



Turbulence ahead

Air India will need all the managerial expertise it can get to turn into a successful buy

The Tata Group's consummation of its acquisition of Air India last week marks both the culmination of the airline's return to its original founders after an almost seven-decade hiatus, as well as the start of an arduous long-haul flight for the loss-making, formerly state-owned flag carrier. The Tata's enthusiasm for winning back what was once the country's iconic airline brand notwithstanding, the skies in which the industry operates have changed considerably. A look at the market share data from the domestic air passenger segment clearly shows that budget or low-cost flights now hold a dominant position, commanding about four-fifths of the market. The Tata group's full-service venture, Vistara, with no less a partner than Singapore Airlines on board, has struggled to establish a foothold and with Air India's addition, the Tatas find themselves saddled with a bulk of their combined domestic market share of 23% (as of November) being in the less-demand full-service segment. Nor is the group's newly combined share from the low-cost segment, comprising Air India's 5.9% and the fractional share that Air India's Air India Express has, significant enough at the moment to give it scale in the high-volume business. That the group is said to be considering consolidating Air India's domestic low-cost services along with Air India's operations is a clear indication that the Tata bosses realise the need to optimise the varied aviation resources that are now in the group's fold so as to enhance viability.

On the international front too, Air India faces multiple challenges, not the least of which is the Government's current pandemic-related curbs on commercial international flights. With foreign carriers restricted to limited capacity under the 'Air Transport Bubbles' arrangement, Air India too has found itself constrained in the number of overseas flights it can operate under the bilateral arrangements with counterpart countries. The Tatas, though, could use the current curtailment of overseas services as an opportunity to undertake a long overdue overhaul of Air India's inflight experience. Also, with Vistara now operating to a full select overseas destinations, the Tatas will need to decide if they would want a younger in-house competitor to Air India once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and normalcy restored as regards international flights. For the Tata group, the choices going forward will need to be strategic. With the domestic market set to see more churn with at least one new budget airline set to enter and other rivals struggling for capital, the group needs to decide whether it wants to add capacity to budget offerings or stay a predominantly full-service carrier at a time when the more lucrative business class travel has been hit, and with aviation fuel costs set to soar further, Air India will need to tap into all of the Tata group's vaunted managerial expertise if it is to turn into a successful buy.

Another one

Nadal keeps overcoming the challenges posed by age and injury

In legendary sporting careers, there comes a moment which perfectly encapsulates the champion's relentless pursuit of transcendent brilliance. For Sachin Tendulkar it was reaching a hundred international hundreds and for Kapil Dev it was getting to 432 Test match wickets to become the then highest wicket-taker. It spells consistency, across decades and geographies. On a balmy Sunday evening in Melbourne, it was the turn of Rafael Nadal to attain similar nirvana with a record 21st men's singles Grand Slam title, passing Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic in the all-time tally. The 35-year-old is only the fourth man in history (after Roy Emerson, Rod Laver and Djokovic) to win all four Majors at least twice. Nadal was not best placed to achieve what he did. For most of the second half of 2021 he was in exile and a chronic foot injury had him considering retirement. In Australia, he was physically sub-prime and in the final against Daniil Medvedev – a 66% all-rounder, who barely five months ago felled Djokovic at the 2021 US Open with a blindingly devastating performance – he was on the cusp of defeat, down two sets and three break-points. But what came to the fore was Nadal's greatest trait, the uncanny ability to thrive when barely allowed to live, culminating in what he called his "greatest comeback" and the "most unexpected achievement" of his already glittering career.

The previous decade in Australia has been one of disappointment for the Spaniard, having lost four finals, including two from winning positions. A repeat seemed in the offing when deep in the fifth set he failed to serve out the match. But such was the rarefied heights he reached that he quickly left a bad service game behind, relaxed into the moment and earned another opportunity for a shot at history that he would not miss. There was a history-maker among women too as the classy Ashleigh Barty, a player with indigenous Australian heritage, won her maiden Major on home soil, a first for an Australian since 1978, and third overall after the 2019 French Open and 2021 Wimbledon. Adept on grass and clay, courtesy her first-rate footwork and outstanding racquet skills, Barty seamlessly transitioned to the acrylic, adding some aggression while keeping her finesse and variety intact. Even in the crowded marketplace that global tennis is, there are no styles and personas quite like Nadal's and Barty's. It was apt that the event ended with rousing victories for the duo, despite the fog of Djokovic's deportation saga that had settled pre-tournament. For Indians, Sania Mirza's announcement of retirement at the end of the season will bring a tinge of sadness. But the year ahead will be another opportunity to relive and celebrate her stunning achievements and trailblazing legacy.

The mind and the state of Russia's President

In a sense, Putin is seeking to rewrite history, with an attempt to push NATO back and restore Russian stature



RAKESH SOOD

In early January, there was a flurry of diplomatic activity beginning with talks in Geneva between United States Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, shifting to Brussels for a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-Russia Council meeting on January 12, with the final being the 57-member Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) meeting in Vienna the following day. The immediate provocation was the presence of 1,000,000 Russian forces, backed by heavy artillery, tanks and armoured personnel carriers on the Russia-Ukraine border, generating apprehensions about an imminent invasion. The diplomacy has continued with meetings and phone calls at the highest levels. In the absence of any forward movement, the situation in Ukraine remains tense as analysts try to read Russian President Vladimir Putin's mind about Russia's next move.

Russian problems

In 2008, the Bucharest NATO summit declaration opened an extended timeframe for membership to Georgia and Ukraine. Russia was quick to pick up the gauntlet. Months later, citing Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's actions in South Ossetia as a provocation, Russia intervened taking over the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

As protests mounted in 2013 against Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich who was seen as pro-Russia, Russia annexed Crimea, legitimising it with an estimated 94% vote in a referendum in 2014. For the last seven years, the eastern provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk have seen pro-Russian militia fighting the Ukrainian forces in

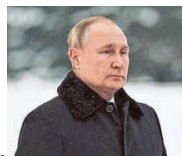
a civil war that has claimed over 10,000 lives.

However, troubles come in multiples. Even as Mr. Putin tries to dampen the Ukrainian tilt to the West, he has had to shore up Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko whose move to get a sixth term in office sparked widespread protests, creating new uncertainty on Russian borders.

In the South Caucasus, fighting had broken out between Azerbaijan and Russian treaty ally Armenia over the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh. In end-2020, Russia brokered a ceasefire that has proven to be tenuous. Turkish President in Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been expanding his regional role and provided vital military support to enable Azerbaijan to gain the upper hand. In Ukraine too, Turkey has sold drones and other military hardware to bolster President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's ability to resist Russian advances. All this even as Mr. Erdogan engages with Russia in the Astana process on Syria and is a client for the S-400 missile defence system.

In Central Asia in early January, protests against the fuel price increases in Kazakhstan followed, prompting President Kasym-Jomart Tokayev to issue shoot-at-sight orders to the security forces. Mr. Tokayev took over in 2019 from Nursultan Nazarbayev who had ruled for 29 years but public protests forced him to resign.

However, he remains influential as Chair of the National Security Committee, controlling the defence, intelligence and police sectors through his loyalists. He has since quit and his right-hand man, former Prime Minister Karim Masimov, was accused of leading the National Security Committee and arrested for treason. Mr. Tokayev also reached out to Mr. Putin and for the first time since it was set up in 2002, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) has sent a Russian-led 4,000-strong military contingent to restore law and order and protect key government facilities. CSTO was a Russian initiative and includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan,



Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Notwithstanding the multiple eruptions in its borders, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov captured the Kremlin sentiment when he described the former Soviet territories not as "free, sovereign and liberated nations" but as "territories that lack ownership".

Seeking lost glory

In a sense, Presidents Biden and Putin are both seeking to rewrite history. The U.S. would like a return to the 1990s, its unipolar moment when it set into motion the eastward expansion of both NATO and the European Union as the instrument for ensuring European security. It engaged Russia through NATO's Partnership for Peace that grew into the NATO-Russia Council with over 20 dozen working groups covering arms control, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, logistics, peacekeeping, civil emergencies, etc.

Mr. Putin thinks differently. He considers the break-up of the USSR the biggest tragedy of the 20th century and has called the eastward expansion of NATO that added 14 new Baltic and Central and East European member states (in stages) an existential threat. At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Mr. Putin raised the issue of security guarantees for Russia for the first time. He has also described the protest movements (colour revolutions) in the former Soviet republics as western attempts at bringing about regime change. He wants to push back NATO and restore Russian stature and influence to what USSR enjoyed during the bipolar era.

On December 17, Russia had

presented two parallel drafts on security guarantees with the U.S. and NATO. These included a prohibition on any further NATO expansion, removal of all U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe and U.S. troops to be restricted to NATO territory prior to the expansion as in 1997. These would also have curtailed U.S. naval vessels from the Black Sea, the Barents Sea in the north and the Okhotsk Sea in the east. These demands were dismissed by the U.S. as "non-starters"; in turn, it proposed talks on arms control, missile deployments, constraints on military exercises and confidence-building.

While declaring that "Russia had no intention to invade Ukraine", Russian Deputy Minister Sergei Ryabkov reiterated that "Ukraine must never, never, ever join NATO" and warned of "military and technical consequences that could put European security at risk". Mr. Sherman said that "NATO's open-door policy was non-negotiable" while Washington hinted at crippling economic and trade sanctions if Russia intervened in Ukraine. The talks in Geneva, Brussels and Vienna ended in a stalemate and brinkmanship continues.

Risks of over-reach

On January 14, over 70 Ukrainian government sites were subjected to a cyber-attack with a warning, 'Be Afraid and Expect the Worst'; Ukraine has attributed it to Russia. The same day, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki disclosed intelligence that Russia had pre-positioned special forces and operatives to undertake false flag operations in eastern Ukraine, warning Russia against using it as a pretext for intervention. On January 27, Mr. Biden said he expects Mr. Putin to make a move in February.

