



THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2020

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

THE GOVERNMENT ONLY GIVES SUBSIDIES FOR NITROGENOUS FERTILISERS. WITH THE RESULT, FARMERS DO NOT APPLY BALANCED FERTILISERS. — M S SWAMINATHAN

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A BEGINNING

Elected district development councils must be a first step in kickstarting political process in J&K — not a substitute for it

THE AMENDMENTS TO the Jammu & Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act to facilitate direct elections to the second tier of local government, the district development council, are evidently intended to kickstart the political process in the Union Territory, infuse some guided political energy into the post-August 5, 2019 environment, especially in the Valley, and pave the way for all those desirous of finding a political foothold in "naya" Kashmir. With the holding of Assembly elections tied to the contentious delimitation exercise, and given that participation is uncertain with regional political parties firm on the demand for a return to statehood and special status, election to the DDCs will be a first test of how deep the waters really run. The Centre may calculate that getting enough people to contest the DDC elections would help weaken the Culpak narrative, which in its third reiteration last week, following the release of PDP chairperson Mehbooba Mufti, resulted in the coming together of the regional parties as a People's Alliance. The recently created Apni Party, hatched out from the PDP, has been itching for a role.

Individuals in the mainstream regional parties, especially those overlooked for nominations in previous Assembly elections, may also see the DDCs as a career opportunity. The BJP is waiting in the wings, too. Earlier, the DDC was filled through nominations. The rationale behind holding direct elections to 14 DDC constituencies in each district is that being chosen through a democratic exercise might give candidates and the DDCs a measure of credibility. The initial responses of the NC and PDP have predictably not been favourable. PDP leader Naem Akhtar, for instance, has said the move is aimed at depoliticisation by cutting up the UT into "district assemblies", and to reduce Kashmiri political aspiration to the solving of district level water-electricity-road problems.

For the DDC elections to achieve the Centre's many objectives, the entire exercise will need to be substantially different from how the 2018 panchayat elections went down. In that election, candidates were too ashamed to admit they were contesting, and could not appear in public because they feared for their lives. Those who won, some of them because they were the only contestants in their halqas, did not surface for months afterwards. In many panchayat halqas there were no candidates and the elections could not be held. In the DDC elections, the NC and PDP will need to consider the opportunity costs of a boycott even as they weigh it against the price of participation. They do not have an easy choice, but they would do better to engage with the political process, even as they oppose, argue and debate. The Centre, too, should be aware of the limitations of a bonafide democracy in J&K. Sri Lanka is a cautionary example of how an elected body with no powers except to lay roads and repair the drains is not an answer to the political aspirations that lie behind the demand for greater autonomy. The restoration of statehood to J&K has to be prioritised, and Assembly elections.

TINKERING AT MARGINS

Cap on subsidised fertiliser merely addresses issue of its diversion, doesn't fix real problem — overuse by farmers

IT'S OVER A decade since a so-called nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) regime for fertilisers was instituted. By linking subsidy to nutrient composition rather than products per se, NBS was expected to wean away farmers from applying too much urea containing only nitrogen. But the actual results prove otherwise. Between 2009-10 and 2019-20, urea consumption rose from 26.7 million tonnes (mt) to 33.7 mt. While overall fertiliser consumption increased from 53.4 mt to 61.7 mt, urea's share went up from below half to 54.6 per cent during this period. The reason for the worsening fertiliser imbalance is simple: Since April 2010, the maximum retail price (MRP) of urea has been raised by hardly 11 per cent, from Rs 4,830 to Rs 5,360 per tonne. The MRPs of other fertilisers — which were decontrolled, with the government only giving a per-tonne subsidy based on their nutrient content — have gone up from 2.5 to four times during these 10 years. Since NBS has been implemented only in other fertilisers, even as urea remains under price control, farmers are using more, not less, of the latter.

The Narendra Modi government must shoulder much of the blame for this agronomic and environmental disaster. The basic MRP of urea has not been revised at all in its nearly six-and-a-half years. Instead of bringing urea under NBS — which would push up its MRP closer to Rs 10,000 per tonne at the current per-kg subsidy for nitrogen present in other fertilisers — the Modi government has resorted to tinkering at the margins. That includes compulsory neem-coating of all urea (from December 2015) and making fertiliser subsidy payment to companies conditional upon actual sales to farmers being registered on point-of-sale machines with retailers after biometric authentication (from March 2018). There's a plan next, as reported by this newspaper, to cap the total number of subsidised fertiliser bags that any person can purchase during an entire cropping season. But these measures merely address the issue of subsidised fertilisers, especially urea, getting diverted to bulk buyers/traders or even non-agricultural users such as plywood and animal feed makers. They don't fix the real problem — of overuse by farmers themselves. If urea is heavily underpriced, they will apply three bags when two or less would suffice.

Urea has to come under NBS. A politically feasible way to do it is by hiking its MRP to Rs 10,000 — maybe over two years — and simultaneously reducing the NBS rates of phosphorus, potash and sulphur to make other fertilisers cheaper by Rs 1,500-2,000 per tonne. In the long run, NBS itself should be replaced by a flat per-ace cash subsidy that could be used to purchase any fertiliser. That includes value-added and customised products containing not just other nutrients, but delivering even nitrogen more efficiently than urea.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



Hathras and truth machine

Narcoanalysis would invite a public/media trial which manipulates science, favours the dominant



JINEE LOKANEETA

THE BRUTAL KILLING and alleged gangrape of a 19-year-old Dalit woman in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, has renewed attention on how narcoanalysis remains central to policing in India. Widespread outrage erupted as the police initially considered it a case of murder and later sought to deny the rape. The Uttar Pradesh government announced on October 2 its intent to use narcoanalysis on the victim's family, the accused and negligent state officials. Narcoanalysis is the use of a drug — sodium pentothal — on a person to ostensibly induce truth with the help of forensic psychologists. The lack of validity and reliability of narcoanalysis is well known, though rarely acknowledged.

The notification of this desire to use narcoanalysis despite disavowal by the scientific community is not just about the technique itself. It is symptomatic of the investigative practices of Indian policing. Narcoanalysis functions to create a public spectacle of "truth claiming" in the garb of science, thereby reinforcing the role that coerced confessions play in media trials and the legal system. In the Hathras case, it further victimises the Dalit woman's family by publicly contesting their version.

Popularised in the US in the 1920-30s by Dr Robert House, the US criminal justice system had a brief fascination with narcoanalysis. It was rejected by the CIA after experiments in the 1950s, and it continues to make rare appearances. The Indian fascination with narcoanalysis began in the late 1980s in Ahmedabad, appeared in complaints to the National Human Rights Commission about lie detectors being used alongside a drug in the 1990s, but gained prominence in the 2000s. Almost all major cases involved its use, including the Aarushi-Hemraj murders in 2008, Mumbai blast case in 2008, Telgi scam case, and Nihari 2005-2006, with videos often leaked as "truth".

In 2010 the Indian Supreme Court ruled that consent was required for the use of nar-

coanalysis, lie detectors and brain scans and made evidence as a result of the techniques inadmissible. The Court stopped short of striking them down as inherently unacceptable under the right against self-incrimination (Article 20(3)) and right to life and liberty (Article 21) of the Indian Constitution. The lack of a decisive rejection of narcoanalysis that medical ethics scholar Amar Jesani calls pharmacological torture has allowed the spectre of this technique to haunt different sites of policing in India, in turn encouraging coerced information or involuntary confessions.

Narcoanalysis (alongside brain scans and lie detectors, that I term "truth machines" in my book) is represented often as a scientific solution to police torture. Reports of custodial violence in Maharashtra resulted in senior police officers sending out a memo urging the use of truth machines. The Delhi High Court has recently asked the Delhi Government about the lack of nontest facility in the capital and the suspects are taken to Ahmedabad for narcoanalysis. Recently, the Aam Aadmi Party Government has promised the High Court that arrangements have been made to set up this narco facility, as if it is a state of the art technique rather than a coercive and unreliable medico-legal one.

By mentioning the use of narcoanalysis on the accused, the victim's family and the police/officials, the UP Government is inviting a public/media trial which utilises science in its popular construction and will inevitably favour those who are dominant in society. As Dalit feminists have noted, provisions of the Prevention of Atrocities Act have to be central in the Hathras case against the upper caste men involved in the alleged gang rape and those state officials who were negligent in their duty. While a media trial is already visible, and medico-legal evidence of rape is already subject to manipulation, mention of narco is notable

since it stands in for the voice of science and the expert claimed by the government to proclaim truth even as the technique is rejected by the scientific community.

The discussion on narco often tends to reinforce the legitimacy of techniques that coerce information from the bodies of the persons, sometimes in conjunction with torture or through a process of hypnotic suggestions. These tests are by themselves coercive and often used to get confessions that force the body to betray itself. The popular campaign to challenge the trial court verdict in the Aarushi-Hemraj case had similarly highlighted the narco results of Hemraj's friends as a way to strengthen their arguments, thereby contributing to the legitimising of these techniques.

The Hathras case, in highlighting narcoanalysis, reminds us how confessions/information are often a part of a media trial, and techniques that enable the body to forcibly betray itself are violative of human dignity and should be disallowed. Asking the victim's family to undergo narcoanalysis in a context where Dalit victims are often disbelieved is primarily meant to contest or proclaim their narratives publicly as a lie — victimising them once again. Saying that police/officials are to be subject to the same technique is reflective of a desire to restrict the negligence to a few bad apples — as opposed to the recognition of a systemic injustice, making justice in this case even more elusive.

The writer is Professor in Political Science & International Relations at Drew University. She is author of 'Truth Machines: Policing, Violence and Scientific Interrogations in India' (Univ of Michigan Press, Orient Blackswan, 2020)

FRUIT OF REFORM

New legal framework for contract farming benefits farmer, consumer, investor



SUDHIR SITAPATI

SANTOSH GANAR OWNS two acres of land in Raigadh in coastal Maharashtra — home of the Alphonso mango. Yet he chooses to plant cheap rice rather than lucrative mangoes. When I asked him why he replied that he would love to plant mangoes. Rice gives him just Rs 30,000 per acre while mangoes would earn 10 times as much. But he could not afford the initial investment of an "elevated bund" for the mangoes, nor survive the five-year waiting period for the trees to yield fruit.

He also added, with a hint of schadenfreude, that his friends who have orchards complain of wasting almost half their mangoes since they are not able to reach the markets on time. This COVID-filled year was the worst, as most mangoes remained unsold. Ganar told me how he saw pot-bellied monkeys, surrounded by half-eaten mangoes, snoring in his friend's orchard. His friend didn't find it necessary to shoot them away with catapults.

The biggest problem the poor in India face is risk mitigation. Since they do not have savings, they are reluctant to undertake even the minimally risky business that you or I would. As a consequence, they remain stuck in a poverty trap, growing cheap rice instead of valuable mangoes. Policymakers the world over have come up with a variety of capital investment and risk mitigation instruments — such as micro-credit loans — for the poor to make money while protecting them against risk. The tragedy of the Indian farmer — who constitute 40 per cent of the country and an even higher percentage of its poor — is that India's farm laws have prevented these risk mitigation instruments from reaching them.

Under the laws that governed India until

the third week of September farmers could only sell to the local mandi or agricultural market. The last two major ananias the number one public health challenge that India faces. We have a situation where horticulture is saddled with unavailability for the farmer and unaffordability for the consumer.

The third week of September, farmers could only sell to the local mandi or agricultural market. The last two major ananias the number one public health challenge that India faces. We have a situation where horticulture is saddled with unavailability for the farmer and unaffordability for the consumer.

I asked Ganar, that if someone offered to invest in a mango orchard in his land, pay him what he loses in not planting rice till the mango trees gave fruit and agreed to buy all the mangoes that grew on his tree five years later, how much discount would he give his benefactor? Without batting an eyelid Ganar

said that he'd happily give a 40 per cent discount and still earn Rs 3 lakh. He would still make 10 times more than he makes today. But his investor, an expert in mango cultivation with better access to markets (and doubtless better methods to shoo away monkeys) would make the full potential of the acre — Rs five lakh. After paying Ganar and accounting for a return on investment the investor would still be left with a surplus. In a competitive market, the consumer would get cheaper mangoes.

This is an example of "contract-farming" — one that would benefit the farmer, the investor, and the consumer. An acre of land yielding Rs 30,000 starts yielding Rs 5 lakh. But for all these years why would either Ganar or the investor have agreed to a "contract" that was not legally binding? Ganar could cheat the investor and decide to sell the mangoes at full price five years later. The investor could cheat Ganar and not buy the mangoes he finally produces. And in a year of mango glut, when forced to buy all of Ganar's mangoes, how could the investor have stored it for the next year, if mangoes were suddenly listed under the Essential Commodities Act (ECA).

