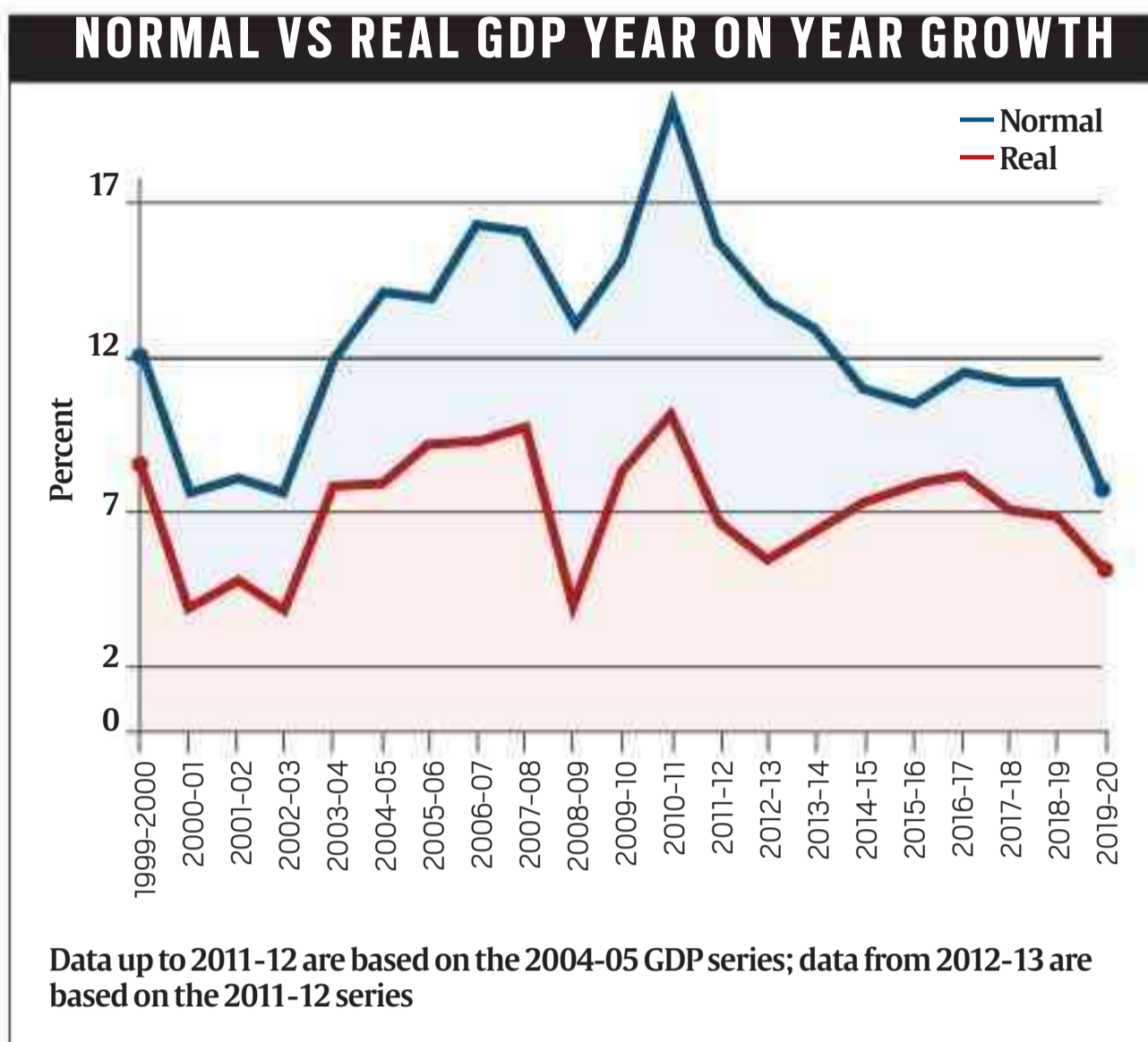
What is nominal GDP and how is it different from real GDP?

GDP is the total market value of all goods and services produced in the economy during a particular year, inclusive of all taxes and subsidies on products. The market value taken at current prices is the nominal GDP. The value taken at constant prices — that is prices for all products taken at an unchanged base year — is the real GDP.

In simple terms, real GDP is nominal GDP stripped of inflation. Real GDP growth thus measures how much the production of goods and services in the economy has increased in actual physical terms during a year. Nominal GDP growth, on the other hand, is a measure of the increase in incomes resulting from rise in both production and prices.

But why should nominal growth matter at all? When we talk about "growth", isn't it a reference to how much real production is increasing?

In the normal course, real growth is what one would ordinarily look at. But the current fiscal year seems extraordinary because the gap between nominal and real GDP growth is just 2.6 percentage points. This is marginally higher than the difference of 2.5 percentage points in 2015-16. But in that year, real GDP growth was 8%, which translated into a nominal growth of 10.5%.



In 2019-20, not only is real GDP growth expected to be the lowest in 11 years, but also the implied inflation (also called GDP deflator, or the increase in prices of all the goods and services produced in the economy) is just 2.6%. Simply put, producers have not gained from either higher input or higher prices. Households and firms generally look at the "topline" — how much their income has grown relative to the previous year. When that growth falls to single digits in a country like India, which has been used to a minimum 5-6% GDP increase year after year and an equal rate for inflation, it is unusual. Low nominal GDP growth is associated more with developed western economies.

for corporates and the government?

In the past, listed companies have seen their turnover double in five years or so, which comes with a nominal year-on-year growth of 14-15%. If the latter falls to 7-8%, the same doubling would take 9-10 years. This can have a psychological impact — although it could also be the case that the value of their inputs, including salaries paid to employees, would also be rising at a slower rate. Their net earnings or profits would not, therefore, be hurt to the same extent.

The problem is more serious when it comes to the government.

In the 2019-20 Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had assumed nominal GDP would grow by 12% to Rs 211.01 lakh crore. However, the NSO's latest projection

of nominal GDP for 2019-20 is only Rs 204.42 lakh crore, which is Rs 6,58,374 crore below the Budget estimate.

As a result, even if the Centre's fiscal deficit is contained at the budgeted Rs 7,03,760 crore in absolute terms, the latter would now work out to 3.44% of GDP, as against the originally targeted 3.3%. This is over and above the slippages in the absolute fiscal deficit itself due to the Centre's revenues from taxes and other receipts, including disinvestment, turning out to be lower than the Budget projections.