In the recent past, former U.S. President Donald Trump was calling NATO a drain on the U.S. and President Joe Biden announced a "brain dead" while U.S. President Joe Biden has sought to rebuild alliances, the messy withdrawal from

Afghanistan left NATO allies doubting long-term U.S. commitments. Barely six months ago, France recalled its Ambassador from Washington and Australia protesting against the creation of AUKUS (a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the U.S. in 2021) that led Australia to cancel its multi-billion submarine deal with France. There were also U.S. and NATO candidates ready to host U.S. nuclear weapons. The 2008 declaration about expanding NATO to include Georgia and Ukraine was seen as a rash promise that NATO was keen to forget. Even Russia's takeover of Crimea had been overlooked. But Russian actions in Ukraine have revived NATO, giving it a new lease of life by restoring its original purpose.

On China

The U.S. focus on China and the Indo-Pacific was an opening that Russia cannot afford to ignore. Europe or be accused of appeasing Russia. Mr. Putin is shrewd enough to know that shifting U.S. focus away from China cannot be in Russian interest; it means Russia more dependent economically on China because the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline remains frozen and sanctions isolate it from European markets. Further, it gives China a free hand to expand its influence in Europe. An overtly antagonistic relationship with the U.S. and Central Asia may also limit Russian options in West and South Asia.

Ultimately, a war in Ukraine is something that neither Russia nor the U.S. want. Both need a way out of the escalatory spiral. The recent talks have brought Russian concerns about NATO's eastward expansion centre-stage. Now, Mr. Putin has to decide which is a greater challenge – a liberally oriented Ukraine or confrontation with a rejuvenated NATO together with an unconstrained China. The choice is clear.

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The case for vaccinating children against COVID-19

Protecting all children, especially those who have risk factors, should be a humanitarian priority for the Government



DHANYA DHARMAPALAN & T. JACOB JOHN

There is a general misconception that vaccination ought to be reserved against diseases that cause death in large numbers. COVID-19 is generally a mild disease in the large majority of healthy young children infected with SARS-CoV-2.

However, children living with diabetes, chronic heart/lung/kidney/neurological diseases, obesity, and with an immunocompromised state due to immunodeficiency syndromes or immunosuppressant therapies are at high risk of severe disease, need hospitalisation and expensive treatments, even of mortality. Older children and adolescents have a higher risk of severe COVID-19, approximating adult risk levels. All such children deserve COVID-19 vaccination to preserve good quality of life.

MIS and diabetes

Four to six weeks after COVID-19, irrespective of severity, some among otherwise healthy children develop Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS). Statistics available in India showed 5% mortality among 800 children hospitalised for MIS; more than half required intensive care and prolonged hospital stay. Without a national registry of MIS, we do not know its real burden. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 91% protective effectiveness of two doses of Pfizer's mRNA vaccine against MIS in children 12 to 18 years. COVID-19 vaccination prevents MIS.

Another post-COVID-19 disease in adults and children is diabetes, starting within weeks. In a report from the CDC on 80,893 children (below 18 years), the incidence of post-COVID-19 diabetes was 31 per 10,000 versus control, 11,810/10,000 after respiratory infections. India already has a heavy burden of diabetes in children. COVID-19 vaccination will prevent post-COVID-19 diabetes.

The Brhanmumbai Municipal Corporation's COVID dashboard (January 13, 2022), showed 16,426 total deaths, of which 19 were in children below 10, and 43 in children between 10 and 18 years (total of 62 or 0.38%). January data from UNICEF show that 0.4% of a total 3.5 million COVID-19 deaths were in children and adolescents. India's reported deaths were 4.86 lakh till January 17, 2022 – child deaths at 0.4% rate would amount to 1,844. Independent analysis by expert epidemiologists (Science, January 6, 2022) estimated a six to seven-fold higher number of deaths, suggesting a far higher number of child deaths.

Other factors

It is estimated that 2,00,000 children are born with congenital heart defects every year in India. New cases of cancer in children are about 50,000 per year. A huge



COVID-19 VACCINE

number of children have neurological disorders. As in a United Nations estimate, about 40 million in India are disabled due to various diseases, among whom over 7% are children. India has the second highest number of obese children in the world (44.4 million). The burden of childhood neurophonic syndrome annually is about 1,40,000. Sickle cell disease is highly prevalent in the tribal populations in India. The Indian Society for Primary Immune Deficiency estimates that over a million children have primary immune deficiency disease. These are all conditions that are known as risk factors for severe COVID-19. Protecting them with COVID-19 vaccination is a humanitarian priority.

India's third COVID-19 wave began on December 28, 2021. On January 3, 2022, children above 14 years are allowed vaccination, undoubtedly a step in the right direction. They become eligible for the second dose four weeks later – thus, children are not getting the vaccine in the second wave of the present wave. Although we have not been able to protect children with vaccination so far, the Government of India must now plan

for protection against the inevitable future endemic COVID-19. Paediatricians caring for children with the above listed conditions associated with high risk of COVID-19 and its complications, need approval to protect them with vaccination.

SARS-CoV-2 (except the Omicron variant) damages many body tissues and organs. Injuries to the pancreas is the reason for new onset diabetes. COVID-19 is a new disease and the extent of damage to the health of children will be known only in due course. All facts considered, rolling out vaccination with vaccine(s) of assured safety is the right way forward.

Vaccine safety

Since the risks of severe COVID-19, its related complications and mortality are much higher in adults, a risk-benefit comparison has so far favoured vaccination, even with vaccines with some known serious adverse reactions. Globally, both mRNA vaccines and Adenovirus vectored vaccines are recognised to cause some specific and defined diseases that need to be immediately diagnosed and treated in order to prevent mortality.

Since risk of COVID-19 severity is low in children, only vaccines with little or no risks of serious adverse reactions are justified in them. Thus, vaccine safety is the most crucial criterion for approval. Fortunately, the indigenous inactivated virus vaccine with adjuvant promoting cell-mediated and antibody arms of immunity had been investigated for safety in children at and above two years, and

found to be safe without any serious adverse reaction. Obviously for this reason the Government has allowed its use for exclusive use in children between 15 and 18 years. We argue for vaccinating younger children also with the same vaccine.

The urgency for vaccination is the continued high risk of disease, complications and death in children who, on account of their chronic diseases or prolonged treatments are vulnerable. Selective vaccination of high-risk groups will not be feasible under the emergency use approval (EUA) of vaccines in children. Once EUA vaccines are licensed for general use, health-care givers can vaccinate selected children under their care.

Age of eligibility

As of now, the ethical, scientifically sound and wise decision ought to be step-wise lowering of age of eligibility: first to above 12 years, then to above five years and eventually to above two years, in rapid succession, ensuring safety in each age group. Expanding the age range for EUA of the vaccine does not necessarily mean that all families may opt for their otherwise healthy children to be vaccinated. However, without EUA, children who need prophylaxis against COVID-19 will continue to be denied the benefit of vaccination.

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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.

Getting to the truth

Nothing stops the Government from suing *The New York Times* if it feels the contents in the said report have no grain of truth. Instead of a flurry of denials of any wrongdoing, it should submit a factual and comprehensive report before the expert committee constituted by the Supreme Court of India to probe the matter. To maintain secrecy over the issue under the garb of national security is

unacceptable since it concerns the constitutionally guaranteed rights and privileges of citizens, who are entitled to know the truth.

J. VIGNAN DHANANJAY, Chennai

■ The Narendra Modi government needs to come clean. Dismissing allegations of any kind of surveillance, saying that there is no concrete basis or truth associated with it whatsoever is not enough. It is the abuse

of Pegasus that is at the centre of the row now. If India has established robust protocols when it comes to surveillance, as the Government claims, suppressing the damning revelations only adds fuel to the fire.

N. SATHYANARAYAN, Bengaluru

■ Think poll reforms

While a voter cannot exercise his/her franchise from two places in the same election, it is an irony that a

candidate can contest from two constituencies in the same election. It is wasteful expenditure in terms of tax-payers' money and valuable resources. It is high time that electoral reforms are discussed and debated by all stakeholders to uphold the value of democracy and the rights of voters.

A. JAINULABDIN, Chennai

Blockbuster tennis

What sets Rafael Nadal apart from his contemporaries is

not only his uncanny and inspiring ability to find new ways to adapt to different surfaces and younger opponents but also his exemplary demeanour of remaining grounded and not courting controversy which he has displayed with ease throughout his storied career. His determined fight against frailties will continue to serve as the greatest source of inspiration for all budding tennis players.

M. JYARAM, Sholavaram, Tamil Nadu

■ Rafael is proof that the basic qualities of hard work, grit and resilience still hold good at all times.

Daniel Medvedev looks to be a very worthy successor to the great trio. There were other notable performances – even among the women players – which resulted in quality tennis. Many congratulations to Ashleigh Barty and Nadal. SURESH BALAKRISHNAN, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

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A hazy picture on employment in India

The trends in employment have not shown any clear and consistent patterns over the years



RAMESH CHAND & JASPAL SINGH

The two important indicators of structural transformation in any economy are rates of growth and changes in the structural composition of output and the workforce. India has experienced fairly consistent changes in the first indicator, especially after the 1991 reforms, but the trend in employment has not revealed any consistent or clear pattern.

The growth rate of the economy, measured by gross value added (GVA) at constant prices, accelerated from 4.27% in the 20 years before the economic reforms to 6.34% in the 20 years following the reforms and to 6.58% between 2010-11 and 2019-20 at 2011-12 prices. This growth trajectory was accompanied by a steady decline in the share of agriculture from 30% in 1990-91 to 18% in 2019-20 and a steady increase in the share of non-agriculture output in total economic output.

Employment patterns

But when it comes to deciphering trends in employment pattern in India, there are wide variations in the conclusions drawn by experts and studies on employment. This is partly due to economic, sociological and technological factors that have brought about changes in the workforce and employment and partly due to gaps in data on various aspects of employment.

Two major sources of data on workforce and employment have been the decennial population census and the nationwide quinquennial surveys on employment and unemployment by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). The last available data from the Census refer to 2011. Similarly, the quinquennial NSSO data on employment and unemployment are available up to 2011-12. This was replaced by the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), started in 2017-18 on an annual basis. The PLFS data set is now available for three consecutive years i.e., 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20. The PLFS is based on a different sampling frame-



REUTERS

work and uses a different analytical approach vis-a-vis NSSO surveys on employment. As a result, the time series data on employment and unemployment available from NSSO surveys are not comparable with PLFS data. At best, the NSSO data can be used as a reference point.