The three agriculture bills change all that by providing the legal framework for contract-farming. This is the essence of the reform, not the circumventing of mandis or the ECA. And it will benefit everyone — farmers, industry and consumers. All except the monkeys who have grown fat on years of antiquated agricultural policies.

The writer is an executive director Hindustan Unilever and is the Co-Chair of the CIPFO Processing Committee. Views are personal

OCTOBER 19, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM RESTIVE AGAIN

IT WAS NOT good on the part of the All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad to resume their agitation as the talks had not completely broken down completely on the foreign nationals' issue in Assam, Union Home Minister Giani Zail Singh said. Speaking to newsmen at Madras, the Home Minister said the government was ready to continue the talks with the agitators for which the date would be announced soon. Drawing attention to the cut-off point, Zail Singh reiterated the contention that the government had gone back further from its original stand. He, however, said that the govern-

ment was firm on the 1971 cut-off date.

SINO-INDIAN TIES

A SENIOR CHINESE leader says Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has "taken a resolute step to improve relations and the Chinese leadership welcomes this". Tan Zhen Lin, vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress recalled the friendly relations between India and China during the days of Jawaharlal Nehru and rued that the relations had become poorer for some time. In a letter to the UN, Tan called for more frequent contacts between Indians and Chinese in various fields. Exchange of visits

by professionals alone was not enough. He referred to the Cultural Revolution and said that because of "the terrible disorder" it caused "the Chinese economy is in many respects far more underdeveloped than India's".

IRAN WARMS UP TO US

IRANIAN PRIME MINISTER Mohammad Ali Rajai said that a decision on the 52 American hostages was not far off and that Iran believed that the US had already apologised for supporting the deposed Shah. When asked if the decision would be taken before the American elections, he said "the moment the Majlis takes a decision".

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2020

THE IDEAS PAGE

How to Make You Wear a Mask

The concept of public goods can be experimentally put to use in the current pandemic for a social cause



SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

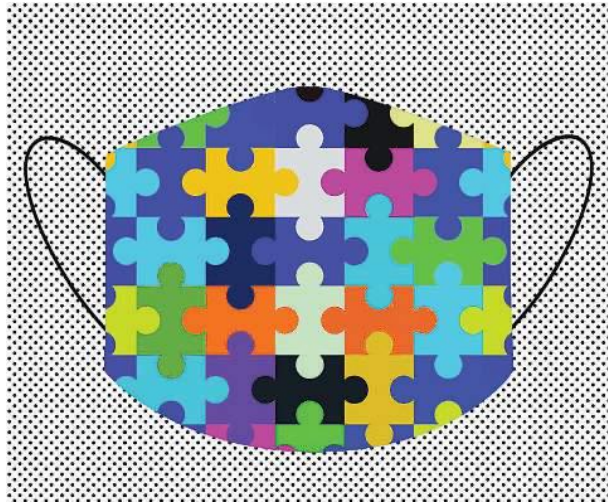
THERE IS A direct linkage between the RBI governor's statement on October 9 and the Nobel Prize in economics that was awarded to Robert Wilson and Paul Milgrom on October 12. The statement by the governor that yield curve control and financial market stability are public goods is a stark reminder of the treatment of the same in game theory, where defection among individuals/market players is random, often resulting in least payoffs. Interestingly, Wilson and Milgrom are also proponents of game theory. It is an irony that the application of game theory in macroeconomics in India is minimal and, thus, it is always a matter of great elation whenever we can find a link.

First, a little tidbit from this year's Nobel prize award in economics. This is, perhaps, the fourth instance of a student and teacher getting the award in the same year. The first instance was in 2004, when Finn Kydland and Edward Prescott were chosen for the honour. Robert Wilson, besides being the winner of the economics Nobel this year, has three Nobel-winning PhD students — Alvin E. Roth, Bengt Holmstrom and Paul Milgrom. In economic parlance, public goods are defined as non-excludable and non-rivalrous in nature, such as law enforcement. There is plenty of literature on the use of public good in financial markets — if agents cooperate well, all players have the opportunity to benefit; if agents work in isolation, all are likely to suffer. Hence, all should have a common interest in reforms that will improve the system for public benefit.

Garrett Hardin's famous essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons," published in Science magazine in 1968, was the earliest example of this argument. The farmer who added an extra cow gained an advantage over other farmers in his village, but it also led to an overgrazed pasture.

In the Indian context, let me provide an even earlier example to illustrate the idea of public goods. One day, Emperor Akbar told Birbal that he was planning to take a bath in milk and that all his ministers should cooperate and get milk to fill the bathtub. However, each minister decided that since milk was costly, he would get the water, while the others get milk. The end result was that all the ministers brought water. When this experiment was done subsequently with provision of a punishment, everyone cooperated and got milk. In a similar vein, the RBI governor communicated through the policy that market players should always be competitive and not combative so as to get the best results. Central banks can only act to oversee the market.

Against this background, it is important to understand how the breakdown of trust across agents in the use of public goods often results in minimal payoffs. Both agents have two options between them — either cooperate or defect. Thus, we effectively have four policy options, and each of the options will have a particular benefit/policy. Our endeavour is to find out which policy option can result in a Nash equilibrium,



C R Sankaranar

which occurs when neither of the agents can increase their payoff by unilaterally changing their actions. Thus there are four options — both Player 1 and Player 2 cooperate, both Player 1 and Player 2 defect, Player 1 cooperates while Player 2 defects, and, lastly, Player 1 defects while Player 2 cooperates.

The payoff scenarios are hypothesised as benefits accruing to Player 1 and Player 2 separately, when they are deciding on either of the policy options: Cooperate or defect. Specifically, both of them cooperating cannot be a Nash equilibrium, as both the players unilaterally will always have an incentive to defect because they will get a higher payoff in such an eventuality. Since the situation is the same for everyone, both the players will thus ultimately defect and receive a payoff of 0. This is the Nash equilibrium for this game. But this is sub-optimal as both players get zero payoffs because of uncoordinated behaviour. The bottomline is an outcome that the regulator will never want.

Let us now extend this analogy to the Indian debt markets. The Bank of Japan was, perhaps, the first central bank to proclaim that the yield curve is a public good and it is heartening to see the RBI echo the same.

In the Indian markets, it is common to find debt market players behaving differently. For example, if one set of players act pro-cyclically, selling government securities with the RBI's monetary policy stance, the other set of players act counter-cyclically, buying government securities — sometimes both the players are combative. While there is nothing wrong in taking two way positions in the market, the problem arises when such buying/selling far outstrips selling/buying that the RBI would prefer. This also results in a yield structure not in sync with macro fundamentals. For example, during

In economic parlance, public goods are defined as non-excludable and non-rivalrous in nature, such as law enforcement. There is plenty of literature on the use of public good in financial markets — if agents cooperate well, all players have the opportunity to benefit; if agents work in isolation, all are likely to suffer. The Bank of Japan was, perhaps, the first central bank to proclaim that the yield curve is a public good and it is heartening to see the RBI echo the same

2017-18, the spread between the overnight repo rate and the 10-year G-Sec yield had increased to 169 basis points in February. Till that time, such a large spread was seen only during a financial crisis.

Can we avoid such a problem of defection? The economist Elinor Ostrom had an answer (the only woman apart from Esther Duflo to have won a Nobel in economics). The only way groups can avoid such a breakdown is by adhering to conditions in the form of eight core design principles.

In a similar vein, the concept of public goods can be experimentally put to good use in the current pandemic for a social cause. Suppose the government were to frame a policy of incentivising well-off households (say, through a certification from the PM) to co-operate and support to all other poor households. Such incentives are extremely important as otherwise individual households can always defect unilaterally because it gives them a higher payoff and thus both could end up defecting. This is a clear example of Jan Bhagidhari.

Similarly, wearing masks is a perfect example of a public good, as there is always a proviso that the person not wearing a mask could benefit and hence, again, both defecting and not wearing masks could be an eventuality. In this case, we, however, need a harsh punishment for those not wearing masks. This is a clear example of Jan Chetna.

Clearly, adhering to Jan Bhagidhari and Jan Chetna, as the Prime Minister has been espousing, requires an intelligent application of game theory in policy making.

The writer, group chief economic adviser, State Bank of India, is thankful to Sudipta Sarangi and Indrani Bhattacharya for useful comments. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"We will be existing alongside this lethal virus for many months to come; the need for national unity in the face of its immense social, financial and health challenges has never been greater."

— THE OBSERVER

Socialism & the pandemic

Countries more successful in curbing COVID-19 are welfare states, ruled by left-of-centre parties. There is a lesson here



SHAH ALAM KHAN

A PLEA HAS been filed before the Supreme Court, seeking to remove the words "socialist" and "secular" from the Preamble of the Constitution. But despite a persistent erosion over the last couple of decades, both principles were central to the type of republic our political forefathers had imagined. With the embrace of neoliberal policies in the Nineties, socialism was pushed aside. With the ongoing pandemic, however, socialism has become relevant not only for India but also the world. As the world grapples to find a vaccine for COVID-19, a closer inspection of the backwash of the pandemic reveals that socialist ideals have turned out to be a life-saver. This needs further corroboration and validation.

In the neoliberal world, hardly any country can be bracketed as a purely socialist nation. Countries which provide socialist medicine are the ones which have evolved the model of what is called a welfare state — the closest cousin of yesterday's socialist state.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of governments, health care models and political ideologies. It is important to see which countries have done better in this pandemic both in terms of COVID-related morbidity and mortality and the political ideology which governs them. It is no rocket science to imagine that those nations with good health infrastructure would do better during a pandemic. Having said this, the response and outcome parameters of the pandemic have not shown such simple trends. Besides healthcare management, it also involves political response and will.

The conceptualisation and application of a good public health system, which is an important component of any form of socialism, appears to have had a better outcome during the current pandemic. Capitalist systems with privatised healthcare have fared the worst, despite a good health infrastructure in terms of the availability of state-of-art healthcare technology.

In terms of good response to the ongoing pandemic, one country which stands out in the Australasia region is New Zealand. With around 1,757 cases and a low death rate of 4.56 per million cases, New Zealand has one of the best COVID-19 figures in the world. The country is at present governed by the Labour party, which has left-of-centre leanings. The total expenditure on health as a percentage of the GDP for New Zealand is around 11 per cent. For India, despite having "socialism" in its Preamble, the figure is a dismal one per cent.

Most European nations that have performed well in the current pandemic are through welfare states with socialist tilts or left coalitions in power. Germany had a

rapid outburst of the pandemic but was able to contain deaths very quickly. Till date, Germany reported a total of 247,000 cases with a death rate of 108 per million cases. Germany's total expenditure on health is about 11 per cent of its GDP and this is about one per cent more than the average spent by other countries of the European Union on health. Portugal, which has had a coalition left-wing government for the last few years, has contained the pandemic well. Its democratically-planned lockdown was eased off earlier than many other European countries. It had a total of around 58,000 cases with 182 deaths. This was in stark contrast to next-door neighbour Spain, which was devastated by the virus causing 480,000 cases and 29,194 deaths. Portugal's total expenditure on health is 9.5 per cent of its GDP. Yet another European nation which has done well in tackling the pandemic is Iceland, with a total of 2,121 cases and 10 deaths. Interestingly, Icelanders voted for a majority left-wing government in the general elections in 2017.

Even among the Latin American countries, those who spend more on health have performed better than those who are prudent in spending on people-centric programmes. Argentina is a classic example. With 40,000 COVID-19 cases and 8,000 deaths, it has fared far better than most of its neighbours. The country is ruled by the Peronists, who subscribe to more leftist economic policies. Argentina's population is comparable in many respects to its neighbouring Brazil, which has a right-wing government and has been devastated by the virus, with 3.96 million cases and around 123 lakh deaths. Venezuela, which has been under socialist regimes for the last two decades, on the other hand, showed promising outcomes during the current pandemic. It reported 47,756 cases with only 400 deaths.

An argument against this hypothesis would be that it is difficult to compare the Indian situation with either New Zealand, Germany, Iceland or even Argentina because our population surpasses the combined population of these countries. The problem with the supporters of the market economy is that they lay all problems at the doorstep of population growth. Kerala, the best performing Indian state in the current pandemic, is also the most densely populated. Concerns of population growth have always been part of a populist agenda in which the population of the poor is the main concern. We fail to understand that the path to population stabilisation passes through the overall socio-economic development of the people, and this the COVID-19 pandemic has handsomely revealed.