High nominal GDP growth also makes the government's debt seem more manageable. The debt stock (numerator) can keep going up so long as it does not exceed the nominal increase in GDP (denominator). That equation changes in a low nominal GDP growth scenario.

For state governments too, low nominal GDP growth is a matter of concern because their budgets normally assume double-digit increases in revenues.

The Centre's compensation formula to states from the Goods and Services Tax also promised to meet any annual revenue shortfall below 14%. That again, did not ever factor in the possibility of GDP growth (real plus inflation) falling to 7.5% levels.

So is low single-digit nominal GDP growth the new normal?

The only time India had as many as three consecutive years of single-digit nominal GDP growth was from 2000-01 to 2002-03, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government was in power. The nominal growth in those three years were 7.62% (2000-01), 8.2% (2001-02) and 7.66% (2002-03). A repeat looks unlikely as of now, given rising food and fuel prices, especially in the last three months or so.

Also, the current real GDP growth of 4.98% is higher than the 3.8%, 4.8% and 3.8% respectively of those three years. With the ongoing efforts by the Narendra Modi government to revive growth and investment activity, things should hopefully improve from the coming fiscal.

Weinstein's NY trial: accusers & charges

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

ON TUESDAY, the New York Supreme Court began selection of a jury in the rape trial of celebrity Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. A look at the charges he faces, and the significance of the trial:

What is Weinstein accused of?

In what has become one of the defining stories of the #MeToo movement over the last two years, more than 80 women have accused Weinstein of sexually assaulting or harassing them. In the New York trial, the criminal charges relate to just three women.

- Mimi Haley, a former production assistant on a Weinstein Company television show, has accused Weinstein of forcibly performing a sexual act on her in his home in 2006. He is charged with a criminal sexual act in the first degree.
- Another woman, whose identity has not been made public, has accused him of raping



Harvey Weinstein in NY court. Reuters

her in 2013. Here, he is charged with rape. On both allegations, Weinstein is additionally charged with predatory sexual assault.

- Actress Annabella Sciorra (*The Sopranos*) has accused Weinstein of raping her in her home in 1993. This allegation is too old to be the basis of a separate charge. However, Sciorra's allegations are part of the predatory sexual assault charges.

What is predatory sexual assault?

It is the most serious charge against Weinstein, with life imprisonment as the maximum punishment. Prosecutors will seek to establish a pattern of serious sex crimes against multiple women. These are expected to include Haley, Sciorra and the 2013 accuser. Additionally, other women may be called to testify against Weinstein. While Weinstein is not charged with crimes against them, their testimony can help build a prosecution case by showing that Weinstein had a consistent pattern of behaviour. Also likely to be called is Barbara Ziv, a professor at Temple University and an expert on the trauma resulting from sexual assault.

What is Weinstein's defence?

Weinstein has pleaded not guilty to charges of rape and criminal sexual assault. He has claimed that his sexual encounters were consensual.

Reuters quoted Weinstein's lead lawyer, Donna Rotunno, as saying that Weinstein had a "slew of witnesses ready to go". She

has said the defence would be introducing emails and text messages to prove that Weinstein's accusers maintained relationships with him after his alleged assaults. According to the Reuters report, his lawyers have also said they plan to call psychologist Deborah Davis, of the University of Nevada, to testify as an expert on memory. This suggests that Weinstein may try to raise questions over his accusers' recollections.

What makes the trial so significant?

It will be a marker of the extent to which #MeToo has impacted the American justice system. It was the allegations against Weinstein that had given steam to the movement. For Weinstein himself, the trial will be seen as a referendum on how strong a comeback, if at all, he can make in the film production business.

Beyond New York, Weinstein also faces separate criminal charges by prosecutors in Los Angeles. There, he was charged with raping one woman and sexually assaulting another in 2013.

Taking stock of infant deaths: in Rajasthan, Gujarat and the rest of India

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 7

EVERY DAY, India witnesses the death of an estimated 2,350 babies aged less than one year. Among them, an average 172 are from Rajasthan and 98 from Gujarat.

In 2014, of every 1,000 children born in the country, 39 did not see their first birthday. Today, that figure has come down to 33. That is 1,56,000 fewer deaths every year.

As outrage continues over the deaths of babies in J K Lon Hospital in Kota, Rajasthan, and in the civil hospital in Rajkot, Gujarat, the fact remains that India has the most child deaths in the world. In 2017, UNICEF estimated 8,02,000 babies had died in India.

How high are the mortality numbers?

India has an annual birth cohort of approximately 26 million. The infant mortality rate (IMR) in the country currently stands at 33 per 1,000 live births. This means babies numbering in the region of 8,50,000 die every year in India, or an average daily toll of 2,350. Gujarat has an annual birth cohort of 1.2 million. In 2017, the infant mortality rate in the state was 30 per 1,000 live births. This means the state sees about 36,000 deaths a year, or an average 98 a day.

In Rajasthan, an estimated 1.65 million births take place every year. The infant mortality rate is 38 per 1,000 live births which implies an estimated 62,843 deaths annu-

ally, or an average 172 every day.

Do Gujarat and Rajasthan have the highest infant mortality?

No. Between 2014 and 2017, India's IMR has declined by 15.4%. At a decline rate of 17.4%, Rajasthan has been ahead of the national average in reducing IMR while Gujarat has a decline rate of 14.3%. The IMR in Rajasthan dropped from 46 per 1,000 live births in 2014 to 38, and in Gujarat from 35 to 30. In 2017, states such as Arunachal Pradesh (42), Madhya Pradesh (47), Assam (44), Uttar Pradesh (41), Meghalaya (39), Odisha (41) and Chhattisgarh (38) had a higher IMR than Gujarat and Rajasthan. Arunachal, Tripura and Manipur have recorded a negative reduction rate between 2014 and 2017, which means child death rates there have gone up. In Arunachal it went up from 30 to 42, in Tripura from 21 to 29 and in Manipur from 11 to 12.

Why do so many infants die in India every year?

On January 1, 2020, according to a UNICEF estimate, India, with an estimated 67,385 babies born that day, accounted for 17% of the estimated 392,078 births globally. This is higher than the 46,299 babies born in China that day, the 26,039 born in Nigeria and 16,787 born in Pakistan.