Though the PLFS data cannot be used to infer an underlying trend, as they are available only for three years, they can be used to reveal the effect of various policies and developments during the current NDA regime as well as to understand and shape the employment scenario based on concrete statistics.

PLFS data show an increase in the worker to population (WPR) ratio from 34.7% in 2017-18 to 38.2% in 2019-20. This is a reversal of the previous trend which showed a decline in WPR after 2004-05. The change also implies that employment has increased at a faster rate than the increase in population. The increase in WPR has been reported in the rural and urban population and in the male and female population. This increase in WPR is even more significant as it has occurred in the midst of an increase in the labour force participation rate.

It is interesting to note that the data from the PLFS surveys do not support the assertion that women are going out of the workforce. Female WPR ratio increased from 17.5% to 24% between 2017-18 and 2019-20. When this ratio is multiplied by the female population, it shows an annual increase of 17% of women workers. Another positive indication from PLFS data is that the gap between the male and female worker participation rate is narrowing down. As against 100 male workers, there were 32 female workers in the workforce

in 2017-18. This number increased to 40 in 2019-20. Women constituted 24% of the workforce in the country in 2017-18 and 28.8% in 2019-20.

Also, the unemployment rate in the female labour force in rural areas is far lower than the male labour force, whereas the opposite holds true in urban areas. This is despite the fact that the female labour force participation rate in rural India is 33% higher than the rate in urban areas. The reason could be that there is less gender discrimination in informal jobs, which dominate rural areas, than in the formal sector which dominates urban areas.

The unemployment scenario

PLFS data show that the unemployment rate based on principal status plus subsidiary status declined from 6.1% in 2017-18 to 4.8% in 2019-20. This shows that the number of jobs increased at a faster rate than the increase in the number of job seekers between 2017-18 and 2019-20. But despite this, the number of unemployed persons has increased by 2.3 million between 2017-18 and 2019-20, mainly because of an increase in the number of job seekers (52.8 million) in these two years.

The sectoral composition of the workforce shows that 45.6% of the workers in India are engaged in agriculture and allied activities, 30.8% in services and 23.7% in industry. According to PLFS data, there is no increase in the share of industry and services in total employment. This means that the labour shift out of agriculture is not happening. Between 2019-20 and 2017-18, 56.4 million new jobs were created. Out of this, 57.4% were created in the agriculture and allied sectors, 28.5% in services and 14.5% in industry. With-

in the broad industry group, employment in the manufacturing sector showed a meagre increase of 1.8 million in two years; and construction activity added 6.4 million new jobs.

That a majority of the new entrants to the labour force between 2017-18 and 2019-20 got absorbed in the agriculture sector has serious implications. The young labour force, which is getting increasingly educated, sought more remunerative work outside agriculture but only a few succeeded. This is because the industry and services sectors have adopted capital-intensive and, in many cases, labour-displacing technologies and production strategies. This is getting further aggravated with the rising adoption of modern technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Internet of Things. This raises a big question about the future of new entrants into the labour force.

There is a dichotomy between the rising share of industry and services in national income without a sizeable increase in employment share is a fairly well-established fact for post-liberalisation India. This puts a serious question mark on the relevance of conventional models of economic growth and development (like the dual-sector model of Arthur Lewis) centred on the large-scale shift of the labour force from agriculture to industry. Perhaps it is pertinent to question the conventional economic development models and their applicability for emerging economies like India. Instead, should we rethink our strategy of striving for an industry-led growth model and explore a more relevant agri-centric model of economic transformation to create more attractive, more remunerative and more satisfying employment in and around agriculture?

Besides this there is also an urgent need to generate much more employment in the manufacturing and services sector compared to the number of jobs they have offered in the recent past. This should include (i) changes in labour laws which discourage industry to adopt labour-intensive production (ii) employment-linked production incentives and; (iii) special assistance for labour-intensive economic activities.

Ramesh Chand is Member of NITI Aayog and Jaspal Singh is Consultant at NITI Aayog. Views are personal

The supreme failure

By failing to decide key constitutional cases in a timely way, the apex court has not acted as the 'sentinel on the qui vive'



PRABHAKAR RANJAN

American lawyer James M. Beck described the U.S. Supreme Court as a lighthouse whose gracious rays of justice and liberty light up the troubled surface of the water, making America a free and strong nation. M. Jagannadha Rao, a former Indian Supreme Court judge, citing Beck, said that what is true of the American Supreme Court is equally true of the Indian Supreme Court. In the 73rd year of our Republic, it is time to put this belief to test especially in the wake of mounting majoritarianism and surging ethno-nationalism.

In the last few years, the Indian Supreme Court has delivered some judgments of far-reaching consequence. It declared the right to privacy a fundamental right; decriminalised consensual sexual conduct between adults of the same sex; recognised transgender persons as the third gender; and outlawed triple talaq. These decisions shore up the belief in republican values like liberty and equality reified in our Constitution.

Black marks

Notwithstanding these bright spots, there are several black marks on the Supreme Court's record. The Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy has developed an excellent comprehensive tracker of all the pending cases before the five-judge, seven-judge, and nine-judge constitution benches of the Supreme Court. According to this tracker, there are 25 main cases pending before the five-judge constitution bench and five cases each pending before the seven-judge and nine-judge benches. These cases relate to significant constitutional and other legal matters that can have serious repercussions on the fundamental rights of ordinary citizens and on core republican values. Related to these main cases, there are more than 500 connected cases. These cases cannot be decided till the legal issues in the main cases before the constitutional benches are addressed. Some of the important cases gathering dust in the Supreme Court are as follows.

First, a deluge of petitions was filed before the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, that provides non-Muslim communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan a fast-track route to Indian citizenship. More than two years later, the matter continues to languish in the apex court. Se-

cond, innumerable petitions have been filed challenging the Presidential Order of August 5, 2019 that effectively diluted Article 370 of the Constitution and split Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories. To date, the court has done precious little to decide this vexed question of law.

Third, petitions challenging the constitutionality of the Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019 that provides reservations in public educational institutions and government jobs for economically weaker sections are also languishing in the Supreme Court. It is shocking that the case has not been heard since August 5, 2020, while the law has already been implemented.

Fourth, a momentous case known as *Vivek Narayan Sharma v. Union of India* is in the Supreme Court for more than five years. This case relates to the legality of demonetisation of all ₹500 and ₹1,000 notes aimed at curbing black money. It was the most audacious economic experiment in the life of the Indian republic that right, decisively wrong because more than 99% of the cash came back into the banking system, according to the Reserve Bank of India. Appallingly, the Supreme Court hasn't heard this case since September 2, 2019.

Fifth, the Supreme Court has failed to accord proper hearing in the last four years to the constitutional challenge to the electoral bonds scheme. This scheme strikes at the heart of our polity because anonymous funding of political parties is the root cause of corruption in public life.

Constitutional duty

Granville Austin, a distinguished constitutional scholar, said, "The Supreme Court is 'custodian of the equality under the law that lies at the heart of the country's constitutional democracy. Unless the Court strives in every possible way to assure that the Constitution, the law, applies fairly to all citizens, the Court cannot be said to have fulfilled its custodial responsibility.' By abjectly failing to decide key constitutional cases in a time-bound manner, the Supreme Court has not acted as the 'sentinel on the qui vive'. The Court should perform its constitutional duty of being a formidable counterforce to brute majoritarianism. The power of judicial review that the Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, calls 'the sword of the people' should be exercised assiduously. Or else, India's hard-fought constitutional democracy would be in grave peril."

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STATE OF PLAY

Strained ties in Tamil Nadu

Unfriendly relations between a head of state and head of government can have unsavoury consequences

D. SURESH KUMAR

Early strains have appeared in the relationship between Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and Governor R.N. Ravi and the M.K. Stalin-led DMK government. Mr. Ravi has invited the ire of the ruling party for seemingly advocating policies that are in conflict with popular political ideology in the Dravidian heartland. In his Republic Day address, Mr. Ravi subtly pushed for a three-language policy. "While it is important that [the] Tamil language is given wider spread in the rest of the country, it is also important that our school students learn other Indian languages like students in other States. Depriving our students of knowledge of other Indian languages is unfair to all," he contended. This came as a surprise since in Tamil Nadu, any attempt to tinker with the time-tested two-language formula is akin to treading on a landmine. As recently as June 2019, a clause recommending mandatory Hindi teaching in schools was dropped from the Draft National Education Policy (NEP) following a backlash, primarily from Tamil Nadu.

The State government's first counter to Mr. Ravi was diplomatic and through the official channel. The Minister for Tamil Nadu Education and Culture, Thangam Thennarasu, responded, "Those who are aware of the history of protests for language in Tamil Nadu would realise that 'other Indian languages' is only another terminology for pushing Hindi." He argued that the two-language policy has not prevented students from acquiring educational qualifications or holding major positions. However, this was followed by a sharp attack in the DMK's mouthpiece, *Murasoli*, which not only questioned Mr. Ravi's performance in his previous gubernatorial assignment in Nagaland but also conveyed to the former IPS officer that politics is a different ball game. "He [Mr. Ravi] is not a politician who experienced the climate of politics before becoming a Governor.

He was a police officer who was appointed Governor after his retirement. The police department may require methods of control, intimidation, and they may yield results there. But they will be of no use in politics..." the article with the byline Silandhi, usually penned by a member of the DMK first family, said.

The government and the DMK were also upset with Mr. Ravi for seemingly backing the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NET), while not forwarding for presidential assent a Bill designed to disperse with the NET in Tamil Nadu. MPs from Tamil Nadu protested against Mr. Ravi's inaction on this in the joint sitting of Parliament on Monday.