To conclude, a quick glance shows that socialism is not an odd contradiction ready to fall apart. Even in its most deactivated, metamorphosed, desultory form, it has been a handy weapon in successfully fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. India's quest for a socialist system may have been waylaid but socialist principles provide a semblance of hope concerning issues pertaining to people's health even in a country like ours.

The writer is professor, department of orthopaedics, All India Institute of Medical Sciences



SIDHARTH NATH SINGH

THE SAFETY OF women has been the top priority of the Uttar Pradesh government ever since Yogi Adityanath assumed the office as chief minister in 2017. The UP government, under his supervision, has not only taken appropriate steps to protect women from all kinds of crimes but has also ensured strict punishment to the perpetrators so that potential criminals mend their ways. This approach bore results and ensured that UP led the way in controlling rape and other heinous crimes against women.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's report in 2019, the rate of rape cases in UP was 2.8 per one lakh whereas in 2016 and 2017 the rate was around 4.6 to 4.0. In 2019, UP ranked 26th among the total of 36 states and union territories in rape cases. This data is a vindication of the fact that UP is ahead of other states in terms of controlling rape cases.

In the figures in "Crime in India 2018 and 2019" published by the NCRB, UP ranks far behind several other states in terms of registered cases of crimes. In other words, it is ahead of many states in terms of controlling crime. The percentage of registered crimes in UP is 10.52 while the percentage of its population in the country is 16.85. Apart from this, in 2020 (till September) UP has been able to bring about a 42.24 per cent reduction in rape cases and about a 39 per cent reduction in the cases of

Numbers don't lie

Opposition noise cannot hide fact: UP government is committed to women's safety

abduction of women as compared to 2016. As compared to 2019, there has been a decrease of 27.32 per cent in the incidents of rape. The accused booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act have been given harsh punishment. As many as five accused have been given the death penalty and 193 accused have been given life imprisonment, while 721 have been awarded other punishments under the POCSO Act.

CM Adityanath's "zero tolerance" towards crime is showing results. This can be gauged from the fact that according to the crime rate per one lakh population, the national average is 58.8, while UP's average is below that at 55.7, with Assam being the highest at 196. States like Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh also stand above the national average. Further, according to "Crime in India 2019" report, the conviction rate for crimes against women was the highest in UP with 15,579 convictions in 2019, and more than 55 per cent of the cases registered for crimes against women and minors led to the sentencing of the accused, which is a huge deterrent for anti-social elements.

Despite this track record, some political parties and those with an alleged anti-national frame of mind tried to instigate communal and caste-based riots on the pretext

of the Hathras incident.

In a democratic setup, we often come across debates about what should we expect for India — a stable government or a strong Opposition. The answer by any political leader is that we need both.

Yes, we do need a strong Opposition but certainly not like the current lot. Do we need an Opposition which is more inclined towards rumour-mongering, has a pessimistic approach and a destructive mindset and divisive thought process? No.

What we experienced in the wake of the Hathras incident was more shock than disappointment. The manner in which the entire false narrative was built to mislead the masses is disappointing and unacceptable. This was, in fact, an exploitation of the emotions of millions of Indians. The political compulsion and desperation of the Opposition can be understood but an attempt to pollute the psyche of the masses was nothing short of a crime.

A good government is expected to take prompt action in cases of crime against women. This was done in the Hathras case. An FIR was lodged promptly and subsequent action was also taken and senior district officials supervised the entire probe. CM Adityanath has already issued directives to act swiftly in cases related to women. In this case, too, he immediately set up a Special Investigation Team to probe the incident and

later recommended a CBI probe to ensure justice. Now, since the case has been referred for a higher probe and is pending in court, the truth will come out soon. But it is also imperative to expose the evil designs of some individuals who have a vested interest in disturbing law and order in the state.

After having spent many years in public life, I find no parallel to the acts of irresponsibility that the Opposition resorted to in the Hathras incident. Besides their attempt to spur communal flare-up, and caste-based riots, the irresponsible approach shown by the Opposition is deplorable. The deliberate attempt to create a totally wrong perception about any ideology, belief or thought process is dishonesty if not blasphemy vis-à-vis the wisdom of the people of this country.

As an age-old dictum says, "Falsehood is invariably the child of fear in one form or another." This signifies the state of mind of the Opposition.

A piece of advice to the Opposition — be positive and work for the best interest of the people, if not the government in power. Also remember, among the other duties of the government, one is to insulate the people from false propaganda and thwart the threat of nefarious rumour-mongering.

The writer is Cabinet minister in the Uttar Pradesh government

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CHILDREN SUFFER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Children in distress' (IE, October 16). The prolonged closure of schools has added to the plight of students from economically weaker sections. Many of them might never head back to school again. The state governments have been dragging their feet yet again for the tears of these hapless children hang in the balance.

Varun Das, Zirakpur

CENTRE'S BURDEN

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Centre gives in, says will borrow to make up for states' GST shortfall' (IE, October 16). The Centre tried to pass the buck to the states, infringing on its commitment to fulfilling the GST compensation. Economic Logic suggests that the Centre is best positioned to raise additional resources to bridge the GST compensation gap.

SS Paul, Noida

PER CAPITA MESS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Best way out' (IE, October 16). So far, the government has given catchy slogans and punch lines with no tangible outcomes. It is regrettable that while we like to be compared with developed economies, we are lagging behind small nations like Bangladesh in per capita GDP.

Deepak Singhal, Chennai

IDEAS ONLINE

A BAND-AID FOR A BULLET HOLE.
VEERA MAHLI

ANTI-FARMER, PRO-CORPORATE.
VARUN VERMA

www.indianexpress.com

FIGHT THE MOB

THIS REFERS TO the article "I'm the unborn baby..." (IE, October 15). I share the writer's sentiments on a gentle, kind and touching advertisement by Tanishq which, unfortunately, had to be withdrawn. There was nothing objectionable in the advertisement, which promotes unity amongst our diversity — India's biggest strength. The issue at hand is more ominous and reflects the increasingly polarised society that we have become. We have to fight such faceless mobs and not capitulate.

Subhadrata Basu, Mumbai

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

The LAC is the new LoC

There is a structural shift at the border. India will have to adjust its posture

India and China are inching their way towards a new equilibrium on the border. The new border equation is likely to make the Line of Actual Control (LAC), marked by large buffer zones and winter withdrawals, similar to the Line of Control (LoC), marked by permanent deployments, firing range distances, and constant friction. Managing this transition, while restoring, to use the euphemism adopted by both governments, "peace and tranquility" along the border, is now the primary challenge. During this, India must show no signs of weakness or impatience as these will be exploited by a China which respects only power in its rawest, hardest sense. The two governments have been talking at multiple levels. Despite this, they have barely budged from their original positions and tens of thousands of soldiers are digging in for a stand-off that will, in all likelihood, run through the winter. Or they could well be further rounds of fighting designed to strengthen negotiating positions.

There has been a sharp change in the options with New Delhi since Indian troops moved to the heights of Chushul Ridge in late August. If China is baulking at rolling back its intrusion along Pangong Tso, India will not pull its soldiers back from the heights. There is now insufficient trust between the militaries for such a move. On paper, this will seem as if India has conceded a chunk of land behind its version of LAC. And all effort must be geared even now to get China to vacate. But in reality, neither side had "actual control" of either bits of territory. They had been part of a no-man's land and their forward deployments have now shrunk that buffer to nothing. This is a reality which Indian border policy is adjusting to.

Restoring *sino quo ante* would also imply returning Sino-Indian economic relations to what they were before. That is also out of the question. New Delhi had once seen trade and investment as a confidence-building exercise with Beijing. Today, New Delhi must draft a five-year plan to reduce China's economic footprint in India as much as possible. And it should be working out how to do so in conjunction with other countries. Peace along the border is the obvious short-term goal, but struggle everywhere else should be India's new long march.

Don't undermine SC on Char Dham plan

The Supreme Court (SC) appointed high-powered committee (HPC), which was formed in 2019 to review whether the Centre's ambitious Char Dham Highway Project (CHDP) needs to be revised to minimise the ecological damage of the fragile Himalayan region, met on October 17 to decide the "future course of action" on the project. But what is surprising — and wrong — is that the meeting happened without HPC chairman Ravi Chopra's approval and participation. The ₹12,000 crore-CHDP aims to build an 889-km all-weather road, connecting Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri. According to a report in this newspaper, some HPC members have alleged that holding the meeting reeked of political interference.

The allegation cannot be rejected completely because there have been several instances in the last few months when certain members of the independent 26-member panel have not only undermined Mr Chopra's authority, but tried to weaken HPC so that the construction of CHDP continues as planned despite environmental costs. The panel is divided over how wide the highway should be — HPC recommended that the width of the road should be 5.5 metres instead of 7.5 metres to SC in July. On September 8, SC upheld the recommendation and asked the National Highways Authority of India to reduce the width of the road for the remaining part of the project. Mr Chopra alleged that the Uttarakhand Public Works Department is not implementing the SC order. Government officials who are uncomfortable with the prescriptions of the SC-empowered panel must realise that undermining Mr Chopra means undermining the court itself, and putting the ecology and citizens of the state at risk. As this paper had said before, the Char Dham project needs to be reviewed, and the SC needs to take a strict view of those undermining its orders.

Broadcasting needs big bang reforms

Cancel all licences, allow 100-odd channels, and set up an independent media regulatory body

India's media and entertainment sector (M&E) is a \$25.7-billion enterprise. Television accounts for almost half of the sector at \$12.93 billion. There are 912 television channels in India — 384 provide news and current affairs, 528 are general entertainment, 386 free-to-air and 332 are pay channels. There are 1,637 distribution platforms. Of the 345-odd broadcasters in the country, only five own more than 250 of these channels. Prasar Bharati also runs an elaborate TV network.

One of the most corrosive legacies of liberalisation has been the mechanical licensing of channels, leading to their proliferation since 1992. It has led to market fragmentation, resulting in flawed/absent revenue models. That is the root cause of aberrations, including Television Rating Points (TRPs)-rigging, exorbitant carriage fees, paid news, private treaties and substandard content.

The recent revelations by the Mumbai police, alleging rigging of TRPs are, therefore, hardly surprising. Globally, 60% of broadcasting revenues come from subscription and 40% from advertising. In India, 100% comes from advertising. With the revenue model being advertising-

driven, grabbing eyeballs by whatever means is the only game in town. For news and current affairs channels, the situation is worse. Industry estimates suggest that 93% of the TV viewers do not watch news. So, 384 news channels kick around in 7% of the TV universe, trying to make money.

There are 40,000-odd people-meters, mainly in metros and smaller towns to measure the viewing habits of 985 million people. The ratings generated based on these then become the currency to apportion advertising spend. If the locations of these people-meters are known, the system can be gamed. With the annual advertising spend estimated at ₹40,000 crore, this game alone, toxic content coupled with meter-rigging can do wonders to a channel's bottom-line.

From its inception in 1996, there have been difficulties regarding efficacy, credibility and reliability of ratings data. The number of meters deployed by the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) now over 40,000. Its Audience Measurement (TAM) at its peak numbering 25,000-odd has been considered inadequate. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) made recommendations in 2008, 2010, and then again in 2012 as did the Anirudh Kumar Committee to fix the system, but nothing was done. It reiterated that an industry

body consisting of all stakeholders should generate ratings. As information and broadcasting minister, I was swamped with complaints from broadcasters, especially free-to-air channels, regarding unreliable ratings. I requested TRAI to give a fresh set of recommendations to fix the ratings mess. They did so on September 11, 2013.

On January 16, 2014, after Cabinet approval, policy guidelines for ratings agencies were issued. The new regulatory architecture mandated that no entity could have paid-up equity in excess of 10% concurrently in a rating agency and a broadcast/advertising company. An industry-led body, BARC, finally became operational in August 2015. The objective of the guidelines was to obviate conflict of interest and create a rule-based regime where multiple rating agencies, including BARC, could operate ensuring a non-monopolistic situation.