Among the factors that have been proved detrimental to child survival are lack of education in the mother, malnutrition



Sick children with their mothers at J K Lon hospital in Kota, Rajasthan. PTI

(more than half of Indian women are anaemic), age of the mother at the time of birth, spacing, and whether the child is born at home or in a facility. According to a UNICEF factsheet on child mortality in India, "... Children born to mothers with at least 8 years of schooling have 32% lesser chances of dying in neonatal period and 52% lesser chances in the post-neonatal period, as compared to the illiterate mothers." It also notes that infant and under-five mortality rates are highest among mothers under age 20. The rates are lowest among children born to mothers between the ages of 20-24,

remain low up to 25-34, and increase again after that age.

According to the National Family Health Survey-4, only 78.9% births in India happen in a facility. This means 21.1% or about 54 lakh births in a year still happen outside of a facility where hygiene levels can be low, sometimes without the help of a trained health worker. Apart from the obvious infection risks in a non-institutional birth, vaccine compliance too is usually worse in these cases. According to the Health Ministry, the vaccination cover in India after several rounds of Intensified Mission

INFANT MORTALITY RATES (SELECTED STATES)

State	2014	2017	Decline
All India	39	33	15.4%
Mizoram	32	15	53.1%
Delhi	20	16	20%
Rajasthan	46	38	17.4%
Bihar	42	35	16.7%
Odisha	49	41	16.3%
UP	48	41	14.6%
Gujarat	35	30	14.3%
Chhattisgarh	43	38	11.6%
Assam	49	44	9.6%
Tripura	21	29	-38.1%
Arunachal	30	42	-40%

IMR = deaths per 1,000 live births
Data source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Indradhanush (MI) and the original MI, now stands at 87%. This means over 33 lakh children continue to miss out on some or all vaccinations every year.

What measures are in place for sick newborns?

Special newborn care units (SNCUs) have been established at district hospitals and sub-district hospitals with an annual

delivery load more than 3,000 to provide care for sick newborns: that is, all type of neonatal care except assisted ventilation and major surgeries. It is a separate unit in close proximity to the labour room with 12 or more beds, and managed by adequately trained doctors, staff nurses and support staff to provide 24x7 services.

According to officials in the Health Ministry, approximately 1 million children are admitted to the 996 SNCUs in the country every year with an average death rate of 10%. "The death rates are usually higher in medical college-based SNCUs like J K Lon (Kota) because they tend to get sicker babies, sometimes from faraway districts when parents rush them there in a last minute effort. J K Lon (Kota) for example has a 20% death rate. But that is because the challenges are higher," said a senior Health Ministry official dealing with child health.

In AIIMS, New Delhi, usually only those newborns are admitted who are born there and these usually come from high-risk pregnancies. "The mortality rate for intramural cases is about 1.5% but these are low birth weight babies, pneumonia, sepsis. Extramural cases we only take those that are very sick, babies that nobody else will take such a heart disease kidney failure etc. Overall 10% has been the mortality figure since the time SNCUs began to be monitored nationally," says Dr Vinod K Paul, member NITI Aayog and former professor of paediatrics at AIIMS.



THERE IS SUCH A THING AS A SACRED IDLENESS, THE CULTIVATION OF WHICH IS NOW FEARFULLY NEGLECTED. — GEORGE MAC DONALD

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

SOBERING ACCOUNT

NSO pegs growth at 5 per cent, Union budget must pare down expectations to reflect state of economy

INDIA'S ECONOMY IS expected to grow this year at the slowest pace in more than a decade with both private consumption and investment faltering. GDP growth has been pegged at a mere 5 per cent in 2019-20 by the National Statistics Office (NSO), in line with the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) earlier estimate. The NSO numbers imply that economic activity is expected to pick up only marginally in the second half at around 5.2 per cent, underlining the view that the recovery will be a protracted process. What is equally worrying is that nominal GDP growth, which has implications for the fiscal math, is pegged at 7.5 per cent for the full year, much lower than the 12 per cent growth projected in the last Union budget.

At the aggregate level, growth in gross value added (GVA) is expected to fall to 4.9 per cent in FY20, down from 6.6 per cent in FY19. Government spending is expected to drive growth this year. Excluding public administration, defence and other services, which largely connotes government spending, gross value added by the rest of the economy is projected to grow by an even lower 4.3 per cent this year. But with government revenues coming under pressure — its gross tax revenues have grown by a mere 0.81 per cent in the first eight months of this year — it is debatable whether this higher government spending can be maintained over the second half of this year. The NSO expects government spending to grow at 13.7 per cent (current prices). How it manages this conundrum in the face of pressure to stick to the fiscal deficit target will be clear when it presents the budget in a few weeks from now. The performance of the other sectors in the economy is expected to remain lacklustre. Manufacturing activity is expected to slow down to a mere 2 per cent in FY20, from 6.9 per cent in FY19. A similar slowdown is expected in the construction sector, trade, hotels, transport and communication as well as the financial, real estate and professional services sector. Household demand is also expected to moderate to 5.8 per cent this fiscal, down from 8.1 per cent in the previous year, while investment activity is expected to remain almost flat, growing at a mere 1 per cent this year, down from 10 per cent in the previous year.

With these growth estimates differing remarkably from the projections factored in the last budget, and with revenue falling well short of expectations, the finance minister must present an honest assessment of the economy as well as the state of government finances in the upcoming budget. This would provide clarity on the fiscal space available to the government for supporting the economy. But, the government should also realise the limits of a fiscal and monetary stimulus. At the current juncture, a comprehensive reform package is needed to return growth to a higher trajectory in the medium term.

WHOSE POLICE?

JNU violence has raised questions about the conduct of Delhi Police. The onus is on the force to restore its credibility

DELHI POLICE IS a strange beast — it does not report to the elected government of the state where it functions. However, the fact that it comes under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has never been so stark as it is now. Police action in Jamia Millia Islamia during protests against the new citizenship law and the inaction in JNU on Sunday allowing hooligans to go on a rampage in the campus have cast a shadow over the force. In these instances, Delhi Police is perceived to have acted in a partisan manner with the intent to protect its master's preferences at the cost of its mandate to enforce law and order without prejudice. Such conduct has had repercussions, in and beyond the capital. The crackdown in Jamia ignited student protests in campuses across India, which is continuing. That's why how Delhi Police handles the JNU probe will be keenly watched. It is now up to the force to restore its credibility as a free and fearless enforcer of the law or be derided as a mere security wing of the MHA.