This was not the first time Mr. Ravi had spoken on these lines, especially on matters relating to education, a Concurrent List subject, where the State government differs with the Central government. While Mr. Stalin declared that Tamil Nadu will not implement the NEP, Mr. Ravi hailed it as a revolutionary document that is inevitable for the higher education system in a dynamic scenario. Going a step further, at the convocation of Bharathidasan University, a State-run institution, he sought to link the NEP's objectives with the "new India" dreams of iconic Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi and Bharathidasan.

Relations between Raj Bhavan and the Secretariat thrive on understanding and mutual respect. Mr. Ravi's intentions in advocating an alternative policy could perhaps be well meaning, but the popular view is such matters are best left to an elected government. At the same time, there is a perception that Mr. Stalin, known for his amiable politics, must ensure that any differing viewpoint is tackled diplomatically, lest the issue escalates into a full-blown cold war.

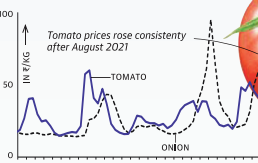
Unfriendly relations between a head of state and a head of an elected government can have unsavoury consequences as the current developments in West Bengal show.

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DATA POINT

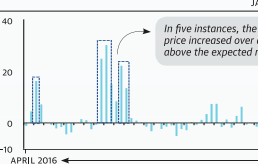
Why are tomato and onion prices fluctuating?

■ **UPS AND DOWNS** | The graph shows the average price changes in retail prices of tomato and onion. Spikes can be seen at both regular and irregular intervals.

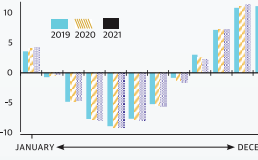


SEASONAL VARIATION (TOMATO)

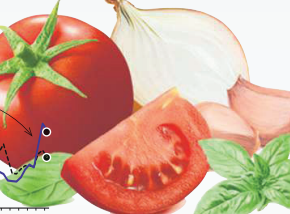
■ **(TOMATO)** | The graph shows the average change in the retail price of tomato (₹ per kg) compared to the long-term price trend. As 70% of the total tomato production is harvested between December and June, the prices dip due to a surge in supply. On the other hand, between July and November, as only 30% of the total production is harvested, the prices rise due to low supply.



■ **SEASONAL VARIATION (ONION)** | The graph shows the average change in the retail price of onion (₹ per kg) compared to the long-term price trend. As 70% of the total onion production is harvested between March and May, the prices dip due to a surge in supply. But in the rest of the months, prices rise due to low supply.



The prices of tomatoes and onions are the most volatile in Indian markets. The Economic Survey 2021-22, released on Monday, explores the reasons behind the variations in the prices of these two staple vegetables. The survey argues that seasonality in production and irregular shocks contribute equally to volatile prices. The unexpected price shocks to these two perishable commodities were triggered by unseasonal rains and prolonged drought. A detailed look at the survey's conclusions.



PRICE SHOCKS (TOMATO)

■ **(TOMATO)** | The graph shows the average change in the price (₹ per kg) of tomato after accounting for seasonal changes. The spikes are therefore increases in retail prices over and above the expected rise due to seasonality. The five identified price shocks in the graph were mostly due to drought or heavy rainfall in various Indian States.

■ **PRICE SHOCKS (ONION)** | The graph shows the average change in the price of onion after accounting for seasonal changes. The spikes are therefore increases in retail prices over and above the expected rise due to seasonality. The four identified price shocks in the graph were mostly due to drought or heavy rainfall in various Indian States.



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 1, 1972

King Mahendra of Nepal dead

Kathmandu, Jan. 31: King Mahendra of Nepal died of a heart attack early to-day at Bharatpur, 200 kms. from here. The King had gone to Bharatpur for rest, but was taken ill suddenly yesterday. A team of doctors was rushed to Bharatpur immediately after the King was taken ill but they could not save him. Within hours of King Mahendra's death, Crown Prince Birendra was enthroned as the new King of Nepal, the only Hindu kingdom in the world.

Soon after the King suffered a heart attack yesterday the Government of India was contacted by the Indian Ambassador in Kathmandu and a cardiologist was immediately flown to Bharatpur. The end came at 3:45 a.m. to-day. Queen Ratna was at the side of the 51-year-old King, when he breathed his last. Only two months ago, King Mahendra had returned from a medical check-up in London. The King had suffered a heart attack early in 1968 too.

Crown Prince Birendra was sworn-in King by the Chief Royal Priest amidst chanting of hymns with traditional Hindu rituals at a brief ceremony in the ancient Harman Dhoka Palace, where his predecessors had been enthroned. A formal coronation ceremony will be held later on a date to be fixed by astrologers in accordance with traditions.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 1, 1922

The Asiatic peril

The Asiatic peril to the average western mind is mainly a menace of numbers. The increasing millions of India, China and Japan in spite of all the natural and unnatural checks on the growth of population is being watched by Europe, America and Australia with a degree of anxiety which seems to make them almost despair of their future when these "human hives" would have organised themselves into efficient self-governing states. With the example of their own unscrupulous expansion and exploitation of the East in the past in their minds, they fear that the next turn of the wheel marked by the awakening of Asia and the coloured people all over the world will work against the future of the west in general and the Whites in particular. It is this psychology that makes many a western thinker oppose the very idea of Asiatic emigration to the west or their sacred preserves in other parts of the world.

Text & Context

NEWS IN NUMBERS



Asset sale

12,100

In ₹ crore, the amount at which the Government approved the sale of 155-making Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd (NINL) to Tata Steel Long Products Ltd. NINL has an integrated steel plant with a capacity of 1.1 million tonnes (MT), at Kalinganagar, Odisha. NINL, which has been closed since March 2020, has huge debt and liabilities exceeding ₹6,600 crore as on March 2021, including huge overdues to promoters (₹4,116 crore), banks, other creditors and employees. PTI

Infra push

13,327

In kms, is the amount at which the Government approved the sale of 155-making Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd (NINL) to Tata Steel Long Products Ltd. NINL has an integrated steel plant with a capacity of 1.1 million tonnes (MT), at Kalinganagar, Odisha. NINL, which has been closed since March 2020, has huge debt and liabilities exceeding ₹6,600 crore as on March 2021, including huge overdues to promoters (₹4,116 crore), banks, other creditors and employees. PTI

Steel output

25

The % at which India's crude steel production increased in 2021-22, according to the Economic Survey. During the period, the country's output of finished steel registered growth of 28.9% y-o-y while the consumption of the same grew 25%. The steel industry has grown even as global steel production slowed down, the Survey said. The global steel production in November 2021 was at a 9.9% decrease compared to November 2020. PTI

Social spending

71.61

In ₹ lakh crore, the amount to which the combined expenditure of the Centre and the State governments on the social services sector increased during the financial year 2021-22. The expenditure is 9.8% higher than the ₹65.24 lakh crore in the financial year 2020-21. The budget estimate (BE) on social services in 2021-22 by the general Government was at ₹71.61 lakh crore, of which ₹6.97 lakh crore was on education, ₹4.72 lakh crore on health and ₹7.37 lakh crore on other segments. PTI

Taking it deep

3

The number of times Rafael Nadal has won a Grand Slam final in five sets. Nadal has featured in a total of six Grand Slam final matches which have lasted five sets. Apart from his 2022 Australian Open win against Daniil Medvedev on Sunday, he had defeated Roger Federer in the 2009 Australian Open final and beat Medvedev in the 2019 U.S. Open. He had also lost three; 2007 Wimbledon against Federer, 2012 Australian Open against Djokovic and 2017 Australian Open against Federer. With 21 wins, Nadal has the most major wins for any men's player in the singles game.

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

EXPLAINER

The limits of the legislature's power to suspend a member

Can a lawmaker be suspended beyond one session? Is a one-year ban from the House legal?

K. VENKATARAMAN

THE GIST

■ Last week, the Supreme Court declared as grossly illegal and irrational the suspension of 12 BJP legislators for one year by the Maharashtra Assembly for disorderly conduct.

■ The State counsel argued that under Rule 53 of the Maharashtra Assembly Rules, the Speaker could direct a Member to withdraw from the Assembly for disorderly conduct for the day, or the remainder of the Session. However, there is no such limitation when the whole House decides to impose suspension. They also stated that once the power to punish a member for disorderly conduct is recognised, there can be no judicial review of the manner in which it is exercised.

■ The Bench noted that Rule 53 showed a 'graded approach' to the issue of disorderly behaviour, an initial suspension for a day, and then for the remainder of the session, but nothing beyond it. Once the length of the suspension goes beyond the session, it ceases to be a disciplinary measure and undertakes the character of punitive action. A lengthy suspension, apart from the deprivation of representation for the constituents, may also be detrimental to democracy.

The story so far: Last week, the Supreme Court declared as grossly illegal and irrational the suspension of 12 BJP legislators for one year by the Maharashtra Assembly for disorderly conduct. Brushing aside objections that the judiciary should not examine the validity of the proceedings of the House, a three-judge Bench, comprising Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, Justice Dinesh Maheshwari and Justice C.T. Ravikumar, ruled that the suspension beyond the term of the particular session in which it was imposed was a nullity in the eyes of the law.

What happened on July 5, 2021? There was a ruckus in the Assembly when the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government introduced a resolution seeking empirical data on OBCs from the Union government. The House was adjourned briefly for a few times before the resolution was passed, as BJP members rushed to the well of the House and were accused of damaging the presiding officer's microphone and grabbing the mace. Later, Bhaskar Jadhav, a Shiv Sena MLA who was in the Chair during the incidents, said that when he was in the Deputy Speaker's chamber, some members rushed inside and abused him. A resolution moved by the Parliamentary Affairs Minister was subsequently adopted by the House to suspend 12 MLAs — Dr. Sanjay Kute, Ashish Shelar, Abhimanyu Pawar, Girish Mahajan, Atul Bhatalkar, Harish Pimple, Jaykumar Rawal, Yogesh Sagar, Narayan Kuche, Bunty Bhangdiya, Parag Alavani and Ram Satpute. They were barred from entering the legislative premises for 12 months. The members challenged their suspension in the Supreme Court.