After an unsuccessful legal challenge to the guidelines, TAM exited the business in August 2015. It teamed up with BARC to supply ratings, creating a monopoly situation again. BARC virtually co-opted existing ground infrastructure of TAM, perhaps out of economic imperatives. Unfortunately, BARC compounded the trust deficit with its functioning with broadcasters complaining that some "biggies"



Manish Tewari



Self-regulation in the media is a chimera. A media regulatory authority of India should be statutorily established to regulate both the content and business side of print, broadcasting and digital media

had a disproportionate influence over it. Allegations of panel tampering among other anomalies prompted TRAI to take *suo-moto* cognisance in December 2018 and review BARC. It issued fresh recommendations in April 2020 that are yet to be acted on. Trust issues have beset BARC from inception. Moreover, people-meters are an ossified template in the digital age. A chip-based anonymised TV-interfaced data collecting system needs to replace it.

Broadcasting needs big bang reforms. There isn't enough space in the market for 900-odd TV channels. The government must bite the bullet and cancel all TV licences. There will be litigation, arbitration and compensatory payouts involved, but ultimately it will be worth it. The government must introduce four TV channels per scheduled and official languages. There are 22 such languages, apart from Hindi and English, respectively. That would make 198 channels. Another four-odd channels should be auctioned for other non-

scheduled languages and dialects. These channels should be made content- and language-agnostic and allowed to run a mix of news and entertainment in the specified language genre. TRAI vide tariff orders must fix subscription rates that should account for 60% of channel revenues. With 100-odd channels, both quality of content and public discourse would radically improve. It would civilise the public discourse. Self-regulation in the media is a chimera. The Press Council Act should be repealed. A media regulatory authority of India should be statutorily established to regulate both the content and business side of print, broadcasting and digital media. It should consist of a judicious mix of judges, retired editors-in-chief and technical experts. Completely outside government, this is an idea whose time has come.

Manish Tewari is former information and broadcasting minister, India. The views expressed are personal

The Opposition must respect Parliament

The recent Parliament session was short, but optically an important signal that public representatives were doing their duty at a time of Covid-19. It was short in days, but high on productivity — despite many efforts to derail and disrupt. The suspension of question hour was characterised as an attack on democracy when it was an effort to promote productivity in a short session. There were no restrictions to unstated questions, special mentions and zero hours.

The new spin to the "death of Parliament" narrative is that Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has undermined Parliament. This is built on the fact that he does not speak frequently in Parliament and uses Twitter and the radio to directly connect with the people.

The number of times a PM speaks in Parliament is not a measure of his political or governance effectiveness. Nor does this undermine Parliament as an institution. Parliament is a platform for all parliamentarians, not just the PM and the government. So many ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) participated in the debates and discussions during the short session.

It is insult to those who have taken great effort to contribute to Parliament and committee meetings to have some in the Opposition imply that this does not matter as long as the PM speaks. The PM also spoke on appropriate occasions, particularly replying to the President's address and the budget. We should celebrate that the short session was as effective as any other in the past. Instead, we find a few disgruntled Opposition leaders expressing outrage as things did not go their way.

What the Opposition wants is to put the brakes on the government's legislative programmes. The PM is adept at using technology to communicate directly with the people. To suggest that this outreach is a substitute to Parliament is probably the silliest one in the attempt to undermine Parliament.

One other criticism is that the government is missing ordinances to bypass Parliament. Every ordinance issued by the government has to be brought before Parliament as a Bill, unless the government wants

the ordinance to lapse, which would be absurd. In every case, ordinances issued by this government were essential for some urgent policy goals. One was the three farm reforms bills. The three ordinances were issued in June.

The opposition to these came when they were introduced in Parliament in September. This smacks of sheer political opportunism by some in the Opposition.

There will be a legal constitutional problem if ordinances are repeatedly re-issued as a tactic to bypass Parliament. This government has been resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past have resorted to this. In any case, the Supreme Court (SC) has held such a practice to be a fraud on the Constitution. The Opposition narrative accepts that ordinances were used by earlier governments but the Modi government has used these "excessively." That is factually incorrect. Governments in the past

6 EDITORIAL

THE HINDU
MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2020

An incomplete solution

The Centre must assure States on the timeline for payment of the GST compensation due

The past week witnessed some forward, albeit explicitly delayed, movement towards breaking the deadlock between the Centre and States on bridging this year's shortfall in cess collections to reimburse States for adopting the GST. Following a lack of consensus at a third meeting of the GST Council on the issue last Monday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said States that had agreed to the Centre's proposal could begin borrowing from the market. To recap – the Centre had argued that just ₹1.1-lakh crore of the estimated ₹2.35-lakh crore shortfall in GST cess inflows was due to GST implementation; the rest was due to COVID-19. States could borrow ₹1.1-lakh crore with interest and principal payments to come from future cess collections; or borrow the ₹2.35-lakh crore, but bear the interest from their coffers. By Wednesday, 21 States had agreed to the Centre's first option and were permitted to raise about ₹79,000 crore (0.5% of their gross State domestic product) as additional borrowing linked to their acceptance of the option. On Thursday, however, the Centre changed tack and said it was now willing to borrow the ₹1.1-lakh crore and lend it onward. Calling this an administratively easier measure to ensure States do not end up borrowing at different interest rates, the Ministry asserted this would neither increase the fiscal deficit nor the general government debt.

States and economists have welcomed this change of heart, especially as it helps bring in much needed cash for States to fight the pandemic. However, it is odd that the 'administrative ease' of the Centre borrowing and lending to States, had not struck North Block mandarins earlier – given that the cess collection worries surfaced soon after the lockdown was imposed. Over the course of the negotiations, States had urged the Centre to borrow and pay them, but the Finance Ministry had repeatedly stressed that this would push up interest rates and upset its fiscal math. Precious time could have been saved had the Centre made this offer earlier – seven months into a year that has seen economic activity and revenue sources dry up, and States have only received ₹20,000 crore from the GST cess. Kerala, which was considering a petition in the Supreme Court with other Opposition-ruled States, has cooled off on the legal route, but sought full payment of the ₹2.35-lakh crore shortfall this fiscal. On Friday, M. Sitharaman wrote to Chief Ministers suggesting that the ₹1.1-lakh crore, in addition to the 0.5% of GDP borrowing, would give them ₹2.16-lakh crore, or almost 90% of the compensation shortfall. Cash flow assurances aside, the Centre must now talk to States to ensure greater clarity on the unanswered questions – including when the States will get the balance GST compensation. That is imperative to sustain the fragile peace attained for now.

No great escape

India's low global rank in tackling nutritional deficits calls for a revamped PDS

India's poor progress on nutritional indices must dispel the hubris surrounding strong economic growth for years, and turn national focus on persisting hunger, wasting and stunting among children. This year's Global Hunger Index (GHI) places India in the company of Sudan – rank 94 among 107 countries – with the unflattering assessment of the national situation as "severe". The country's score of 27.2 is the worst among BRICS countries, and inferior to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. The GHI is developed around wasting and stunting (under five), the share of the population with insufficient caloric intake, and child mortality. Index scores by international agencies have been criticised as flawed for choosing the wrong weights in scoring, and also for not including genetics and social determinants, but that would be a narrow view. The evidence from the NFHS-4 of 2015-16 is not very different. The reality is that national policy has no appetite for a radical transformation in the delivery of adequate nutrition especially to women and children, and has paid inadequate attention to achieving diet diversity through the PDS. On the other hand, the country is widely seen as falsely equating energy calories with a diverse diet. The existing deprivation has been aggravated by the pandemic, with food inflation putting pressure on depleted incomes or meagre pensions and savings.

The NFHS-4 found that under-five stunting from chronic undernourishment stood at 38%, and wasting, a result of acute lack of nutrition, at 21%. These data represent some progress, at a drop of about 10 percentage points in both categories compared to a decade earlier, although steady economic prosperity should have yielded a far bigger social dividend. The latest GHI measure is a reminder that much work is necessary to bring the true benefits of the National Food Security Act to the unreached, not merely as hunger mitigation through cereals, but as nourishment through a diverse diet that includes fat, protein and micronutrients. But there are worrying indications that the Centre has chosen the wrong course. In its pursuit of fraud within the PDS, it is inclined to take hard measures that would deprive the disabled and the elderly of even cereals, by insisting on biometric verification to get supplies. Strengthening the PDS, with a focus on women's health, would lead to healthier pregnancies, and stronger supplemental nutrition under the ICDS scheme would give children a better chance at all-round development. The importance of sustained, immediate intervention is further underscored by recent findings of International Food Policy Research Institute scholars that three out of four rural Indians cannot afford a balanced, nutritious diet. The right to food would be meaningless if it leaves a large section of Indians hungry, stunted and wasted.

The Raj Bhavan's new role – taking centre stage

The political design behind increasing gubernatorial over-reach is simple – to crowd in on certain State governments



HARISH KHARE

When in 2007 at the height of the agitation in Nandigram in West Bengal, Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi had allowed himself to express his "cold horror" at the ugly violence, Raisina Hill overseers were not pleased and their displeasure was conveyed to the Raj Bhavan in no uncertain terms. There was a definite clarity in New Delhi that a Governor need not get involved in the frays among the political parties and leaders. That was "old India" and there was a commitment to the federal principle.

In the "new India", a new role is being scripted for the Raj Bhavan, as is for all other constitutional institutions. The Governors in the non-Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled States have been given a licence to convert Raj Bhavans into a rival centre of political activism – even intrigue – against the elected governments.

The letter in Maharashtra
Hon'ble Jagdeep Dhanekar at the Kolkatta Raj Bhavan, so far, had the distinction of being the most active licensee – till his counterpart in the Mumbai Raj Bhavan decided last week to cross all limits of gubernatorial propriety. Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshari's by-now famous letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, demanding re-opening of the places of worship to the devotees across Maharashtra, is a brilliant but thoroughly unerving innovation in a Governor's bag of tricks of over-reach.

Various Raj Bhavans, of course,

have become embroiled in extremely unsavoury controversies over the decade, partly because the Constitution of India does allow a certain discretion to the Governor. And a discretion invariably does get abused. The framers of the Constitution had definitely disfavoured the idea of an elected Governor because they were unambiguously clear that political power would only be vested in the Council of Ministers, headed by a Chief Minister; yet, they were not inclined to put in a formal instrument of Instructions for the Governors and were content to believe that political decency and correctness would be observed both by the Governor and the Chief Minister.

In the distinguished constitutional expert, Nani A. Palkhivala, saw it, "the Constitution intended that the Governor should be the instrument to maintain the fundamental equilibrium of the powers of the State and to ensure that the mandates of the Constitution are respected in the State". The assumption, of course, was that those appointed to a Raj Bhavan would be endowed with "a *buddhi* [wisdom] which sets apart a statesman from a politician".

A twist to discretion
In the post-Neohuman era, as our politics became rough and our politicians rougher, that *buddhi* eluded most Governors. As an apologist of the Union Government, the Governors have, predictably enough, been all too prone to do the bidding of the ruling party at the Centre. Inevitably the "discretion" – be it choosing a Chief Minister to prove his/her majority, or dismissing a Chief Minister, dissolving the legislature, recommending President's Rule – came to be tainted with partisan political considerations.



GATEWAY TO THE TEMPLE

More often than not, the gubernatorial discretion was abused, sometimes absurdly, even whimsically.

The Supreme Court did try, through its judgment in the S.R. Bommai case, to restore some kind of order on the rampant proclivities of Raj Bhavans. That, of course, did not prevent a Governor from becoming difficult. For example, a Governor has been known for, once, withholding his assent to the Budget because the Chief Minister was not inclined to accede to the Raj Bhavan's demand for a fourth imported luxury car for "His Excellency".

But now, the BJP has accelerated the process of institutionalisation. A new role for the Governors in the non-BJP ruled States has been devised. Without seeming to abuse his "discretion", a Governor, like the one in Karnataka, Kolkatta Raj Bhavan, can blatantly put the licence of 'gubernatorial activism' in the service of his boss' party interests. There is probably nothing in the Constitution that forbids a Governor from making a political nuisance of himself. The Twitter handle comes in handy. Or, no one can fault a Governor for granting an audience to delegations hostile to the Chief Minister. The Maharashtra Governor was all too willing to get himself photographed with a film actress, who was demonstratively brawling with Chief Minister Thackeray. Or, take the case of the West

Bengal Governor openly suggesting that the police officials and the bureaucrats should perform their duties as "public servants are not political workers". Almost, a hit-and-run strategy. And, then, leave it to the media to whip up a political cloud over such loaded utterances.

New law

Article 167 of the Constitution does allow a Governor to call for any information "relating to the administration of the affairs of the State"; but, with a wink from the bosses in the Union Home Ministry, a Governor like Mr. Dhanekar or Mr. Koshari can become a total partisan. But, it was a new law when the Maharashtra Governor mockingly asked the Chief Minister if he had suddenly turned 'secular'.