The JNU probe, however, has started on the wrong note. The first FIR, filed on Tuesday, was against the JNU Students Union President Aishe Ghosh, who was beaten up by the goons, allegedly affiliated to the RSS students-wing ABVP. This seems to be aimed at firming up the narrative that the violence in JNU was merely a "clash" between rival student groups over the semester registration process. Sunday's incident was much more than the scaled-up version of campus violence. Police reportedly did not respond to calls for help from the campus. Visuals of armed thugs leaving the campus after thrashing students and teachers under the watch of police personnel remain fresh in public memory. That not one of them was apprehended by the policemen waiting outside the JNU gates speaks poorly about the competence of the force.

Failure on the part of Delhi Police to clarify these questions will stain its record. The AAP government, as part of its larger campaign for statehood, has often accused Delhi Police of working like an "armed wing of the BJP". Evidence of the last few days reinforces this. Delhi Police brass has a task in hand: It must remove apprehensions about its neutrality and reclaim its credibility. It could begin by earning the trust of the JNU campus community.

LESS WORK, MORE PLAY

Finland's PM calls for a four-day work week. It's an old idea, but its time may have finally come

LESS THAN A month in office as prime minister of Finland, and the world's youngest serving head of government has spoken up for leisure. Sanna Marin's call for a four-day working week is not ground-breaking, because a movement for fewer work hours has been building up for years in the more prosperous economies. But it is particularly thought-provoking because Marin represents the very generation which will live through a massive disruption in the idea of work, brought on by automation, artificial intelligence and concern for the environment. It will alter perceptions of many values of society, including that of identity. The political implications could be immense.

Since the dawn of settled living, professions have conferred identity, and even surnames like Carpenter and Smith. But if leisure and culture become as important as work, people who work as engineers may prefer to self-identify as painters or immersive gamers. How would such reassignments alter social relations? Besides, the effects of less work and more culture are not necessarily benign. In *The Machine Stops*, perhaps his only science fiction story, EM Forster portrayed a future society organised around the solitary production and consumption of culture. And when the machine that delivers culture globally stops, lives collapse. And anyway, less work and more personal time would seem like science fiction to the majority of the world's population, who are compelled to work for a living — literally, to stay alive.

Nevertheless, a head of government in a welfare state supporting the idea of more leisure is a sign of change. As Thorstein Veblen wrote in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, "In itself and in its consequences the life of leisure is beautiful and ennobling in all civilised men's eyes." The leisure class he studied was built on exploitation, but the technological future could be different.

Why I quit the panel

Present operations and aims of country's statistical system are at alarming variance with past legacy



C P CHANDRASEKHAR

LET ME EXPLAIN why I joined the Standing Committee on Economic Statistics in the first place. I've had a long association with the country's statistical agencies, in a number of its committees. Most recently I was in two committees — on developing indices of services production and prices. Probably for that reason, when the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation took the decision to constitute an omnibus Standing Committee on Economic Statistics, I was requested to serve as a member. India has had a long tradition of building a strong statistical system starting from the time of P C Mahalanobis and other stalwarts. Even today, it has extremely competent and committed professionals, some of whom I have had the good fortune to work with. I joined this Committee to contribute to strengthening that system.

But there were some disturbing recent developments. One was the controversy over constructing a "back series" for the National Accounts Statistics with 2011-12 as base. Given the change in data sources and methodology, this did pose a challenge. But the report of an official committee set up to develop a method of estimating historical numbers was released and rejected, possibly because the numbers did not suit the government. An alternative series was generated through a process that was controversial, because it pointed to political intervention, apparently motivated by the need to present growth under earlier governments in poorer light.

A second source of concern was a recent tendency on the part of the government to delay the release and even hold back survey reports, when it found the results inconvenient or at odds with its rhetoric. The periodic labour force survey results were not released long after the statistical system had vetted and cleared the numbers. Users had to wait for a general election to get over, before the survey results were officially available. Leaks

of the report showed that it pointed to sharp increases in unemployment in the country, which seemed to explain the government's reticence to release the data. That suspicion was strengthened, and partly confirmed, when the government decided to hold back the results of a consumption survey, which again was leaked with the figures pointing to a fall in consumption that would have as its corollary an increase in poverty. The official position is that the survey is faulty and a new survey will be done in 2021 or 2022. But releasing the data to allow researchers to confirm or contest the government view would have been the better policy, especially since the report has been cleared for release by the system. All this points to a significant erosion of the independence of the statistical system.

It could be argued that it is important to strengthen the independence of the system and support its professional core by participating in deliberations on the concepts, methods and processes. That may be why other experts have agreed to join the SCES.

The statistical system has its own strengths and weaknesses. But earlier, there was always an understanding that you have to give the system a degree of independence. There are no opinions or analysis coming out of that system. All that is coming out is data collected and collated, using methods that are vetted by experts of different kinds. All you are finally doing is putting out that information and making it open to scrutiny by ministries, academics, journalists etc. There have always been questions about how independent a system of this kind can be, given the fact that it is part of the government. Recent developments have heightened those doubts, making it less likely that the statistical system can function as it did in the past.

The danger that the system can be subverted increases when there are pressures to misuse the statistical system for political purposes. For example, there is a genuine fear that the exercise of preparing a National

Population Register (NPR) as a prelude to Census 2021 could be subject to such misuse. While a house listing process is a prerequisite for the Census, this was extended (not under this government but earlier) to preparing an NPR under the 2003 Citizenship Rules. Now, the demographic data to be collected is being enlarged. While it has been announced that there is as of now no plan to prepare a National Register of Citizens, it is clear that if an NRC process is started, the data from the revised NPR would be used to prepare the NRC. In the process, it is expected that data from the NPR would be used to identify "doubtful citizens". If the NPR is being modified with this purpose in mind, it would amount to using statistics for purposes not revealed at the time of the original exercise.

Concerns of this kind have now taken on a new relevance because there are signs that the government does not brook disagreement and is not open to debate once it has embarked on a chosen trajectory. Events in the aftermath of the push for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 in universities like Jamia and AMU and elsewhere are clear indications. And then the mob attack in JNU which the administration and police were evidently complicit in, which could not have happened if there was no political support. All these reflect an inability to tolerate opinions which differ or dissent of any kind. In my view if this is the government's approach, it is pointless to be part of a committee which is meant to make the statistical system more robust, credible and transparent. That cannot happen if the government chooses to subvert the process as it has done in the recent past. The JNU events were the tipping point when I finally decided to withdraw. Coincidentally, the first meeting of the committee was to happen on Tuesday, therefore I decided on Monday that I would send in my resignation.