How did the State government defend the action? Counsel for the State government argued that there is no limitation on the power of the legislature to punish for breach of privilege or disorderly conduct in the course of its proceedings. Once the power to punish a member for disorderly conduct is recognised, there can be no judicial review of the manner in which it is exercised. Under

Rule 53 of the Maharashtra Assembly Rules, the Speaker could direct a Member to withdraw from the Assembly for disorderly conduct for the day, or the remainder of the Session. However, there is no such limitation when the whole House decides to impose suspension. In this context, counsel contended that when the power to expel a member is available, the power to suspend, being a lesser punishment, is also available to the House at all times. The Bench had raised a question as to how any suspension can go beyond 60 days, in the light of Article 190(4) of the Constitution, which says the House could declare a seat vacant if a member is absent for 60 days. The State government contended that in such a case, it is the House that declares the seat vacant, and it is not an automatic consequence of a member's absence for 60

The Bench had raised a question as to how any suspension can go beyond 60 days, in the light of Article 190(4) of the Constitution, which says the House could declare a seat vacant if a member is absent for 60 days.

days on which the House met. The Government also pointed out that in Raja Ram Pal (2007), the Supreme Court had upheld the expulsion of 12 MPs in the cash-for-questions scandal. When expulsion, the greater punishment was allowed, suspension, being a lesser penalty, cannot be questioned.

What are the reasons given by the court in its ruling? The Bench noted that Rule 53 showed a 'graded approach' to the issue of disorderly behaviour, an initial suspension for a day, and then for the remainder of the session, but nothing beyond it. It was a power to be exercised only for the protection of the proceedings. However, in the present case, there was no separate provision for the House to impose a lengthy suspension. If at all it was exercising inherent powers to regulate its proceedings, it ought to have adopted a 'graded approach'



and limited its suspension to the immediate objective of ensuring order. Once the length of the suspension went beyond the session, it ceased to be a disciplinary measure, but partook the character of a punitive action. Citing Privy Council cases and Indian precedents, the Bench said anything that went beyond the session was irrational and grossly illegal. The Bench also cited provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, that say any vacancy in the House has to be filled up through a by-election within six months of its occurrence.

It ruled that a one-year suspension meant that the constituency concerned would go without representation in the Assembly for a whole year.

Further, suspension seemed to have worse consequences than outright expulsion from the legislature, as a by-election will be held within six months; whereas, a one-year

suspension does not entail mandatory filling up of the vacancy.

What general principles arise from the case?

The court has reiterated the principle that even though the judiciary will not interfere in the functioning of the legislature, a coordinate body, it is not deprived of the power of judicial review if there is a violation of the Constitution. Even though there were no prescribed limits to the privileges of the House, there is no doubt that these are subject to the provisions of the Constitution. A lengthy suspension, apart from the deprivation of representation for the constituents, may also be detrimental to democracy, as it could be used to manipulate numbers in the legislature, and deny the opposition the opportunity to participate effectively in debates.

EXPLAINER

Tipping right: On the U.S. Supreme Court balance

Who is going to be the next nominee on the SCOTUS bench? How did the Court come to have a 6-3 balance?

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The story so far: U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS) Justice Stephen Breyer (83) has announced that he will be retiring at the end of the current term of the court, which will be around the end of June or early July 2022. His departure from the highest court in the land during the tenure of President Joe Biden, a Democrat, means that the 6-3 balance of the SCOTUS in favour of conservatives will remain undisturbed given the near certainty that Mr. Biden will successfully nominate another liberal judge to the court. In line with campaign promises, the Biden White House has already signalled its intention to nominate an African American woman justice for the post.

What is Justice Breyer's legacy on the SCOTUS?

Justice Breyer was nominated to the Court in 1994 by erstwhile Democratic President Bill Clinton. With a reputation as a pragmatic centrist who eschewed grand jurisprudential ideology in favour of practical compromise that benefited the common man and woman, he left an indelible legacy for major pronouncements by the SCOTUS on



The U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, DC. GETTY IMAGES

abortion rights, the environment, health-care coverage, and probes into the constitutionality of the death penalty. However, even though the SCOTUS leaned increasingly conservative over his tenure, Justice Breyer always looked for compromise and impacted judicial rulings on issues such as affirmative action in university admissions, same-sex marriage and the First Amendment protecting freedom of speech. He was sometimes overshadowed by his towering reputation of his colleague, the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg, but as one of the few remaining liberal voices on the SCOTUS, his work will continue to have a

lasting impact on a wide range of social causes for decades to come.

Who will Justice Breyer's successor be?

After Justice Breyer's retirement announcement, Mr. Biden said that the person he intended to nominate to succeed him would not only be "of extraordinary qualifications, character and integrity," but "... that person will be the first Black woman ever nominated to the United States Supreme Court. It is long overdue." Indeed, no African American woman has ever served on the SCOTUS before, and such a nomination would come at an important moment of national reckoning over gender inequality and race.

Leading the list of potential nominees is Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson (51) who has already successfully gone through a Senate confirmation process when Mr. Biden promoted her from the Federal District Court in the District of Columbia to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. Also under consideration by the White House is South Carolina U.S. District Judge J. Michelle Childs, who was in the process of being nominated to the Court of Appeals. A third serious contender is Associate Justice of the

Supreme Court of California Leandra Kruger. Given that Democrats enjoy only a slim majority in the Senate, where the nominee will have to be confirmed, after extensive background checks and legal history research Mr. Biden is likely to pick a candidate who could easily summon 50 support votes in the Lower House of Congress.

Why does the SCOTUS have a conservative majority?

The SCOTUS has tipped dramatically to the right since Justice Anthony Kennedy chose to retire under Donald Trump in 2018. Former Democratic President Barack Obama nominated the remaining two liberal justices on the court, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan. However, Republicans led by Senator Mitch McConnell foiled Mr. Obama's attempt to replace the space left by the death of conservative Justice Antonin Scalia with his nominee, Merrick Garland. Instead Mr. Biden's immediate predecessor, Donald Trump, succeeded in nominating Judge Neil Gorsuch to the seat. Mr. Trump then got two other conservative judges onto the SCOTUS, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Barrett, respectively upon the retirement of conservative Justice Anthony Kennedy and the death of the

liberal Justice Ginsberg. Thus, luck and timing — including in terms of which party controlled the White House and Senate during various nominations — have played a role in tipping the SCOTUS firmly towards conservatives over the years.

What impact will this balance have on social and political issues?

The simple answer is: enormous. Whether in terms of re-litigating and potentially reversing the seminal decision under *Roe v. Wade* granting abortion rights, or game-changing rulings on voting rights, gun control and capital punishment, the conservative supermajority of the SCOTUS is already rewriting the social contract of America as its citizens know it. Major policies with immediate impact that could be decided in the coming year or so include the Biden administration's vaccine mandates to combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fate of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, which gives young immigrants a reprieve from deportation, regulations governing gerrymandering, or the partisan redistricting efforts to influence electoral outcomes, and the use of race in affirmative action policies by major U.S. universities.

THE GIST

■ U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer has announced that he will be retiring at the end of the current term of the court. He was nominated in 1994 by erstwhile President Bill Clinton.

■ Mr. Biden said that the person he intended to nominate would have extraordinary qualifications and would also be the first African American woman nominee.

■ The 6-3 balance of the SCOTUS in favour of the conservatives was a product of luck and timing as the former President Mr. Trump managed to get two conservative judges on the bench, upon the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy and the death of the liberal Justice Ginsberg.



Unified identity: Naresh Singh Tikait (3rd from the right), one of the leaders of protesting farmers from western U.P. in New Delhi on 8th January 2021. •BUSINESSLINE

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Amid fault lines, a revival of the farmers' identity

Signs of a polarised western U.P. and its agrarian communities unifying are visible in the ongoing farmers' movement

SATENDRA KUMAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party in western U.P. has started feeling the impact of the farmers' agitation as their campaigning efforts are blocked by villagers who are not allowing them entry into their respective villages. In this article dated February 13, 2021, Satendra Kumar outlines how a fractured kisan identity had re-emerged in the wake of the farmers protests from last year.

This year in Uttar Pradesh, thousands of farmers gathered on January 29, at the government inter-college ground, Muzaffarnagar, following a call by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) president, Naresh Tikait, for a 'mahapanchayat' to express solidarity with the protest at the Ghazipur border led by his brother, Rakesh Tikait. Among the key speakers was Ghulam Mohammad Jaula, the most influential Muslim leader of the BKU, and considered to be a close friend of the late Mahendra Singh Tikait.

The presence of Mr. Jaula and Muslim farmers at the meet has been read as a sign of a re-emerging Jat-Muslim alliance under the kisan identity after the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots affected the social fabric in rural western U.P. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its regional leadership were behind a local caste dispute growing into a communal issue that polarised villages along religious lines. At the time, it seemed that Jat farmers had suddenly claimed the Hindutva identity.

But that did not happen overnight. The farmers' polity has had deep roots while farmers' mobilisations have a long history in the western U.P. region. The ongoing agrarian change and crisis generated by neoliberal economic policies have shifted the agrarian economy to non-farm occupations. These new developments caused fissures in the farmer's polity in the northwestern region, giving the BJP a political advantage. Recent events indicate a revival of the farmers' identity as a community.

A transformation

The Jats have dominated landownership in large parts of western U.P. since at least the mid-19th century. Muslims form a section of the Jats, and both groups have co-existed in the villages.

Between the mid-1960s to late 1980s, the Green Revolution boosted the Jats. As landowners, they have been patrons (*jaimans*) of the artisan-services and labour castes who are largely Pasmanda Muslims. The artisan-service castes are either landless or small-marginal landowners. The BKU has provided an inclusive platform to various rural groups including labourers, marginal and middle farmers across religions. In the 1980s, the BKU led by Mahendra Singh Tikait, along with Muslim farmers and landless labourers, organised protest movements for cheap electricity and higher crop prices.