In the "old India", the President of India would have mostly propped up the Chief Minister in the Keshavnagar Bhavan's displeasure to the Maharashtra Governor for this 'secular' taunt. After all, secularism is very much a part of the basic structure of the Constitution, the very sacred book that a Governor takes oath to 'preserve, protect and defend'.

"Secularism" is not a dispensable part of the Constitution, nor is it a dirty word, as Governor Koshari's letter implied. After all, it has been pointed out by jurists and constitutional scholars that in the Kesavananda Bharati case, the Supreme Court had declared secularism as a basic feature of the Constitution, even before the Forty-Second Amendment had introduced the word 'secular' in the Preamble to the Constitution. The political design behind an over-activist Raj Bhavan is simple: poke, prod, pinprick and provoke the elected government to waste its political energies and capital in an unwanted war of attrition; the BJP

can be the only beneficiary from the resulting skirmishes.

Reflecting an arrogance
However, there is a certain method to this gubernatorial madness. Governors like Mr. Koshari and Mr. Dhanekar are too insignificant as political players to have crafted on their own this new gubernatorial mediocrity; their over-reach is only a reflection of a new arrogant mindset at work.

The Narendra Modi-Amrit Shah leadership subscribes to a maximalist approach to the obligation of institutionalised sharing of power within our federal framework. Over and above the primacy of the Union, the BJP is allergic to the idea of having to share power and space with other political parties and players. The non-BJP governments, an unafraid Manta Banerjee and unmitigated Uddhav Thackeray, are seen as eyesores which need to be removed. To that end, wherever possible, the Raj Bhavans would become the State BJP's extension centres. No one should be surprised if the BJP were to use the contrived Koshari-Thackeray dust-up in the Bihar election campaign later this month.

This itch for political intolerance is a recurring nightmare for the Indian Union. After she returned to power in 1980, Indira Gandhi was determined to use the Raj Bhavans to get rid of unhelpful non-Congress governments. Remember Governor Ram Lal in Andhra Pradesh or Governor Jagmohan in Jammu and Kashmir. But, now, a new righteous of the "new India" is being deployed to beautify an old-fashioned power lust. An over-bearing Centre appeals enormously to wannabe emperors.

Harish Khare is a senior journalist based in Delhi

The hues in the green tribunal's resilient journey

Over 10 years, the NGT has made a difference to environmental protection, helped by a new tribe of legal practitioners



JAIRAM RAMESH

Yesterday (October 18) was a significant day, as it marked the 10th anniversary of the National Green Tribunal, or NGT (https://bit.ly/2T8Bz0J). Few ministries can boast of as varied, diverse, and challenging a mandate as the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The downside to this vast and all-encompassing scope, which covers forests, wildlife, environment, climate change and coastal protection, is that it gives rise to an equally diverse volume of litigation.

Complexities from day one
This was one of the very first things I realised upon assuming office as the Minister for Environment and Forests in the year 2009. The sheer number and complexity of cases, with several more being added every week, led the Supreme Court of India to designate a special Bench to handle these matters. This Bench, which met every Friday to deliberate on these and many other matters, came to be known fittingly as the 'Forest Bench'. And this was to say nothing of the numerous matters that were filed and pending hearings in the various High Courts.

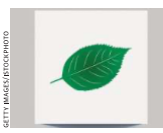
Given the time constraints of the top court and the High Courts, some cases had been pending for decades and in turn, spawning

other linked matters which further delayed the process. I also realised that despite the efforts of the capable officers and experts assisting the Supreme Court, this was at best an *ad hoc* solution.

Stages in an evolution
Several years prior to my tenure, Parliament had passed legislation to the establishment of a National Environment Tribunal (1995) and a National Environment Appellate Authority (1997). The Authority (https://bit.ly/29vQ0Qb) was intended to act primarily as a forum for challenges to environmental clearances while the Tribunal (https://bit.ly/2H6GAG9) could award limited amounts of compensation in cases of environmental damage to life or property. In my opinion, these did not go far enough in terms of jurisdiction, authority, impact, or autonomy.

It was clear that the enforcement, protection, and adjudication of environmental laws required a specialised and dedicated body. A tribunal, staffed with judges and environmental experts, would need to be empowered to hear these issues so that the burden on the High Courts and the Supreme Court could be reduced. The quality of time spent on these issues could also be increased as, unlike the Supreme Court, the tribunal could have benches in various States, thereby increasing access to all citizens. Thus, the idea for the "NGT" was born.

This was not the first time that the idea had been mooted. In judgments such as *M.C. Mehta & Anr. Etc vs Union Of India & Ors*, Etc (1986), the then Chief Justice of India,



GATEWAY TO THE TEMPLE

Justice P.N. Bhagwati, had suggested "to the Government of India that since cases involving issues of environmental pollution, ecological destruction, and conflicts over national resources are increasingly coming up for adjudication and these cases involve assessment and evaluation of scientific and technical data, it might be desirable to set up Environmental Courts on the regional basis with one professional judge and two experts drawn from the Ecological Sciences Research Group keeping in view the nature of the case and the expertise required for its adjudication. There would be of course a right of appeal to this Court from the decisions of the Environmental Courts" (https://bit.ly/3j3DxBv).

These observations were recalled in 1999 by the Supreme Court in the landmark case of *A.P. Pollution Control Board vs Prof. M.V. Nayudu (Retd.)* which added its own emphasis on the need for a court that was "a combination of a judge and Technical Experts".

The NGT's first year was a turbulent one. Unlike the opaque legislative process followed today, the first draft of the NGT Bill was circulated as part of a pre-legisla-

tive consultation process and inspired widespread debate. Concerns ranged from the genuine to the absurd. In the first category, one of my senior colleagues argued that it would contribute to the trend of 'tribunalisation' (a debate that would achieve some closure a year later with the Supreme Court's judgment in *R. Gandhi's case* in 2010). In the last category, an environmental non-governmental organisation took issue with the name and argued that the word 'Green' could act as a green signal to potential polluters. Following its passage, the Madras High Court even issued notice on a petition which had challenged the Act as unconstitutional and stayed appointments to the body (an order vacated by the Supreme Court on appeal).

Incidentally, I had intended for the parent bench of the NGT to be in Bhopal, as a tribute and homage to the memory of the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy of 1984. However, many of the jurists and retired judges I consulted suggested that for administrative considerations, it would be better for the Chair to be at Delhi.

The track record

Since its inception, the NGT has, apart from creating a new breed of legal practitioners, protected vast acres of forest land, halted polluting construction activities in metros and smaller towns. It has penalised errant officials who have turned a blind eye towards enforcing the laws, and held large corporate entities to account. It has protected the rights of tribal communities and ensured the en-

forcement of the "polluter pays" principle in letter and spirit. In this endeavour it has been assisted by brilliant practitioners, many of whom are young attorneys, passionate and dedicated towards protecting the environment.

A change in attitude

Perhaps the biggest testament to the NGT's success has been the attitude of the ruling government towards it. Three years ago, in a fashion similar to what has been done with the Right to Information Act, the Central Government attempted to dilute the criteria for appointments to the NGT and other tribunals. I challenged this dilution before the Supreme Court and my counsel, the renowned senior advocate, Mohan Parasaran, was called upon to assist the Bench as an *amicus curiae* in the case.

The rules (though not the Rule making power) were ultimately suspended by the Supreme Court. But key challenges remain: the NGT must focus less on governance issues and more on adjudication. Benches have to be filled quickly.

In its next decade, the NGT must continue to remain a proactive "inconvenience" to all those who, while pontificating grandiloquently on the need for environmental protection, take actions that make economic growth ecologically unsustainable.

Jairam Ramesh is a Member of Parliament and the Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science & Technology, Environment & Forests

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

A strong bond
Former President Pranab Mukherjee not only lives in the hearts of Indians but also in the hearts of Bangladeshis (Page 1, "Special", October 18). The love and respect Bangladeshis have for the former President is overwhelming. There are forces out to divide people in the name of religion, but the underlying spirit of oneness between India and Bangladesh must not be left forgotten.

POSHITA VIKRAMATH,

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Theory story

The quadruple whammy, in the form of cheap Chinese

imports and the pandemic, demonetisation and introduction of GST, is squeezing the life out of domestic toy manufacturers ("Ground Zero" page, "Far from a happy toy story", October 17). As an important first step, the Centre needs to impose a ban on Chinese toy imports. Additionally, a reduction in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on the lowest slab needs to be implemented, by considering toys to be educational aids.

In terms of marketability, the G.T. tag of the toys can be leveraged and these toys presented to visiting Heads of State or Governments as

a souvenir. These toys should also be handed out to the Padma, Arjuna, other sports and film awardees as a memento along with the respective awards. The government can also consider purchasing these toys in bulk and giving them to its schools for gifting to students below a certain age. "Play or Display" should be the slogan; these toys should be marketed under.

Lastly, the Centre should also carry out an educational blitzkrieg, targeting the parents of the importing countries, about wooden toys being safer.

V.V. KOUSHIK,

Chennai

Biometric ration supply

It is great that India, at almost all levels, is improving after the introduction of many changes. One such step is having electronic authentication for ration supply. However, there is a spoke in the wheel. With poor connectivity, the machine does not work and there are frequent scenes of people being made to wait for long hours and then asked to return home to try their luck another day.

I have observed that not all provisions are supplied on the same day. It could be rice one day, dal another, and oil some other day. Each time, the individual

concerned has to come in person and affix his thumb impression – that is if the machine is working. It is sad that it is an uncertain situation for the elderly, the disabled and the poor. Till now, in Tamil Nadu, the poor did not have to worry about their basic needs as a result of the Public Distribution System. But

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

A news report about J&K topper in NEET examination from a trouble-torn area (October 18, 2020) had erred while giving the name of the candidate who had earned that distinction. The Jammu and Kashmir State topper, according to the statement available on the National Testing Agency's website, was Gupta and not as reported. It was clarified by the bureau that the list of State toppers was not included in the statement given to the reporters earlier. However, the bureau said, it is now available on the NTA website, with a footnote saying that the list was added later.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by telephone: +91-44-28448257/28536300; E-mail: readsendeditor@thehindu.co.in



To read more editorials online, scan the QR code

with an 'insistence' on electronic authentication, I fear that many an elderly or disabled person will face hunger. There should be an alternative way to supply provisions when the machine does not work.

Dr. JESSE LIONEL,
Vellore, Tamil Nadu

Probing judicial impropriety and corruption

Only retired judges of high credibility would be able to conduct a robust inquiry into Jagan Reddy's complaint



PRASHANT BHUSHAN

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy dropped a bomb last week when he wrote to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) accusing a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of judicial impropriety and corruption and State High Court judges of bias.

Contents of the letter

The letter refers to the purchase of agricultural land, in the area to be declared as the capital of Andhra Pradesh, between the time when Chandrababu Naidu became Chief Minister in 2014 and the time when he announced the demarcation of the new capital at Amaravati. The charge is that the land was purchased by persons, including the Supreme Court judge's daughters and in-laws (named subsequently in an FIR, after declaration of the capital area limits, at the same low price for the lands which existed before the demarcation, when in fact the market prices had skyrocketed, thereby causing huge pecuniary gain to them. In this connection, in March, the Principal Secretary (Home), Andhra Pradesh Government, wrote to the Secretary of the Union Ministry of Public Grievances and Pensions seeking a CBI inquiry into the findings of a Cabinet sub-committee, set up to investigate charges of corrupt dealings in land purchases, filed in committee had "opined that public servants at the helm of affairs in the erstwhile government misused and abused their official position to pre-determine the location of the new capital and subsequently purchased lands to unjustly and illegally benefit their associates and their companies and businesses, family members and political party members."

Mr. Reddy accused the Supreme Court judge of influencing the allocation of benches at the State High Court (his parent High Court) to hear politically sensitive cases. This, he wrote, led to the passing of a string of orders staying a number of investigations of corruption against the Naidu government. One of the cases the letter cites to show that the High Court



AP/AN

is favouring Mr. Naidu is an extraordinary order passed in one evening by the Chief Justice of the High Court staying all investigations into the FIR involving this land scam, which mentions the relatives of the Supreme Court judge as well as a former Advocate General as beneficiaries. The Chief Justice also issued an unprecedented gag order on the media from reporting the contents of the FIR.