The writer is a former professor of economics at JNU, Delhi. As told to Asad Ali

LET'S RECLAIM THE MUSLIMS

It's high time that the community's tragedy that began with the Partition ends



JS BANDUKWALA

IN SECULARISM'S BREXIT moment' (IE, January 6), Ramesh Venkataraman urges secularists to engage in a self-critical debate. The RSS/BJP's drive of the past six months has led to a shift in the national discourse, which has gone against Muslims. The community is passing through a difficult phase, especially in Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh. Have Muslim secularists failed in presenting their viewpoint? Have they blundered in understanding the RSS psyche? A critical analysis of secularism is necessary to stop the widening and dangerous communal divide.

Prophet Muhammad would often remark on the fragrant breeze that blew into the Arab world from Hind. Kerala and the Arab peninsula had trade links. The first mosque in India was built about the time the Prophet passed away. Of course, there were basic differences between Islam and Hinduism. But the Quran was revealed to the Prophet in a period of over 20 years. Similarly, Hinduism is a religion based on revelations to many rishis over centuries. The core of both faiths stress peace, compassion and brotherhood.

To Muslims, the revelations to the Prophet served as a bond. But interpretations of that message led to the birth of various sects. Hinduism, in contrast, was a spiritual pyramid, with the Brahmins at the top and Dailts at the bottom. The division of labour and intellectual work divided Hindu society into caste and subcastes.

Gandhi sought to make Muslims an active component of the national movement against the British colonialists. The Sultan of Turkey, regarded as the Caliph by Muslims, was overthrown after World War 1 and the title of Caliph was taken away from him.

Orthodox Muslims of India wanted that the title be returned to the Sultan. Gandhiji made this one of the demands of the national movement. In hindsight, this sounds absurd. The move strengthened the orthodoxy among Muslims. The ulema's role increased, which had disastrous consequences leading to the country's Partition. Jinnah, a liberal, was isolated in national politics and became bitter. In the late 1930s, he joined hands with the ulema and other ultra conservatives among the Muslims and took over the leadership of the community. His demand for Partition inaugurated a tragedy for the Muslim that continues to this day.

The heaviest price was paid by the Muslims who remained in India. The rich and educated Muslims shifted to Pakistan. The poor and illiterate remained in India, where they faced the anger of the Hindus.

Islam is by nature a universal faith. It is incompatible with nationalism. A faith based on one god, one prophet and one holy book can never be bound by territorial boundaries. Show me two Muslim countries that share a common border and yet live as brothers. Religion and nationalism are fundamental aspects of modern life. But for Muslims these are often clashing concepts that make peoples' lives miserable. Pakistan has been embroiled in a longstanding conflict with Afghanistan. In contrast, Bangladesh is a success story because all its neighbours are predominantly non-Muslim.

The sensible way out for Indian Muslims is to turn their energies inward, provide young Muslims with the best possible education in good schools and colleges. The poor students of the community should be provided special coaching. That will give them a chance to compete with other students. This can be accomplished with a wise use of Zakat funds.

Orthodox Muslims who attend municipal and panchayat schools should receive special coaching. This can be accomplished with a wise use of Zakat funds. In Gujarat, we established the Zidni Ilma Charitable Trust, which caters to the poor and lower middle class children. The funds come mostly from ordinary Muslims, though a few rich patrons help us a lot. That may be the only salve to the pain caused by the Partition or a way to calm the anxieties caused by the CAA/NRC.

Fortunately, the Muslims are coming out of the clutches of religious fanaticism. They have begun to focus on education, participate in business and criticise religious strictures that discriminate on the basis of gender. Most Muslims accept that triple talaq is against Quranic injunctions. The sharp rise in Muslim women professionals is a vital sign of change. Much more needs to be done. We have been urging richer Muslims to avoid repeated Haj and Umra visits and use the money to support poor students.

It is also vital that educated Muslims establish links with the RSS. This is not to say that they should join the outfit. But it would benefit everyone, if RSS members see for themselves how ordinary Muslims live. Healthy social relations between ordinary Muslims and Hindus will go a long way in establishing peace and stability in our cities, towns and villages. Indian Muslims are the lost children of Partition. Let us reclaim them and see how rapidly India rises in the eyes of the world. That would be the best tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150 anniversary.

The writer, a human rights activist based in Vadodra, taught physics at MS University

JANUARY 8, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO



AN INDIRA VICTORY
INDIRA GANDHI'S CONGRESS (I) was racing towards achieving majority in the Seventh Lok Sabha and if the trend continues the party might get more than two-thirds majority. Mrs Gandhi led the sweep by her own victory in Medak which she bagged by a majority of over two lakh votes. She was also poised for a spectacular win in Rae Bareilly. Having virtually made a clean sweep in Karnataka, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Orissa, the Congress (I) was making headway in several northern, states which had rejected the party in 1977. While in Janata strongholds in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the Congress (I) was far ahead of its rivals, its candidates

were leading in several constituencies in UP and Bihar.

JANATA DEFEAT
THE JANATA PARTY said it would be "wrong to assume that people of India have voted for erosion of their democratic rights although some people might be keen to make that assumption". Talking to newsmen, the party general secretary, Surendra Mohan, said, "We trust that the people will not tolerate the erosion of freedoms. Freedom of organisation and freedom of the press are important and our party will not allow the people's vigilance or its own to falter in defending them." He said the "Janata Party accepts the verdict with

all humility". He added he had thought that it would be a positive vote for the Janata but had now found that it was a negative vote.