However, in the early 1990s, when the Green Revolution had advanced, farmers' income stagnated and land holdings became smaller through subdivisions. Neoliberal economic policies, a decline of state subsidies to agriculture, the rising cost of farming inputs, growing stagnation in farm production, and ecological precarity, all led to non-farm economic activities,

and a further weakening of Jat farmers and the BKU's politics. Increasingly, villagers are facing interactions among different communities and individuals, once common, are now a rarity. Farmers who would depend on the artisan-service castes for everyday services (repairing agricultural implements, hair dressing and washing clothes) now look to new technologies or nearby towns for these services. The breakdown of the *jaimani* system has resulted in a cash flow. The young generation across caste groups has come under the spell of the consumer culture. Villagers who live on non-farm incomes and remittances now self-identify as middle class. Family, kinship and an obligation-based rural economy have been transformed into an individual-centric economy based on skills and cash transactions. Intra-caste, family and kin inequalities are on the rise. The formation of rural middle class is under way which includes the Muslim artisan-service castes. Independence from *jaimani* relations combined with universal suffrage has not only created political competition between the Jats and their clients but also changed their mutually dependent economic interests into competing ones.

In the resultant shift in attitudes among the younger generation toward the dominant caste patrons, the young generation of artisan-service castes are now asserting their rights. Such assertion by the marginalised groups often leads to skirmishes and conflicts. But the disintegration of vertical relations and everyday face-to-face interactions between different caste-communities and individuals (who work in urban areas), and the growing disconnect from the village and its social norms have all weakened the capacity of rural society to absorb and resolve everyday conflicts.

More importantly, these changes have also reduced the ability of the Jats and other dominant castes to use their power and resolve conflicts in their favour.

Shifting identities, BJP's rise

Distress in agriculture has led Jats to look for new avenues of employment as well as new political alliances. In a globalising economy, these shifts have brought the younger generation in proximity with the large urban Hindu middle class, influencing their tastes, language, rituals, symbols, politics and ethos. Changes in aspirations and identities forged by the new media and culture and mobility have created an altered socio-cultural landscape. Communication and entertainment technologies have aided new social and economic connections, providing spaces for different socio-political formations. Economic and spatial mobilities have fragmented the Jat community.

By giving representation and political offices, the BJP has tapped into the political and economic aspirations of youth. An increasing number have shifted away from their Arya Samaj roots and joined different religious and spiritual sects that are urban based and have spread to rural western U.P. With agricultural and village festivals on the decline, Hindu rituals and festivals, and religious meetings and functions organised by member-groups of the Rashtriya Swamijevak

Sangh are the new centre of focus. The BJP has appropriated their symbols of pride by organising celebrations such as on the birth centenary or 'sacrifice day' of Jat freedom fighters. Certain TV channels (Asha) have become quite popular too. Increased interactions with the wider world have had an influence on the sense of caste and religion.

Similarly, religious channels such as QTV and Peace TV are quite popular among the Muslims in this region and who are also influenced by ideas shared by young Muslims who work in West Asia about being Muslims there. In the last three decades, backward Muslims have begun to exhibit (pan-Islamic) religious symbols in public places. There are now more men and women participating in the Tablighi Jamaat, a religious movement. The ideas, norms and practices of the Tablighi Jamaat have changed the public presence of the Muslim identity. There is a growing intensification of a pan- and fundamentalist-religiosity among Muslims and Hindus in the region.

Crises and a re-assemblage

The political aspirations of the rising new middle class among the Jats had fragmented and weakened the kisan identity and polity in the region. In the general elections (2014 and 2019), and the U.P. Assembly elections (2017), the Rashtriya Lok Dal lost badly and a new political leadership emerged among the Jats. This new leadership of the BJP represented the aspirations of youth who perceived Muslims as a threat. However, continued agrarian distress, rising electricity charges, diesel and fertilizer costs, and unpaid dues of sugarcane by mills have severely affected Hindu and Muslim Jat farmers.

The Yogi Adityanath-led BJP government's stringent anti-cattle slaughter measures have devastated already broken farmers as stray cattle ruin crops. The COVID-19 pandemic has also hit the rural economy. Jat farmers have had a hard time getting agricultural labour and help since a large number of Muslim artisan and service castes displaced by the 2013 riot have left the villages.

The everyday hardships have changed their perceptions about each other. The realisation for cooperation is what compelled leaders such as Mr. Jaula, Vipin Balyan, and Puran Singh to organise joint Hindu-Muslim kisan panchayats in 2017 and 2018. Rakesh Tikait, under the banner of the BKU, organised a massive rally just before the 2019 election and led a march to Delhi. Both Hindu and Muslim farmers were participants.

In addition, the Centre's three reform farm laws have not only created fear among the farmers of losing land but have also disenchanted them as far as the BJP is concerned. Finally, the events of the night of January 27, 2021 have hurt the dignity of Hindu and Muslim Jat farmers, and accelerated the process towards a new farmers' alliance. The ongoing farmers' movement has shown the potential to heal old wounds and unite the polarised western U.P. society. A new dawn beckons amidst the many insurmountable fault lines.

Satendra Kumar teaches at the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. The views are personal



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

"Good morning, sir.
"Good morning. Bright and early!"
"Early Sir. I managed to find some time in the morning. I want to learn a lot. Yesterday someone asked me a simple question. I just blinked."

"What do you mean by 'blink'?"
"I mean, Sir, that I am unable to give the right answer. I am ignorant."

"Don't worry. We are all ignorant. Your area of ignorance is different from mine. But the word 'blink' is not used in English in the sense you have used it. When a person opens and shuts his eyes quickly, he is said to blink. It is no use blinking the fact that we are poor. In this sense, it means you refuse to consider or ignore the fact. Here it is used in a figurative sense."

"What is the difference between 'among' and 'between', Sir?"
"You use 'among' when more than two things or persons are involved."

"He divided his property among his three children."
"You must discuss the matter among yourselves."

"Between" is used when two persons or things are involved.
"What is the distance between Madras and Calcutta?"

You can choose between coffee and tea. This is strictly between you and me.

However, it is incorrect to say that between cannot be used when more than two things or persons are involved. If there are a number of objects and they are being considered in pairs, you can use 'between'. When you talk about treaties and agreements, it is 'between' rather than 'among' that is used. Examples:

"The treaty between four nations was signed."

An agreement was reached between the three companies yesterday.

When there is a triangular piece of land, you say it is between three points and not among three points. The Oxford English Dictionary says that 'between' is still the only word available to express the relation of a thing to many surrounding things severally and individually; 'among' expresses a relation to them collectively and vaguely.

"Sir, is it correct to say fill in the application form?"

"Yes, you can 'fill in' or 'fill out' or 'fill up' an application form. They mean the same thing and all are correct."

"Sir, in a recent editorial in *The Hindu*, I found the sentence "They could bankrupt Iraq". Is the sentence correct?"

"The sentence is quite correct. You are perhaps worried about the use of 'bankrupt' as a verb. In modern English it is used as a verb. 'Bank' is an Old High German word meaning 'bench'. Bankers of the past stood behind a bench and transacted business. There were no counters, vaults, safe or unsafe! When a banker failed, his bench was broken by the people. The word 'bankrupt' is of Latin origin. 'Bank' means 'bench' and 'ruptus' means 'broken'. Bankrupts 'suffered' a broken bench and a broken heart. Well, in modern times in banks it is only the customers who sit on benches; the officials use steel chairs!"

"The story of the word is so interesting. Thank you, Sir. Goodbye."
"Goodbye."

THE GIST

■ The Jats have dominated landownership in large parts of western U.P. Muslims form a section of the Jats, and both groups have co-existed in the villages. The Green Revolution boosted the Jats and as landowners they have been patrons (*jaimans*) of the artisan-services and labour castes who are largely Pasmanda Muslims. However, when the Green Revolution had advanced, farmers' income stagnated and villagers were found more at urban sites than in the fields. This led to the rise of the rural middle class which includes the Muslim artisan-service castes. Independence from *jaimani* relations changed their mutually dependent economic interests into competing ones.

■ Distress in agriculture has led Jats to look for new avenues of employment and political alliances. In a globalising economy, these shifts have brought the younger generation in proximity with the large urban Hindu middle class with the Jat tapping into the political and economic aspirations of the youth. Similarly, more Muslim men and women were participating in the Tablighi Jamaat, a religious movement. There was a growing intensification of a pan- and fundamentalist-religiosity among Muslims and Hindus in the region.

■ Thus, the political aspirations of the rising new middle class among the Jats had fragmented and weakened the kisan identity and polity in the region. However, the Yogi Adityanath government's stringent anti-cattle slaughter measures as well as the Centre's three reform farm laws have not only created fear among the farmers but have also disenchanted them causing a re-surgence of the kisan identity.

THE DAILY QUIZ

On this date in 1964, The Beatles had their first #1 single in the USA and Beatlemania was up and running. Test yourselves on songs that reached the peak positions in both the U.K. and the U.S.

1 According to Beate scholars, which were the first songs to be No. 1 in the U.K. and the U.S.?

2 Though the band's second single is considered to be its real first #1, it was not officially acknowledged because it was only No. 2 on the Record Retailer chart, which subsequently evolved into the U.K. Singles Chart. Name this song that featured in an album of the same name.

3 Which is the band's only number one not to have Ringo Starr drumming away but playing the tambourine? And who played the drums?

4 Which 1965 song did John Lennon claim on more than one occasion as the first heavy metal

song ever made?

5 Which much covered number had the working title 'Scrambled Eggs' and is said to have been composed by McCartney at the home of his then-girlfriend Jane Asher?

6 The first release by the quartet on its Apple label evolved from a song McCartney wrote to comfort Lennon's young son Julian following John leaving Cynthia for Yoko. Name this ballad.

7 Which song, released a month after their break-up, was the group's 20th and last No. 1 in the United States?

8 Simple one to end with. Which November 2000 album features virtually every No. 1 single the band achieved in the U.K. or USA from 1962 to 1970?