The letter also mentions the High Court's recent order of an inquiry into a private conversation between a retired judge of the High Court and a district judge (under suspension). In the conversation, the retired judge is heard mentioning his knowledge about the corruption of this Supreme Court judge and asking the district judge if he has more information in this regard. The district judge then surprisingly files an application in a pending writ (seeking an investigation into the death of a backward class registrar of the High Court due to alleged violations of COVID-19 guidelines at the High Court) bringing on record this telephone conversation which he had secretly recorded. This unrelated conversation, filed in an intervention which was not even allowed, and which has nothing to do with the prayers in the main writ, is then made the basis for ordering an inquiry into what the High Court terms "designing a plot against 'The Hon'ble Chief Justice of High Court of Andhra Pradesh and another sitting judge of the Supreme Court'". This is a rather extraordinary order, especially considering that much of the conversation contained information on the Supreme Court judge already in the public domain and does not make out any plot or conspiracy against a judge or the judiciary to warrant such an inquiry.

With these developments, two questions have arisen: whether such a letter/complaint against the

Supreme Court judge should have been put out in the public domain; and two, what the CJI's response should be. In 1997, judges adopted an in-house procedure for inquiring into such charges. In case of a complaint against a Supreme Court judge, the CJI is expected to order an inquiry by three sitting judges of the Supreme Court. Though in *C. Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bahadur* (1995), the court held that such complaints should be kept confidential, the unfortunate reality is that the judiciary tends to try and brush complaints of corruption against judges under the carpet. Sometimes, if the public becomes aware of such complaints, the CJI is compelled to order an inquiry. But we have often seen that even credible complaints against judges, made confidentially to the CJI, are ignored.

The same is seen in attempts to impeach a judge. I have found that at least three conditions must be satisfied before a sufficient number of MPs are willing to sign an impeachment motion against a judge: there should be solid documentary evidence of corruption; the judge should have been a public scandal. In the absence of the second condition, MPs are reluctant to sign an impeachment motion even if there is documentary evidence of corruption. The *Ravichandran Iyer* decision, that the complaint should be kept confidential, is only likely to lead to more serious complaints being shelved. In any case, as the court has held, sunlight is the best disinfectant and there is no reason why such complaints, even if made against senior sitting judges, should not be put out in the public domain and does not make out any plot or conspiracy against a judge or the judiciary to warrant such an inquiry.

Now, progressive democrats, seeking to have Mr. Reddy's letter released, the letter to the media.

Contempt proceedings against him would be counterproductive, since he is unlikely to be cowed down. The issue will probably escalate, further denting the image of the judiciary. Some say Mr. Reddy's charges against the judge should not be taken seriously since he is himself facing several corruption cases. In fact, a Bench headed by the same Supreme Court judge ordered fast-tracking of such criminal cases against MPs and MLAs. However, the fact that the complaint may be corrupt should not cloud the view about the charges made by him; if those charges are serious and backed by evidence, they must be investigated. Charges of corruption can also be a ground for initiating impeachment. Such charges therefore cannot remain secret.

What should the CJI do?

The purpose of the in-house procedure is that all credible complaints of misconduct against judges of the High Court and Supreme Court should be looked into by a committee of judges. The charges made in Mr. Reddy's complaint are serious and appear to warrant an in-house inquiry. The code of conduct requires an inquiry by three sitting judges of the Supreme Court. But in a complaint involving the senior-most puisne judge, it is unlikely that junior judges will conduct a robust and credible inquiry. In the case of the sexual harassment complaint against the previous CJI, Ranjan Gogoi, by a woman employee of the Supreme Court, the in-house committee did not allow the complainant to be accompanied by her lawyer, nor did it allow recording of the proceedings. The final report, which purportedly exonerated Mr. Gogoi, has not yet seen the light of day. Strangely, the woman whose allegations were found to be unsubstantiated by this committee was later reinstated by the Court. This casts serious doubts on the credibility of the report.

Only retired judges of high credibility will be able to conduct a robust inquiry into Mr. Reddy's complaint. The Chief Justice should set up a committee of retired judges to enhance the reputation of the judiciary, dispel mistrusts, and redeem the image of the judge concerned.

Jagan Bhushan is a public interest advocate practising at the Supreme Court

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

The global pandemic and its impact on journalism

While the impact has been mostly negative, there is some good news too



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on every sector. Its impact on journalism is immense. Economists have given us sufficient warnings about how the lack of reliable data in India hurts the vulnerable. Just as we do not have data on migrant labourers, we do not have any data on COVID-19's impact on Indian journalism. But a global survey gives us an indication of the cost extracted by the pandemic from the world of journalism.

The International Center for Journalists (ICJ) and Columbia's Tow Center for Digital Journalism started the 'Journalism and the Pandemic' survey to understand how members of the media are faring in these trying times. The authors of this project are Julie Posetti, an award-winning journalist and academic who leads the ICJ's global research programme; Emily Bell, Founding Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School; and Peter Brown, Research Director at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism. They surveyed 1,406 English-speaking journalists and news workers from 125 countries with the aim of providing a meaningful and actionable snapshot of the challenges faced by journalists in the first few months after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic.

Many threats

Thirty per cent of the respondents who were reporting in the field during the first wave of the outbreak said their news organisations did not supply them with a single piece of recommended protective equipment. Forty-five per cent said they did not receive a face mask; 49% said they were not given hand sanitiser; and 85% said they did not receive appropriate technical equipment such as extendable boom microphones and telescopic lenses that would have enabled them to conduct interviews at a safe distance.

The survey found other threats too. Seventy per cent of the respondents rated the psychological and emotional impacts of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis as the most difficult aspect of their work, and 82% re-

ported having at least one negative emotional or psychological reaction as a result of the pandemic. Two-thirds of the respondents reported multiple negative mental health impacts. Twenty per cent said their experience of online abuse, harassment, threats or attacks was "much worse than usual".

The question of false balance comes up in a critical manner in the survey. In their report, 'How are we feeling?', the authors write: "Readers have been outraged at the commissioning of dangerously inflammatory opinion columns under the justification that it's important to expose readers to a range of views." Reliance on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook saw a sharp increase as reporters depended on remote sourcing rather than being a witness. Many questions emerge from this development: "Are they more like public meetings or private conversations? How secure are they? And what are the ethical implications of dependence on tech platforms for building communities?"

The survey also said that "politicians and elected officials were identified by 46% of the respondents as a top source of disinformation, along with government agencies and their representatives (25%), and State-linked troll networks (23%), highlighting a serious lack of trust in political and governmental actors as the pandemic took hold." It identified Facebook as a "prolific disinformation vector" (65%). Over one-third (35%) also found the Facebook-owned closed messaging app WhatsApp as a top spreader; 11% of the respondents identified Instagram, also Facebook-owned, as a top enabler; 9% cited Facebook Messenger; and 42% cited Twitter as a "prolific disinformation spreader".

Some positive findings

Amidst this generally depressing news, there were some positive findings too. Forty-three per cent of the respondents reported that audience trust in their journalism had increased during the first wave of the pandemic and 38% said they had experienced increased audience engagement (which was also largely positive) during the period. And 61% expressed an increased commitment to journalism as a result of the pandemic.

Most respondents wanted to alter the publishing environment in favour of high-quality reporting, and governments and civil society organisations to reaffirm a belief in the value of critical, independent journalism.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

Still awaiting police reform

It is time for the judiciary to step in and enforce the diktats it had passed in 2006

M.P. NATHANAL

Police brutality in recent months has turned quotidian. The thrashing of a Dalit Ahiwar couple by the police in Guna district of Madhya Pradesh on July 14 was very distressing. But for the media coverage, the incident would have gone unnoticed. The District Collector and the Superintendent of Police have been transferred and six police personnel have been suspended since the incident. The matter will soon be forgotten.

The public outcry following the brutal torture of J. Benicks and his father P. Jayaraj in Sattankulam town in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu resulting in their death had still not ended when news came that a gangster, Vikas Dubey, was killed by the Uttar Pradesh police in Kanpur when he allegedly tried to flee from custody. The police version of the incident was quite unbelievable. It looked like the law had been subverted.

These incidents and several others show that we need immediate remedial measures lest the country witnesses an upheaval of the kind that the U.S. saw following the death of George Floyd. Should such a situation arise, it will be the political class that will squarely be held responsible, for it is they who have proved to be the stumbling block in the implementation of various apex court directives aimed at improving the functioning of the police.

Solutions that remain on paper Commissions and committees are set up every time there are demands for police reforms after a major incident. Then the recommendations of such commissions and committees are simply consigned to the archives. But they are not forgotten as some senior police officials vociferously demand implementation of their recommendations from time to time.

The first serious attempt to overhaul the policing machinery was made when the National Police Commission (NPC) was set up in 1977. The NPC submitted eight reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs between 1979 and 1981. Seven of these reports were circulated to the States in 1983 with an annotation that "the Commission has been unduly critical of

the political system or the functioning of the police force in general". In a subtle manner, a signal had been sent. The report was put in cold storage until Prakash Singh, a retired IPS officer, filed a PIL in the apex court in 1996 demanding the implementation of the NPC's recommendations.

In 2006, the Supreme Court issued a slew of directives on police reform. These would have had a far-reaching impact had the States and the Centre paid any serious attention to them. But that would have upset the appellate of our politicians and even the bureaucrats, some of whom are known to be corrupt and mired in crime. According to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), there were 1,580 MPs and MLAs facing criminal charges. The rein lies the crux of the matter.

Turning a blind eye

The one diktat that would hurt the most is the setting up of a State Security Commission (SSC) in each State which would divest the political leaders of the unbridled power that they wield at present. Of the States that constituted an SSC, only Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have had SSC recommendations binding on the State government, according to the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. Only six States provided a minimum of two years to the Director General of Police (DGP). In Tamil Nadu, T.K. Rajendran, who was made DGP (Intelligence) and given full additional charge as DGP in September 2016, was formally appointed DGP on the day he attained the age of superannuation. Many States have not implemented a single directive of the Supreme Court.

Since expecting political will to implement police reforms is a far cry, it is for the judiciary to step in and enforce the diktats it had passed. Fourteen years is too long a period for any further relaxation. The Court has to come down heavily on the States and the Centre to ensure that its directives are not dismissed lightly. A bold step towards bringing down to the politicians is possible only when the politicians criminals-police nexus is shattered.

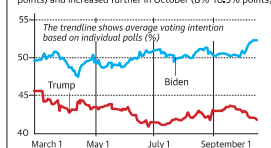
M.P. Nathanal is Inspector General of Police (Retd), CBNP



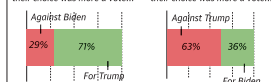
DATA POINT

Advantage Joe Biden

POLL FAVOURITE | According to data from multiple opinion polls aggregated by [fivethirtyeight.com](https://www.fivethirtyeight.com), a U.S.-based news website, Biden had a 10.2% point lead over Trump in national polls as of October 12. In March, the gap was narrower (4%-6% points). It widened in June (6%-9.5% points) and increased further in October (8%-10.5% points).

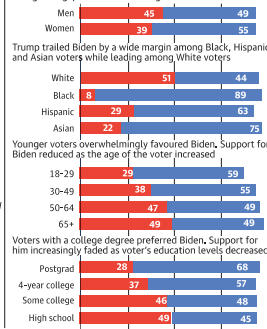


NOT THE OTHER | According to a study by the Pew Research Center, views on Trump are central to voting choices — both among his supporters and Biden's. In October, 63% of Biden's supporters said their choice was more a vote "against Trump". Also, 71% of Trump's supporters said their choice was more a vote "for Trump".



*Pew surveyed 11,929 adults, including 10,543 registered voters, during the last week of Sept. and the first week of Oct. 2020

PREFERENCE MAPPING | Overall, Biden enjoys significant acceptance across gender, race, age and education lines. However, Trump holds a slight advantage over Biden in certain sections of the population. Charts show the % of voters who would vote for Biden (■) / Trump (■) if the presidential election was to be held today*. Among both men and women, Biden was favoured by the majority, though the gap was narrow among men.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 19, 1970

Quebec extremists kill minister

Quebec extremists executed Labour Minister Pierre Laporte after holding him captive for a week as a wave of deep shock and anger swept Canada there was confusion over the fate of the second kidnapping victim — British diplomat James Cross. The body of Mr. Laporte, 49-year-old father of two children, was found wrapped in blood-soaked blankets in the boot of a car in Montreal, with a single bullet hole through his head. Police in reporting the grisly find last night also said they had discovered the body of Mr. Cross abducted from his Montreal home on October 5, by members of the Quebec Liberation Front (F.L.Q.). But the police later would not confirm or deny the report. A Montreal radio station reported that a letter written by Mr. Cross saying he was alive was received to day (October 18) by the Montreal police. With the letter was a communique from the F.L.Q. Police later confirmed receipt of the letter and communique. According to the radio station the communique said the full demands of the F.L.Q. must be met or Mr. Cross would be executed.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 19, 1920

The Coal Strike

(From an editorial)

The threatened strike of the miners in Britain has now begun. On the merits of the miners' claims, the non-recognition of which has resulted in the present disastrous strike, we do not now propose to enter. We shall be content with touching briefly the position taken up by the Government and the miners respectively. The Government's case is that at the time of the coal prices and wages of miners, many of the mines could just only manage without closing down and that therefore no rise in wages or reduction in prices was justifiable or possible. The Government would like to support position with statistics which tended to show that, far from production increasing or at least keeping pace with rise in wages, it had fallen concurrently with such rise. The miners, on the other hand, at first contended that there must be effected a reduction in prices by 14s.2d per ton and, subsequently, shifting their ground, asked for a 2s. increase in wages. The miners are consumers as well as producers of coal and they are interested as much in getting coal prices decreased as in getting miners' wages increased, and hence their first request to get coal prices reduced as the cost of living was high.

OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | PARALLAX VIEW



Our digital leap forward and a snare to beware

As Information Age companies zoom ahead while most others languish under a covid cloud, India would need to ensure that earning gaps don't result in stagnant mass-market demand

Businesses in diverse fields and of various sizes have been left gasping by covid-19, but some have either forged ahead or rocked on as demand swelled for their wares and/or services under our corona siege. That business fortunes would split was clear all along the ascent of our big infection wave, but would profit gaps leave us a gap? Would capital, if not capitalism, get shaken up? Answers may slowly have begun to surface. Take India's infotech results after Q3 and 'turned into virtual life support for most of the webbed world, a positive demand shock for digital gigs everywhere. A glance at the numbers of our top players would show that they are not just surviving the pandemic, they are thriving under it. Last week, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), India's largest software exporter, posted a quarterly net profit of ₹7,475 crore, not a peak but about 6.7% higher than its June quarter, on revenues of ₹40,135 crore, up 4.7%. Its close rival Infosys scaled new highs with its net profit up 14.4% to ₹4,845 crore on sales of ₹24,570 crore, up 3.8%. HCL Tech's figures for the second quarter of 2020-21 were robust, too, with Wipro not far behind. In dollar terms, their performance looked brighter still. This is not like the tech booms of yore, but impressive for the times. They outdrew forecasts on most counts, and their prospects look upbeat.

With India's corona curve now seen to be on a descent, e-commerce exuberance could well be the story of this year's third quarter. Covid has nudged shoppers online globally. The US-based retailer Amazon Inc, which saw its sequential sales jump almost 18% during the June quarter of 2020 to nearly \$89 billion,

expects to add 50% more capacity across the world this year. A pre-pandemic digital shift has got magnified, evidently, be it home live or work. In the words of TCS chief Rajesh Gopinathan, "What we are witnessing right now is the start of the first phase of a multi-year technology transformation cycle." Like their global peers, Indian firms have also found they need to invest heavily in technology to get their operations up to speed. Even if we escape another wave of the pandemic, there would be no getting away from arising dependence on automation. All this suggests that the arena of business may come to be dominated by enterprises of the Information Age in ways we have not seen so far.

While that has indeed been happening for years, the two-speed economy it would now throw up could also widen inequality in a country that has a socio-economic pyramid that is already too steep. A big bulge of Indians derive their livelihood from sectors fraught with uncertainty and turbulence. According to a McKinsey Global Institute report, India must achieve a recovery in manufacturing and construction for our economy to regain a trajectory of rapid growth and generate jobs at the scale we need. Capital needs to disperse for it to uplift Indian lives. If earning gaps are not adequately addressed right now, India risks getting caught in a 'middle-income trap' all too prematurely. A small tech-savvy elite may discover there is just not enough money to go around at lower slabs of the pyramid for demand to swell at a pace that justifies our global tag as an emerging market. To save mass consumption from stagnation, revive investment, and aim high again, we urgently need another burst of broad reforms.

The countless untold stories of lives sent haywire by the virus

We may never hear of the struggle for survival that hundreds of thousands face after covid struck



SANDIPAN DEB
A former editor of Financial Express, and founder-editor of Open and Swarajya magazines

Say the virus has got you fired or shut down your business, and besides your bare necessities, you also have an equated monthly instalment (EMI) to pay. The moratorium on loans is over, and you have to pay interest on the EMI postponed. So you actually need to pay more, though you still earn nothing. It's not uncommon.

Thirty years ago, I worked in the consumer finance business of a giant multinational. We financed everything from TVs to trucks. With no electronic fund transfer system, we collected post-dated cheques from the debtor to cover the loan period. As the manager for three east Indian states, I was on the front line, both approving loans and collecting from defaulters. After all, the sale of a loan is incomplete until the lender gets his money back with interest.

Prakash Dashed bought a motorcycle with a loan from us. He had been an ideal debtor for 18 months, and then he began defaulting. The EMI was ₹526, and four consecutive cheques had bounced. We checked the documents he had submitted when applying for the loan. His family's financial health seemed to be fine. He worked in an ajute mill, his wife in a government school, and his father in the state government. It was time to go meet him and, if necessary, seize the motorcycle. So one Sunday, a small posse—me, a junior col-

league and a retired police officer we'd hired as muscle for such situations, set off for his village in Howrah district. On the main village road, a young man on a rickshaw with a megaphone was announcing an upcoming jatra (a traditional Bengali theatre form usually enacted in the open) by a renowned Calcutta troupe. We went to the nearest teastal and asked for directions to our customer's house. Immediately, a man got up and asked who we were. We named our company. He asked us to come with him. On the way out, he said something to the jatra promoter on the rickshaw. This was worrying. In our business, in such situations, one needed to be alert—we were after all aliens here and the community could get hostile. But there was nothing we could do now. "I am Prakash's brother," said our guide. As we walked, he told us casually that he had a small shop, but because he worked for an opposition party, it had been burnt down some months ago by thugs from the ruling party. This was apparently common, but as a result, he now had no income.

We reached a recently built house where the walls didn't have a single coat of paint on them, parents welcomed us graciously and seated us in the small living room. His father then explained how utterly unexpected events had changed the family's fortunes in the last few months. His elder son's shop was gone, a factory had shut, and his wife, whose job at the school had been temporary one, had lost it because she was expecting. The father had retired six months back, but since he had been an honest man and never allowed anyone around him to take bribes, the clerks in his department were now exacting revenge by holding up his provident fund and pension—and all his savings had gone into building this house. There was no money left to paint the walls.

Then we saw the jatra rickshaw man flit past our door. A minute later, he appeared, and introduced himself as

Das. We explained that we needed the money right now, with penal interest. "Give me three days," he said. "I'm organizing this jatra on Wednesday night, and the response is good. If it doesn't rain, and the event goes through, I hope to make a profit of ₹4,000. You'll have your money."

There was a whisper at the door. We saw a pregnant young woman, half-hidden by the curtains, beckoning to our customer. He got up, his mother came in, and three plates with a sandesh, a *chocogila* and a *samosa* on each were placed before us. So that's what the brother had told our men on the street—to buy sweets for us. Deeply uncomfortable, I said: "You shouldn't spend money on us," smother smiled and replied: "You are guests and you have come a long way. We can't let you go without having something." The policeman muttered: "They've already spent the money, sir. Eat up." We ate.

As we were being seen off by the men, I said: "Till Thursday noon. Otherwise we come and take the bike." The father said: "Sir, there's a difference between you coming and taking the bike away and my son coming to your office and handing it over. On Thursday, I promise you that he will come to your office either with the money or the bike." I knew I could trust his word.

I had never worried about the weather as much as I did that Wednesday, scanning the sky frequently for rain clouds. But it didn't rain, and the brother came the next morning and paid up the dues with a bundle of soiled notes. Soon after this, I left the company and the city. A year later, on holiday in Calcutta, over an evening drink with an ex-colleague, I asked what had happened to the case. "Oh, he couldn't pay," he said indifferently. "We went and seized his bike."

The events that ruined the family were totally unexpected. I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of people this out-of-the-blue virus has created. Their stories will never be told.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Knowing what's right doesn't mean much unless you do what's right.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

A practical reason why businesses should resist bullies

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, and a novelist, most recently of 'Miss Laila, Armed And Dangerous'

One day a billionaire walked into a meeting of journalists. He guessed, correctly, that we were talking "something negative" and that we were, as usual, plotting the downfall of the government and the powerful. He then said, "Baniyekhi modhi hamesha neehet hai." For those who don't follow Hindi, an English translation will have to come. He said of the Baniy caste, he was using the word figuratively to denote India's business class. And what he meant was that merchants are by nature more practical than courageous; that they never antagonize the powerful.

There is a general perception that the whole business spectrum, which includes industrialists, entrepreneurs, merchants and salaried executives, is given to being pragmatic instead of idealistic, amiable with authority instead of being confrontational, and compliant instead of being bold. This is why in the past few days, Tanishq, a Tata-owned jewellery brand, received much understanding, even sympathy, from per-

haps millions of regular people after it withdrew a commercial to appease a mob. The commercial showed a pregnant Hindu woman in a Muslim household getting along with an affable Muslim mother-in-law. A small segment of Hindus objected to the commercial, claiming to be offended, though it is not very clear what exactly offended them, apart from the detail of a Hindu woman being married to a Muslim man. You may think there was an assemblage of an argument. All of us do get angry now and then, and we try to dress it up in "facts" and other forces. But in this case, there is nothing worthy of mention. I am certain that if it was a pregnant Muslim girl in a Hindu household, there would have been no rage, though I cannot substantiate this unless there is another ad with such a plot line. In any case, what happened was that even though Tanishq had done nothing wrong and it had only made a lame film about human love, it capitulated to a bunch of trolls. The brand's reputation is intact because corporations and the rest of the business class appear to have a moral right not to stand up to bullies. This is a perception granted by people in general because those people in general work for corporations and are acquainted with the usefulness

of practical retreats. They think that fighting for what is right is the risk of loss; something only a certain type of artist, journalist or activist does. In reality, it is this notion that is impractical and an affront to the wisdom of capitalism. All too often, practicality is a masquerade for poor analysis.

It is not hard to understand why most people give corporations a long rope. Companies have too much to lose. A small group of inconsequential people can harm them in ways that are disproportionate to their power. Most people and no company wants to remind its consumers of the unpleasantness of life. It is no coincidence that rebellion is the nature of people in low-paying professions or with low prospects. This also explains why arts students agitate more than engineering students, and why sons of poor men are more likely to rebel against their dads than the sons of rich men. Also, while India's refined

imitators of the West may bloat about "institutions", the fact is they never built any in the decades that they had tremendous influence. As a result, there is little that protects Indians who take cultural risks unlike, say, American companies and public figures who have exquisite freedoms. Also, people

who seek freedom of expression are usually those who want their livelihood from expression—so idealists are just practical entrepreneurs like writers and filmmakers. Even so, there is a reason why businesses should exhibit more cultural guts, why it is wise for the entire business community to resist bullies, and why entrepreneurs should behave like artists.

We do not need the abstraction of morality to do the right thing. Logic can show what it is. In most situations, if not all, we indeed know what it is. Often, there is only one right way, and a million wrong ways. A single right way is clarity, a million wrong ways is confusion. Sometimes idealism is the diary of the thing; the right way.

Freedom of expression is not entirely about entertainment, nor merely about the right to offend. In a society where storytelling does not have wide cultural freedom, where a mob can regulate it by claiming to be offended, the kind of people who become powerful are largely useless, even destructive, to the economy. In India, it is far easier for someone to get attention by raking up pointless issues than through ingenious civic administration. For the same reasons, it is very easy for mediocre artists and activists to gain attention, even an international reputation, by annoying a small mob.

When the bar is too low for cultural and activist charlatans to succeed through facile gimmicks, society as a whole is impoverished. Also, in a world where the successful, the smart and the happy feel that they have too much to lose by standing up to bullies, the very idea of rebellion has been taken over by the down-and-out and the defeated. Anarchy is the job of people with very little to lose. Every time a corporation capitulates to a bully, it not only empowers a small mob of cultural guardians, it also empowers future disenchanted forces of capitalism. And yes, a free society does make better cinema.

GUEST VIEW

Construction and manufacturing could be our growth propellants

If adequately set up for success by policy action, these sectors could be pivotal in driving India's growth over the next decade

SHRISH SANKHE & ANU MADGAVKAR
are, respectively, senior partner at McKinsey & Co., and partner at McKinsey Global Institute

New-age services such as e-commerce and digital communications dominate conversations about the next curve of growth these days.