URS RESIGNS
SWEPT OFF HIS feet by the Indira wave which swallowed all the 28 Lok Sabha seats in the state, Devaraj Urs tendered the resignation of his cabinet. Urs called on the governor, Govind Narain, at Raj Bhavan at 8:15 pm after a round of talks with some of his cabinet colleagues and handed over the resignation of his ministry to him. Three of his colleagues, H C Srikantiah, Chowda Reddy and S M Yahye have also resigned. The resignations of more ministers are to follow.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Friendship and progress

Divisions, tensions and violence between groups and sects that political separatists promote not only damage our social lives, but also work as barriers to intellectual progress within as well as across nations



AMARTYA SEN

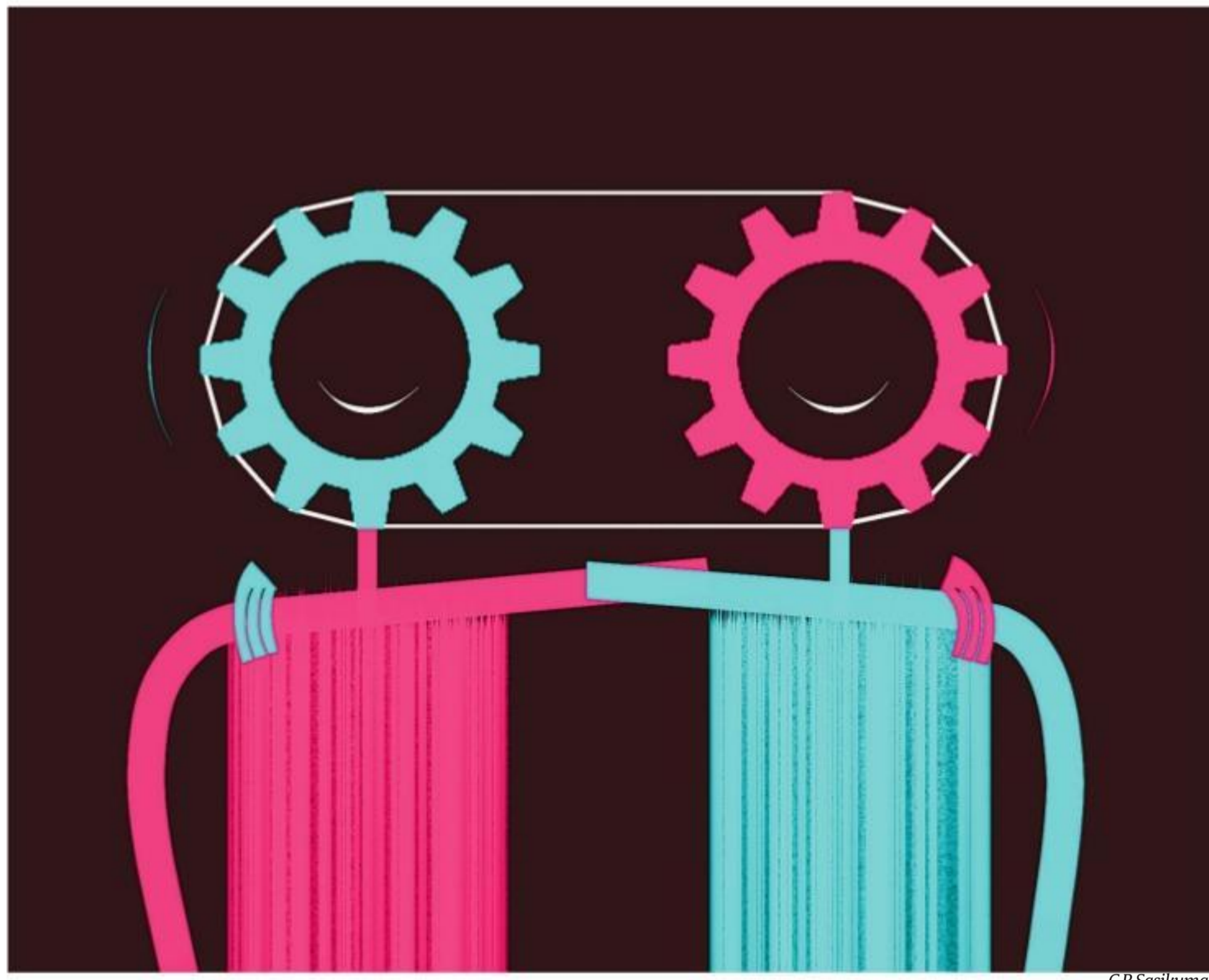
WHILE A BEAUTIFUL thing in itself, knowledge generates many different types of rewards, from productive use of inventions to the creation of new bonds among people. The 17th century French writer Rabutin, Comte de Bussy, famously remarked, "Love comes from blindness, friendship from knowledge". Love may well result from the inability to see what one is getting into. However, it has certainly enriched the world in many different ways — particularly through the creation of great literature, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Abhijana Shakuntala*, and *Layla and Majnun*. But what does friendship produce — whether or not knowledge generates it (as Bussy-Rabutin claimed)?

I want to concentrate particularly on the opposite direction of influence emphasised by Bussy-Rabutin — not on how knowledge produces friendship, but on how friendship generates knowledge. The understanding that friendship helps the creation of knowledge is particularly important in the philosophy and history of science. Nationalist sentiments may make a country claim a secluded flowering of science and mathematics, detached from the rest of the world (unrelated to what we can learn from others — from our friends), but that is not the way science and mathematics — and ultimately culture, too — proceed. For example, the view of ancient India as an island, making its discoveries and inventions in splendid isolation — detached from the rest of the world — is pleasing to intellectual nationalists in India, but it is fundamentally mistaken.

We learn from each other and our intellectual horizons are expanded by being in touch with what others know. Once acquired, our newly learned knowledge expands under its own dynamics and we can give to the outside world much more than we received from it.

Consider the golden age of Indian mathematics. This was not the Vedic period, contrary to what is often claimed (exaggerated claims about Vedic mathematics have tended to generate a world of fantasy in parts of university education in India today). The golden age of mathematics in India was, rather, the classical period in the first millennium, quite close in time to the flowering of the great literature of Kalidasa, Sudraka and other writers. The great mathematical revolution in India was led particularly by Aryabhata, born in 476 AD, and developed by Varahamihira, Brahmagupta, Bhaskara and others. Aryabhata's departures had sophistication and extraordinary reach that were quite uncommon in the mathematics of his time. There is much evidence that while deeply original, Aryabhata's mathematics was substantially influenced by mathematical developments in Greece, Babylon and Rome. There was outside influence, and yet in Aryabhata's hands, mathematics in India — and astronomy too — took gigantic leaps that were pioneering contributions for the whole world. India learned something but gave to the world enormously more than what it had learned from outside.

And as new understandings were born in India, they spread abroad, not only to Greece and Rome, but particularly to China, where they played a central role in the extraordinary progress in Chinese astronomical work (even the head of the official Chinese Board of Astronomy in the critically important 8th



CR Sasikumar

century was an Indian mathematician, Gautama), and to the Arab-speaking world which would become the most important vehicle of mathematical progress in the 8th to the 11th centuries. What began with India learning something from others soon became India teaching a lot to others, and these others, in turn, made huge contributions to the world of mathematics. Friendship, in the broadest sense (including the ability to learn from each other), played a central role in this interactive process, each step reinforcing the next, across national boundaries.