◀ This statue is named after the protagonist in an all-time favourite where none of the Fab Four played any instruments but contributed harmony vocals. Name the protagonist. •WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Gandhi's return from South Africa to India on 9 January 1915. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, 2. Champaran in Bihar, 3. Madurai, Tamil Nadu, 4. 79, 5. Herbert Reiner Jr, 6. Charlie Chaplin

Early Birds: Brig. HS Ratnaparkhi Praveer Mehta| Jahanavi Saini| Abhay Anand| Lucky Maurya

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

RAMP UP SUPPORT

Economic Survey projects to scope for greater government aid to economy. Credible path for fiscal consolidation is also needed

THE ECONOMIC SURVEY 2021-22, tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Monday, expects the Indian economy to grow by 8-8.5 per cent in the upcoming financial year, on the back of a 9.2 per cent expansion in 2021-22. The Survey's projections appear conservative when compared to recent assessments of the IMF, which has pegged the economy to grow at 9 per cent, or the World Bank which expects it to grow at 8.7 per cent. As the annual flagship document of the Ministry of Finance, it is disturbing that the Survey does not examine the uneven nature of the recovery in greater detail. The continuing distress in the labour market, the sharp rise in inequality, the lingering financial stress among the MSMEs, especially those operating in the informal parts of the economy, are issues that need to be explored more exhaustively. While the Survey has sought to assure that when it comes to macro-economic stability, India is better placed than what was at the time of the global financial crisis and the taper tantrum, what is less clear is the extent to which the recovery will heal the scars induced by the pandemic in the near term.

While there is always a gap between growth projections and reality, the Survey has rightly flagged the risks to these projections. To begin with, the external environment is likely to be less benign, and financial conditions will tighten considerably. In its recent World Economic Outlook, the IMF has pegged global GDP growth at 4.4 per cent in 2022, down from 5.9 per cent in 2021, with global trade volumes growth expected to fall in 2022. There is also the threat of another wave of infections and the associated impact on economic activity. Elevated crude oil prices are another area of concern — while the Survey has assumed oil to remain in the range of \$70-75 per barrel, crude oil prices are currently around \$90.

The Survey has, once again, mounted a strong defence of the policy response to the pandemic, arguing in favour of the emphasis on supply-side oriented measures, rather than relying solely on "demand management". Even so, coming ahead of the Union budget on Tuesday, the underlying message is of continued government support to the economy. The "government has the fiscal capacity to maintain the support, and ramp up capital expenditure when required", it says. The sharp rise in central government revenues provides it with the necessary fiscal space. However, considering that the general government debt stands at 89.3 per cent in 2021-22 (BE), up from 74.6 per cent in 2019-20, the government needs to remain mindful of its constraints. The upcoming Union budget will be judged on how the finance minister balances the twin objectives of supporting the economy and putting government finances on a credible path of consolidation.

COURT & PEGASUS

SC panel must factor in questions raised by latest revelations, the people have a right — and need — to know

THE REPORT IN The New York Times last week that the Indian government bought Israeli spyware Pegasus in 2017 as part of a \$2-billion defence deal raises questions that were raised earlier but never addressed. Last year, an investigation by a global consortium of media groups revealed that Pegasus was used by governments, including in India, for targeting individuals for alleged surveillance. The government stonewalled questions and claimed that the probe was an exercise in "maligning India's well-established institutions". A few weeks after the Pegasus story broke, the Defence Ministry informed the Rajya Sabha that it "did not have any transaction with the NSO group," the Israel-based developer of the spyware. A month later, however, after the matter reached the Supreme Court, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta was more ambivalent. He told the three-judge bench that lawful interception is permitted to prevent terrorist incidents and "whether it's done through which software etc can't be a matter of public debate." The court did the right thing by calling out the use of national security as a free pass and constituted an inquiry panel under former judge R V Raveendran. Now, this expert committee must extend the scope of its investigation to include the questions raised in the NYT report.

Union Minister of Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw has maintained that only "lawful interception of electronic communication" is carried out for "national safety". There is no contesting the government's mandate to meet security-related imperatives. Surveillance is a part of the security toolbox but, in a democracy, there need to be checks and balances. In the present case, the government's equivocation doesn't wash. The issue at hand is not about keeping a watch on the activities of terrorists through established procedures. It is, instead, this: Since those allegedly targeted by Pegasus include Opposition leaders, civil society activists, a former election commissioner, and journalists (including three editors of this newspaper, two current and one former), were any red lines breached to violate these individuals' right to privacy? Targeting the Opposition's phones corrodes democracy and so, as SC pointed out, "any restriction must pass constitutional scrutiny".

The NYT investigation has revealed that the FBI bought Pegasus but discarded its plans to use the spyware last year. Union minister Genu V K Singh has dismissed the US daily's probe as one conducted by "super media". Singh's name-calling deserves to be ignored, but, as the SC rightly underlined, "The public is entitled to know whether the spyware was used by the government by any other method other than those permissible under the law". At stake is the credibility of institutions and it's up to the Justice Raveendran panel to take the new revelations forward.

THREE PLUS ONE

Nadal steals a march over his two rivals, Medvedev's underdog story searches for a happy ending

THE TRYRANNY OF reverence towards tennis' holy trinity was always going to be tricky for those biding their time in the wings. Daniil Medvedev, perhaps, has picked up the gauntlet of dislodging their pedestal, and is feeling the heat of howling crowds who aren't sensitive to how their vocal love for the Big Three can end up sounding like jeers for their younger challengers. The three-way debate on who is GOAT will continue unabated, and Rafael Nadal stole a march over Federer and Djokovic by reaching his 21st at Melbourne.

But what the 6-hour-long battle, where the Spaniard came from two sets down to jostle past Medvedev, did to the Russian, showed that in tennis' fervent dogma for the three presiding divinities, sports' enduring underdog story has crumbled. So insistent are the fans in their devotion to the trio, that anyone not playing second fiddle to them will have to play the antagonist, and no more.

A disruptor of the near-two-decade-long hegemony, owing to his hard-court consistency, Medvedev is acutely feeling the un-loved of the kings. The 25-year-old who might've started out as a fan of the trinity, finds himself in the unenviable position of being good enough to take them apart in Grand Slam finals. But he's simultaneously hit by the whiplash realisation that his childhood dream where the crowds would root for an underdog as he slayed the giants, is not coming true. Medvedev is uniquely in the hot seat when New York whimsically starts showering love on Djokovic and Melbourne shushes audibly so Nadal can peacefully serve out. All that Medvedev wanted was love while accumulating his own Grand Slam trophies. It's the one thing he'll have to do without, apparently, while the search for the GOAT bleats on.



SAUGATA BHATTACHARYA

THE ECONOMIC SURVEY has evolved into a valuable document and, in recent years, has often presaged the contours and strategy of the Union budget. Even in its truncated form this year, the Survey provides insights into the economic conditions and outlook which are key inputs for the FY23 budget assumptions.

The Survey notes that India's growth-inflation trade-off is becoming more favourable. Economic recovery has stabilised and is proceeding apace, while prices are expected to moderate in the months ahead. It projects that GDP growth in FY23 will be 8.0-8.5 per cent, moderate and more realistic compared to the IMF's recent forecast of 9.0 per cent for India. This follows the official estimate in early January of a 9.2 per cent growth for FY22, which the Survey has retained.

However, there are risks that will need to be addressed.

India's external environment is likely to be less benign than in FY22, and financial markets are likely to remain volatile. As the world comes out of the pandemic and the set of extraordinary policy stimulus measures, the Central banks of many countries, grappling with high, persistent inflation, have reversed their accommodative monetary policy stance. The US Federal Reserve is expected to aggressively tighten its monetary policy, starting with hiking its policy rates at its March 2022 meeting and, thereafter, start extracting the huge infusion of liquidity during the pandemic period.

In its recent update of the World Economic Outlook, the IMF projects that the world GDP growth will decelerate from 5.9 per cent in 2021 to 4.4 per cent in 2022. China's slowing economy is expected to contribute to this, but the large developed markets are also decelerating. India remains the only bright spot, with growth expected to continue at 9.0 per cent (or even the Survey's 8.0-8.5 per cent range). The WTO forecasts global trade volumes to moderate, falling from 10.8 per cent in 2021 to 4.7 per cent in 2022. This is going to be mostly led by a drop in emerging markets. Note, too, that the high demand for consumer goods during the pandemic is likely to cycle back towards travel and hospitality services, meeting pent-up demand.

Even more importantly, India's nominal growth in FY22 is 17.6 per cent, which implies an increase of roughly Rs 30 lakh crore over the

Economic Survey shows post-Covid recovery has stabilised. But risks remain, will need to be addressed

FY20 pre-pandemic level. In terms of the segment of economic activity which is expected to contribute to this increase in nominal incomes in FY22, both consumption and fixed investment are expected to add about Rs 10 lakh crore each and government spending about another Rs 6 lakh crore. How this additional income is likely to be distributed, especially for lower-income households, will have implications for durable recovery and aggregate demand going forward. The FY23 budget is likely to project a nominal growth rate of 13-14 per cent on which the fiscal assumptions will be based, assuming an 8.3 per cent real GDP growth and 4.5 per cent inflation rate.

On inflation, prospects seem a little better in FY23, with our base scenario of a gradual fall from the current high levels of about 6 per cent in Q4 of FY22, to an average of 4.8 per cent in FY23. However, there are risks. Crude oil prices — indeed, the entire energy complex of gas and other hydrocarbons — remain a source of concern. Brent crude is likely to remain elevated so long as current global geopolitical tensions continue, but are unlikely to lower significantly due to a continuing demand-supply imbalance (the International Energy Agency had recently forecast that demand in 2022 is likely to be higher than the pre-Covid levels, particularly if travel demand resumes) coupled with very moderate investments in new sources of hydrocarbons. China's growth slowdown has cooled the prices of some key metals, but more stimulus measures are already underway, and some growth recovery might again take these prices up. In addition, the broader move towards electrification and decarbonisation will keep the prices of another set of metals high. Shortages of chip and electronic components are likely to continue for some time. The good news is that logistics and the operational costs of cross-border trade have come down.

In light of these expectations, the importance of the Union Budget, and more broadly the fiscal space, is evident in the sequence of the Survey chapters, with the fiscal developments following the lead chapter on growth and aggregate demand. The role of monetary policy will largely be in keeping financial conditions stable, even as the RBI begins a gradual, calibrated normalization. While the Centre's balance sheet remains strong, growth in tax and other receipts might be expected to moderate in FY23, given the economic condi-

On reinforcing India's medium-term 'potential' prospects and the associated 'output gap', the Survey notes longer term uncertainty in the post-Covid world due to technology, supply chains, geo-politics and other shifts. The ability to sustain a 7-8 per cent growth over many years without the economy overheating and the consequent need for policy tightening will determine income potential and distribution over the next decade.