While these sectors hold great promise and need to maintain their growth momentum, McKinsey Global Institute's latest report, *India's Turning Point*, shows that high economic growth over the next decade would need the traditional sectors of construction and manufacturing to play a leading role.

India needs to create 90 million non-farm jobs over the next decade, requiring an average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 8.0-8.5% over 2023 to 2030, or about double the rate of 2019-20. While this seems like a tall order, failure to achieve this growth momentum might mean a decade of missed opportunity.

Our analyses show that of the 90 million non-farm jobs needed, 24 million could come from construction alone—16 million from real estate and 8 million from infrastructure. Manufacturing, meanwhile, could generate one-fifth of the incremental annual GDP (about \$750 billion) and close to 11 million new non-farm jobs by 2030.

To generate its share of employment, the construction sector needs to grow at about 8.5%, nearly double its 4.4% growth rate over financial years 2012-13 to 2018-19. India could take two major actions to trigger this growth.

First, spend about 8% of GDP on infrastructure annually for the next 10 years. Of this, the government share of the spending could be 6% of GDP, more than the 4% of GDP spent in the last few years.

Second, build 25 million affordable homes over the decade. For this, a set of focused real estate reforms are required. The measures adopted by the country could include generously increasing incentives for home ownership and creating rental stock. At the central level, substantially raising tax deductions limits on mortgages and rental incomes, as well as introducing tax incentives for investments in rental housing stock could be considered. The US, which offers tax deductible interest of up to \$750,000 on mortgage loans and an effective low-income housing tax credit incentive, could serve as a good guiding example. State-level measures could include rationalizing stamp duties and registration fees (like Maharashtra has done), introducing regulatory amendments in rent-control policies, launching digitally-enabled, single-window clearances to reduce time delays in affordable housing construction, and bringing the goods and services tax on modern construction methods (like pre-fabrication) in line with in-situ buildings. The blueprints of these policies could be designed over the next three to six months, and implemented soon after.



Additionally, India has a high land-price-to-average-income ratio; in terms of per square-metre price to per-capita GDP, it is about 6.0 in Mumbai and 3.8 in Bengaluru versus 0.5 in Bangkok and 0.2 in Beijing. To narrow this gap, India could do two things. First, release 20 to 25% of underused but buildable public-sector land. About 400,000 hectares of land-holding is with defence, railways and port trusts alone. Second, reform zoning regulations in the top 300 cities by population. Indian cities have an average floor space index of 1.0-1.3, much lower than that of comparable cities elsewhere. This would, of course, need to be accompanied by infrastructure planning.

Manufacturing has also been a powerful engine of growth for most high-performing emerging economies, such as China, where manufacturing GDP grew by 13% annually over 2000 to 2010, and Bangladesh and Vietnam, where it rose by over 10% over 2010 to 2019, while employment was created at a 4-5% rate.

Manufacturing in India could capitalize on trends such as shifting global supply chains and the burgeoning use of digital and automation. A set of sub-sectors—electronics and capital goods, chemicals, food processing, pharmaceuticals and medical devices, among others—could generate \$500 billion of economic value by 2030. The electronics sector's imports alone stand at \$125 billion currently, and it needs to replicate the success of the automotive sector.

To turbocharge manufacturing, India could

introduce targeted, time-bound and conditional incentives—like the production-linked incentives announced in April 2020 for domestic handset manufacturing—to reduce the cost disadvantage that Indian manufacturers face while competing with companies from China and Vietnam, among other countries.

Indian states could also create powerful demonstration effects by establishing port-proximate manufacturing clusters that contain free-trade warehousing zones. They could provide land at lower costs, plug-and-play infrastructure, and common utilities, apart from expedited approvals.

India also needs to consider reducing its factor costs of power and logistics. Inefficiencies in power distribution and cross-subsidies have made India the only country in a peer set of 20 countries with industrial power tariffs higher than residential tariffs. India's logistics costs are also high, at 13-14% of GDP, and its modal mix is skewed towards high-cost road transport. Both these costs could be reduced 20-25% by enabling franchised and privatized distribution company (or "discom") models, reducing cross-subsidy surcharges, and establishing multi-modal freight ecosystems.

If adequately set up for success, manufacturing and construction could be pivotal in driving India's growth over the next decade. Considering that the consequences of inaction on this front could possibly be prolonged stagnation, India is at a critical turning point. It is time for the country to go back to the basics, and bring manufacturing and construction centre stage.

MY VIEW | IN THE MARGINS

The Economics Nobel's propensity to stir controversies

VIVEK DEHEJIA



is a Mint columnist

The announcement of the 2020 Nobel prize for Economics on 12 October aroused a surprising degree of controversy. Awarded to two mid-career professors and unknown (outside the academy) professors at Stanford University, Paul R. Milgrom and Robert B. Wilson, the controversy arose because the pair were awarded the prize for an apparently esoteric branch of microeconomics known as "auction theory".

Among mainstream economists, the first to be ticked off by the award was apparently Branko Milanovic, who sent out a tweet thread critical of the prize. Apart from the usual snark of critics who put "Nobel prize" in inverted commas—implying that it's a bogus and real Nobel, not being one of the original awards—Milanovic's substantive point was that the award should go to research dealing with big and important questions—wealth, poverty, inequality and so forth, of the type he deals with—and not to allegedly minor topics such as how to design an auction. As he wrote in the thread: "Eco-

nomics is a social science. Its aim is to make us understand the world and make people's lives (materially) richer. The work that should be singled out is the work that does that—in a big way."

In today's social-media driven world, the reaction was equally swift. Two recent graduate students of the winning pair, now professors themselves at top universities, tweeted their own thoughts. Economists Mohammad Akbarpour and Shengwu Li argued persuasively that the apparently esoteric topic of auction design relates to some big questions of economics—of a type that Milanovic and other critics purport to care about. Going right back to Friedrich von Hayek, himself an early Economics Nobel laureate and doyen of the Austrian school of economics, Akbarpour and Li pointed to a central question that Hayek and other early pioneers of modern economics grappled with: How, exactly, does the (publicly observable) price system capture and convey (private) information through a market economy? And how do we know that this leads to an efficient allocation of resources?

While early pioneers of microeconomics, including Kenneth Arrow, Gerard Debreu, and Leonid Hurwicz—all Nobel laureates—showed that under certain conditions, a

competitive market would achieve economic efficiency, it remained for later economists such as Milgrom and Wilson to show how a public auction could elicit private information and lead to a socially desirable outcome. Building on these insights, real world auctions, such as for broadband spectrum, have been designed in accordance with these theoretical principles. Contrary to what critics say, that's pretty big, isn't it?

This is not by any means the first time that the Economics Nobel prize has courted controversy.

The award to Paul Krugman in 2008, which bypassed a whole generation of international trade economists preceding him, was widely seen, fairly or not, as politically motivated. Awarded on the eve of the election of Barack Obama to the US presidency, Krugman was well known as a staunch Democrat and critic of the incumbent president, George W. Bush.

Likewise, the 1998 Economics prize awarded to Amartya Sen—so far, the only

Indian to have won (last year's co-winner, Abhijit Banerjee, was a US citizen when he won)—was widely seen, rightly or wrongly, as "atonement" for the previous year's award to economists Robert C. Merton and Myron S. Scholes for their work on financial derivatives, such as for linked to the Long Term Capital Management debacle on Wall Street that occurred as a fallout of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Sen, whose work focused on poverty and deprivation, seemed a more wholesome choice the year after.

Sometimes, though, the Nobel committee does get its timing right. My own great-guru, Robert Mundell, won the Economics Nobel prize in 1999, the very year that the European common currency came into being (on 1 January).

Given that Mundell won, in part, for his theorization about an "optimum currency area" and as the architect of the first blueprint for a European currency going back to the 1970s, leading to his being known as the euro's "godfather", the timing seemed emi-

nently just. And everyone agreed that the prize was richly deserved—especially since Mundell won solo, rather than having to share it.

Meanwhile, in the early years of the prize, which was first awarded in 1969, the Nobel committee was playing catch-up, awarding it to obviously deserving winners, titans of the field such as Kenneth Arrow and Paul Samuelson, who, together, can be credited for codifying modern mathematical economic theory. Another early winner, Sir John Hicks, who shared the prize with Arrow in 1972, was a legend for codifying the Keynesian theory in the "IS/LM" (investment-savings and liquidity preference-money supply) diagrammatical analysis that we teach to this day.

Sometimes, the Nobel committee combines winners in a given year with a keen sense of irony. Thus, in 1974, the year that arch free-marketeer and opponent of big government Hayek won, he shared the prize with Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, an acolyte of the welfare state and of extensive government involvement in the economy.

What is without doubt is that the Nobel prize redefines the gold standard for academic work in economics. That is not going to change.

MINT CURATOR



These rare gibbons are found only in the forests of Hainan island in China. AFP

A new bridge of hope for world's rarest primate

Swinging through the treetops comes naturally for gibbons. But that's tricky if a landslide has torn a huge gap in the forest, making it difficult to roam far and wide, to find food or meet a date. For the rarest primate in the world, there's now a temporary solution: a rope bridge reconnecting the trees. Some used the ropes as a handrail, others swung by their arms and the most daring walked the tightrope. The primate lives only in the forests of China's Hainan island. All nine in the group mastered the rope bridge, save one adult male, which made a mighty jump from one tree to another, sometimes accompanied by athletic teenage companions. Conservation scientists say the 18-metre-long structure could be an essential lifeline for the endangered species....

BBC

Robot punished for calling cosmonauts drunk

A Russian-built humanoid robot that flew to the International Space Station (ISS) has been removed from Twitter after insulting former cosmonauts and accusing them of drinking in space. The space robot Fedor (Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research) served aboard the ISS for 10 days in August but was sent back to Earth after it proved incapable of performing a space walk. Prior to its mission to the space station, former Russian deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin shared videos of Fedor appearing to show it driving a car, lifting weights and shooting guns. The life-sized robot... had an active social media presence but was abruptly removed following a barrage of tweets aimed at former cosmonauts Maxim Surayev and Alexander Samokutiyev, who now serve as lawmakers.

The Independent

Pakistani falcon smugglers nabbed in good time

Pakistani authorities have thwarted a bid to smuggle endangered birds out of the country. The falcons are thought to be worth about 200 million rupees (₹50,000/\$1.2m) on the black market. Collector of Customs Mohammad Saqif said they were all on the endangered species list, and were being smuggled from Afghanistan to "Arab countries". Hunting with birds is a popular sport in a number of countries in the Middle East. Reuters news agency report that 74 falcons were recovered, while AFP news agency says 75 falcons and one houbara bustard—a desert bird hunted by falconers in North Africa—were found. The meat of the houbara bustard is widely prized in the Middle East as an aphrodisiac. Two men have reportedly been arrested, and customs authorities plan to release the birds....

BBC

Concorde's ghost won't daunt this speedy plane

People have always wanted to travel fast, ever since the first person galloped across the plains on horseback," says Mike Barnister. And he should know. Mr Barnister flew Concorde with British Airways for 22 years. As the airline's senior Concorde captain he piloted the final commercial flight over London in October 2003 and subsequently the very last flight delivering a Concorde to a Bristol museum. Nearly two decades later the world is edging closer to gain again faster passenger jets that can fly faster than the speed of sound. This month, Boom Supersonic rolled out its XB-1 supersonic test plane. It's the first civilian supersonic aircraft since the Soviet Union's Tupolev TU-144 in 1968. The skinny, sharply-pointed machine will allow Boom to confirm aspects of the design of its proposed Overture....

BBC

The sea lion whose brain went under the knife

The adolescent patient turned sullen and withdrawn. He hadn't eaten in 13 days. Treatment with steroids, phenobarbital and Valium failed to curb the symptoms of his epilepsy. Then, on Sept. 18, he had a terrible seizure—violently jerking his flippers and turning unconscious in the water. Cronutt, a 7-year-old sea lion, had to be rescued so he didn't drown. His veterinarian and the caretakers at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom began discussing whether it was time for palliative care. "We'd tried everything," said Dr. Claire Simeone, Cronutt's longtime vet.... Cronutt underwent groundbreaking brain surgery aimed at reversing the epilepsy. If successful, the treatment could save increasing numbers of sea lions and sea otters from succumbing to a new plague of epilepsy. The cause is climate change.

The New York Times

Grumbles over this year's award are a bit of a surprise but several wins in the past have attracted flak