Emerging in a primitive form in Sumeria and Babylon, trigonometric ideas received the attention of Euclid and Archimedes in Greek mathematics in the 3rd century BC and Hipparchus in Asia Minor a century later. In the first century BC, *Surya Siddhanta* in India aired trigonometric constructions with further sophistication. The Greek influence was clearly present in Indian mathematics, but *Surya Siddhanta* had more developed trigonometry, particularly applied to astronomy, than what Alexander and the Greek settlers brought to India. To consider one example, when, towards the end of the 5th century AD, Aryabhata produced his comprehensive account of advances in mathematics, the concept of the sine, which is still perhaps the most widely used trigonometric notion, found its definitive explanation.

But how did this Aryabhatian concept come to be called "sine", which is not a word in Sanskrit or any other Indian language? This bit of linguistic history, which I have discussed in *The Argumentative Indian*, is worth recollecting. Aryabhata called the sine by the Sanskrit name "jya-ardha" — half-chord — making use of the geometric basis of trigonometry, and often referred to it as "jya" for short. When the Arab mathematicians translated this concept into Arabic, they called it "jiba" — a corruption of jya. Arabic is written only with consonants, omitting the vowels, and so Aryabhata's jya was represented as "j, b" — the two consonants in jiba. The sound jiba has no meaning in Arabic, but

The isolationist view of the progress of knowledge is fundamentally defective — no matter how appealing it may be to the nationalist and the sectarian. Friendship is important for our intellectual pursuits. Of course, it has many other rewards as well, but the advancement of science and mathematics — and of knowledge in general — is an important part of the beautiful impact of friendship.

the same representation "j, b" can also be pronounced as "jaib", which is a fine Arabic word, meaning a cove or bay.

When the Arab texts on sophisticated trigonometry, on the lines derived from Aryabhata, were ultimately translated into Latin (Gherardo of Cremona, an Italian working in Toledo, did the translation in 1150 AD), the word *jaib*, meaning a cove or a bay, was translated into the corresponding Latin word "sinus", which is Latin for a cove or bay. And from there — from the word *sinus* — comes the modern trigonometric term "sine". The much-used mathematical term *sine* carries within it the memory of Aryabhata's Sanskrit term *jya*, and its sequential Arabic and Latin translations. What came to India from Europe in a somewhat simple form, went back to the world as a more developed tool of mathematics and astronomy.

The separatist outlook in the development of science, mathematics and culture is seriously misleading. Indeed, the role of friendship applies not only across national borders, but also within borders. Divisions, tensions and violence between groups and sects that political separatists like promoting (even within a nation), not only damage our social lives, but also work as barriers to intellectual progress within as well as across nations.

Indeed, the isolationist view of the progress of knowledge is fundamentally defective — no matter how appealing it may be to the nationalist and the sectarian. Friendship is important for our intellectual pursuits. Of course, it has many other rewards as well, but the advancement of science and mathematics — and of knowledge in general — is an important part of the beautiful impact of friendship.

The writer, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and professor of economics and philosophy at Harvard University. Excerpted from the keynote lecture at the Infosys Prize ceremony, 2020

nopolised platform of the History Congress, that also in the communist den of Kannur. It was nothing less than an insult faced by Aurangzeb in his own court by Shivaji. As a true follower of Aurangzeb, Prof Habib reacted. This way he not only exposed himself but also the entire gang of distortionists who preach 'free speech' and 'Azadi'... this also expressed the frustration of losing out on monopoly not just over institutions but also on the myth creation in the name of history."

INDECENT DISSENT

IN AN ARTICLE titled, "Dissecting the Dissent", *Organiser* has called the protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as devoid of any decency. The article has said that democracy needs dissent. "But the recent dissenting movements against CAA have crossed all decent limits, and turned violent. Unfortunately, those who are behind the arson are claiming to be intellectuals and they think they have the right to protest including in a violent way. Perhaps those intellectuals deserve the popular term 'Urban Naxals'."

It has argued that CAA is not discriminatory and would not affect any Indian citizen. "The alleged discrimination, if any, is for the Muslims living in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. In what way are those Muslims of those three countries related to the agitators?... Should Hafiz Syeds, Kasabs be welcomed by India? Better

regulated borders are in the national interest and any unrestricted entry of those groups which are established anti-Indians is suicidal for the Nation and it is better the agitating Indians understand this."

The latest issue of RSS's Hindi mouthpiece *Panchjanya* has also dedicated considerable space to CAA protests. In an article on how the UP government has set an example by making protesters pay for damage to public property, it has accused the Opposition of siding with those who love Pakistan.

It has also stated how the UP police was keeping an eye on salons in the state because Muslims were getting their beards shaved out of fear.

"To save themselves from arrest and recovery notices, Muslims involved in the protests have begun to cut their beard. On the condition of anonymity, senior police officers have said that such information has been received from Gorakhpur and Kanpur. Police have increased their activity around salons," the article said.

PAKISTAN LINK

IN ANOTHER ARTICLE published on its website under "Editor's Pick", *Organiser* has claimed that one of the women, who later met DMK leaders such as Kanimozhi, was linked to an organisation of citizen journalists in Pakistan. "Be it protests against Sterlite or Hydrocarbons, or Salem National Highway or Jallikattu, the DMK is behind it and, in turn, anti-national forces funded by dubious agencies are also part of these protests. With the emergence of the Gayathri-DMK link, the BJP is now demanding that the central government probe the DMK for its links with Pakistan," the article said.

According to sources in the intelligence

agencies, the article claimed, "after the abrogation of Article 370, Pak-based groups have now set up their shop in Tamil Nadu by exploiting the fringe outfits, power-craving DMK, left, anti-national Tamil fundamentalists and Naxal groups. Christian-supported NGOs too pour in their might. Now, the link between these elements and Pak-based elements are slowly emerging after the arrest of women who were part of anti-CAA protests in Chennai."

The article talks about an incident where two women were arrested by the police following a complaint that they had made about anti-CAA/NRC rangolis. "The police arrested the women who used a Hindu tradition to make a political statement and disturb the peace in the locality. The DMK, which abhors anything that is Hindu, shamefully used a Hindu tradition for its cheap politics," the article said.

It said that the Tamil Nadu police has claimed that one of the women, who later met DMK leaders such as Kanimozhi, was linked to an organisation of citizen journalists in Pakistan. "Be it protests against Sterlite or Hydrocarbons, or Salem National Highway or Jallikattu, the DMK is behind it and, in turn, anti-national forces funded by dubious agencies are also part of these protests. With the emergence of the Gayathri-DMK link, the BJP is now demanding that the central government probe the DMK for its links with Pakistan," the article said.

Compiled by Deeptiman Tiwary

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

The UK will not profit from pursuing a reckless Brexit while hitching ourselves to Donald Trump's Iranian misadventure. — THE GUARDIAN

Children of lesser gods

The deaths in Kota, from largely-preventable diseases, bare the light on a healthcare system founded on apathy towards the poor



SHAH ALAM KHAN

NEARLY 200 CHILDREN have died in the past two months at the J K L Government Hospital in Kota, Rajasthan. This comes barely six months after the death of more than 150 children in an alleged encephalitis epidemic in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. In 2017, more than 1,000 children died in the state-run Baba Raghav Das (BRD) Medical College in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut uses a phrase a number of times — "so it goes". The phrase conveys death. Vonnegut's use of the phrase in a novel on war conveys the message that life just went on even though men, women and children were dying — no one cared for the losses. With our conscience not pricking us despite the regular deaths of so many children across the country, the phrase should haunt us.

According to the UNICEF's report, 'State of World's Children 2019', India reported the maximum number of deaths of children under five in the world in 2018. Eight lakh eighty two thousand children under five died that year. That means around 2,416 deaths per day — or seven jumbo jets full of children crashing every day without anyone taking notice.

The death of children due to largely-preventable illnesses is a matter of serious concern and calls for urgent introspection. Unfortunately, we have failed to learn from past experiences. In fact, after the Kota tragedy, the narrative has degenerated into a blame game with the leaders of the BJP and the Congress engaged in mud-slinging over which is the greater tragedy — the deaths in Gorakhpur or those in Kota. Nothing could be more shameful. To indulge in a game of one-upmanship over the deaths of children is like medieval rulers boasting their hunting trophies. Actually, it is not about the BJP or the Congress. The death of young children should draw our attention to something more important and pressing.

The matter is also not merely about the non-availability of healthcare services or deficits in other realms of preventive medicine. The deaths in Kota, Muzaffarpur and Gorakhpur should draw our attention to a conglomeration of factors that govern child health in India. Most of the children who died in Gorakhpur, Muzaffarpur and Kota belong to the lowest strata of the society. It won't, therefore, be wrong to conclude that they were victims of structural violence. In India, this structural violence is unleashed through a multitude of social, political and economic factors — apathy of healthcare

professionals, poor health services/infrastructure in rural hinterlands, low rates of female literacy, economic inequality, the rigid caste system, social apartheid, lack of political will and patriarchy.

Kota happened because we slept after Muzaffarpur and the tragedy in Bihar happened because we were complacent after Gorakhpur. As a society, we have stopped looking at the deaths of our citizens through the prism of compassion and concern. Such apathy is unfortunately all pervasive — complicit in it are a range of people from political leaders to doctors practising in a rural primary health centre to the village headman.

In his landmark paper, 'Anthropology of Structural Violence', Paul Farmer of the Department of Social Medicine of the Harvard Medical School uses his experiences among the poor of Haiti to describe structural violence. The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world, Farmer contends. Structural violence, he points out, influences the nature and distribution of extreme suffering. The hypothesis holds true in the Indian context.

So what is the solution? Even before the smoke from the pyres in Kota has settled, a Niti Aayog document shows that the government is considering the takeover of 750 district hospitals by private medical colleges through a public private partnership (PPP) model. This, despite ample evidence about the failure of the model in the country's healthcare system. In his seminal paper, 'Uncertainty and Welfare Economics of Medical Care', Nobel laureate Kenneth Arrow demonstrated that profit and private involvement in healthcare leads to an erosion of trust. Arrow pointed out that because an individual's demand for medical services is irregular and unpredictable, the involvement of a private market model for such services (in any form) can be disastrous. This understanding from 1963 holds true even today. Medical factors are much more unpredictable in India today than in Arrow's America. The country's experiences in the PPP model in healthcare have shone a light on the deficits in transparency and highlighted the lack of care of vulnerable groups. They have raised ethical questions about a market-driven healthcare model.

What is urgently required is not the involvement of private players but a sincere engagement by the state in matters concerning peoples' health. Reports have shown that most of the babies in Kota died due to suffocation at birth; low birth-weight and infections were the other significant causes of death. These are highly-preventable reasons. The role of the state in delivering health to its people cannot be overemphasised. We need to question the government's priorities in a country where nearly a million children die every year.

The writer is professor of Orthopaedics, AIIMS, New Delhi. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HEAR THEM OUT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Power to the goon' (IE, January 8). It is sad that the goons had a free run in JNU on Sunday. Such violence and attacks, be it on students at AMU, Jamia or JNU, does not auger well for democracy and the future of the country. Such attacks can not suppress the free spirit of students, but they will definitely cause fear and anguish in people. Educational institutions are the last place for politics or muffling free speech. It is also not a place for the police to show its prowess. Students should not be expected to be "yes men" or toe the government's line of thinking.

Ripu Singh, Ambala

GOVT IS NOT NATION

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Innocents no more' (IE, January 7). I could never understand why my opinion should be the same as that of the government, especially in today's time. What if I feel that the CAA combined with the NRC is dangerous and, to back that, I produce research. But basic norms have changed in the past few months. If one's views go against the government, a person is likely to be labeled an urban naxal, communist, anti-national or a member of the "tukde tukde gang". Since when has the government become coterminous with the nation? The JNU students have the right to protest and put forward their views and demands. They deserve to be heard.

Ranjit Nimbalkar, Pune

YOUNG AND OLD

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Why I refuse to accept CAA' (IE, January 6). It is

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.

quite heartwarming to see that the young generation has a vision for the country and they are taking to the streets for that. And, they are doing so while the older generation is getting progressively more risk-averse.

Sangeeta Kampani, Delhi

SECULAR DISSENT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Proceed with CAA, reject NRC (January, 7)'. It is strange that the agitation against the CAA is labelled as a Muslim movement. This CAA is against the fundamentals of the Constitution and all who believe in pluralism are opposing the Act. The UP government has been selective in punishing those who vandalised property. On at least three earlier occasions, the state property was vandalised under the current regime, but not even a single recovery notice was issued.

Asif Ali, Delhi