QUDSIYA CONTRACTOR

AS THE election dates close in, there is a scramble among parties to get the social formula right in the selection of candidates. The last few days have seen major political parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajwadi Party and the All India Majlis-e-Itehadul Muslimin announcing a significant number of Muslim candidates. The NDA, too, has announced one Muslim candidate. The Muslim-majority districts of Uttar Pradesh are expected to play an important part in the first phase of elections, the results of which may hold the key to power.

This suggests a growing claim for greater political representation from the community and the deepening of secular democracy in a society that is diverse and divided along caste and religious lines. It also seems to suggest that the BJP under CM Yogi Adityanath is under pressure as it tries to consolidate the votes of all caste fragments under the Hindutva banner. But it is possible that competition between Muslim candidates will end up being an advantage for the BJP again? The use of Muslim cultural symbolism by leaders such as AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi has been criticised for attempting to rouse communal sentiments. What is the use of community identification by Muslim candidates meant to achieve — separatism or representation?

Electoral competition may not necessarily be bad for Muslims because, as scholars have pointed out, they, like others, tend to vote based on issues rather than the identity of the

RESETTING THE BALANCE

Why UP polls could show a new path for minority representation in a diverse polity

candidate. Even in a communally-polarised constituency, what matters is local issues of access to public services and amenities. Electoral competition has, in the past, led to a change in patronage politics of the Congress that would field very few Muslim candidates, despite the rising threat of BJP. Politically under-represented social groups within Muslims have joined other political parties and forged alliances with other traditionally marginalised groups such as OBCs and Dalits to counter the communal agendas of dominant caste Hindus. This has also helped counter the prioritising of personal gains by elite Muslims over addressing local issues concerning equitable development, justice and dignity.

Muslims, like Hindus, are not a homogeneous community. Factions based on class, sect and *jati/biradari* are part of the Muslim social world. Electoral competition may only create more opportunities for politically underrepresented groups within the community. It might force Muslim candidates to walk the talk in order to keep one's electoral constituency.

Using Muslim symbols in this context may not necessarily mean stirring communal sentiments. Since these refer to forging a collective identity not violently opposed to Hindus, such symbols could be seen as a way to mobilise Muslim voters with the acknowledgement that being part of a secular democracy also means inclusive development for all citizens. It is an attempt, often found effective in

indian political culture, to forge an identity by stringing together a common experience of marginalisation and political alienation. Invocations of the Indian Constitution and one's rights as citizens alongside Muslim symbols suggest a deepening of the cultural aspects of a secular democracy.

The BJP and the Sangh Parivar have been actively engaged in appropriating Hindu secular symbols in an attempt to empty democracy of its cultural signifiers. The use of Muslim symbols in this context across parties may be a way to break the cycle of long-standing political alienation of Muslims, for a more inclusive secular democracy. The new generation of Muslim voters is starting to connect to such an identification in the context of a dominant Hindu right-wing discourse, as opposed to an earlier tendency to downplay their identities when aligning with secular liberal parties. Even though representation might seem to be at the heart of modern democracies, it will always be a challenge for Muslim politics in a Hindu majoritarian democracy to be acceptable and endorsed. If the thwarting of the anti-CAA protests was a display of how the state uses violence to discipline its subjects, "Muslim" politics requires new ways of making demands for representation. The upcoming elections in UP might just be showing us the way it could be done.

The writer is executive vice president and chief economist, Axis Bank. Views are personal

The writer is faculty associate, IIT-Goa

FEBRUARY 1, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDO-PAK COMMISSION

WHILE THE TALKS on a no-war pact are not making any headway, India and Pakistan agreed to set up a joint commission to tackle bilateral problems. The suggestion to set up joint commission was made by the PM when Pakistan Foreign Minister Agha Shahi met her. Shahi accepted the proposal immediately. While details about the composition of commission — its mandate and how often it should meet — are yet to be discussed by the two governments, the foreign ministers of the two countries are likely to be its co-chairmen. Both India and Pakistan have joint commission arrangements with many countries, but this is

the first time the two countries will be setting up an institutional mechanism to tackle nagging bilateral problems. Problems concerning Indo-Pak trade, travel facilities, communications, cultural exchanges and perhaps the settlement of a maritime boundary are likely to be referred to the proposed joint commission.

BILLA, RANGA HANGED BILLA AND RANGA, killers of the Chopra children were hanged simultaneously at Tihar jail in Delhi exactly three years and 150 days after the ghastly offence. The hanging brings down the curtain on one of the most publicised criminal cases in the country. It follows a long drawn legal battle by Ranga, which went up to the

Supreme Court.

PAWAR ON ANTULY

THE CONGRESS(S) is likely to launch an agitation against the appointment of former Maharashtra Chief Minister A R Antulay as chairman, Irrigation Corporation, according to Sharad Pawar, president of the party. Talking to newsmen, Pawar said in Mumbai that they would also raise the issue in the proper forums, like the state assembly. He welcomed the CPM resolution adopted at Vijayawada on united opposition on issues of common interest. He said his party would welcome even the BJP and other left parties in this effort.



THE IDEAS PAGE

Doing business in a new world

Adapting to global geo-economic churn demands that Delhi find ways to integrate financial, trade, technological, security and foreign policies



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

AS INDIA RETURNS to a high growth path after a slowdown in the last decade, its geopolitical salience in the world will continue to rise. India's GDP has grown manifold since 1991-92 when it stood at \$270 billion. Today, India's GDP is \$3.1 trillion and could cross, according to some estimates, \$8 trillion by the end of this decade.

India is now the sixth-largest economy and could become the third-largest by the end of the decade if the current projections hold. India's total trade, which was about \$38 billion in 1991-92, is expected to touch \$1.3 trillion this year. This is about 40 per cent of India's GDP and underlines the fact that India is more deeply tied to the world than ever before.

But the GDP's journey from three to eight trillion will not be a linear process; nor would it be easy to secure India's interests amidst the deeper integration with the world. That the world itself is in a geo-economic churn makes the transition a challenging one.

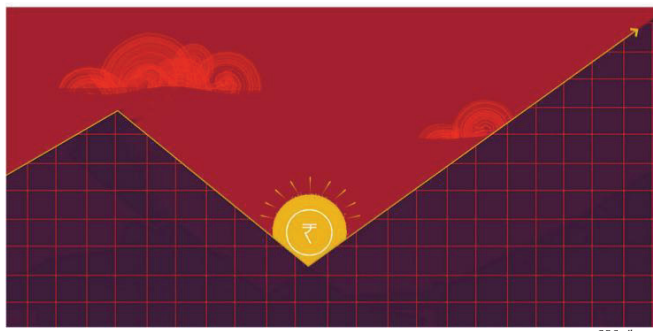
Elevating India to a higher economic orbit would involve a recalibration of its assumptions, taken for granted in the last three decades of reform. For, the international context in which India has rapidly grown has begun to change. If globalisation was seen as inevitable and irreversible during the last three decades, India's task now is to adapt to significant changes in the global economic order.

First, a word about the current buzz on geopolitics. It was Edward Luttwak, the well-known American strategist, who triggered a global discourse on the idea of geopolitics in a seminal article in 1990 amidst the end of the Cold War and a new wave of economic globalisation.

Luttwak — who is speaking to the Indian strategic community this week on the legacy of the Indian strategist late K Subramaniam — addressed the emerging consensus on the new importance of economics in global affairs, as opposed to the dominance of military competition during the Cold War years.

The rapid economic rise of China in the last three decades and Beijing's success in leveraging its growing economic clout for political gain is widely seen as a classic example of geopolitics. But Luttwak was not really talking about geopolitics. He was speaking to the international system. Luttwak was offering a more powerful argument on the relationship between geopolitics and economics.

Luttwak warned against the excessive optimism that was enveloping the post-Cold War era — that economic interdependence would eliminate the contestation among nations. The idea of a borderless world promoting perpetual peace and prosperity across the world had indeed become a powerful force at the dawn of the end of the 20th century amidst the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Luttwak argued that the "logic of conflict" between states is likely to persist in the age of globalisation if only in the "grammar of commerce". He suggested that the emphasis on "national interest" will remain as powerful in the economic domain as in the geopolitical domain. He also insisted that states will continue to do what matters more within their



C R Sasikumar

frontiers than the presumed imperatives of global good.

Luttwak posits that zero-sum situations that prevail in military conflicts are not exclusive to geopolitics. They also exist in the economic domain inevitably triggering conflicts, some of which could escalate to the military level. But the popular notion of geopolitics as a metaphor for the replacement of politics by economics endures. The latest example is the recently issued document on Pakistan's national security policy.

Pakistan's real challenge is not replacing geopolitics with geoeconomics. What Pakistan needs is a long-overdue transition from a rentier national security state to a developmental state. This, in turn, demands ending the dominance of the military, the feudals and a kleptocratic elite over the country's economy. Rerouting the Pakistani state is in the end a political task rather than an economic one.

Luttwak's warning against illusions of economic interdependence and globalisation have been borne out by major changes in US-China relations in recent years. The dramatic expansion of economic interdependence between China and America over the last four decades — what some called "Chimerica" — was the principal evidence for the thesis that geopolitics and ideology no longer mattered.

That "capitalist America" and "communist China" would form such an expansive economic partnership reinforced by a massive linkage between their business elite and civil societies reinforced the power of geo-economics. Chimerica was held up as an efficient economic fusion that underscored the virtues of economic globalisation. That mythology is now being shredded by developments in the US and China.

Economic nationalism has re-emerged in both countries today. In the US, President Joe Biden has persisted with his predecessor Donald Trump's emphasis on "America First" economic policies. He has gone one step forward by making the effort of rebalancing America a more purposeful one. The US is also strengthening domestic research and industrial capabilities to compete more effectively with China.

Biden is resisting strong pressures from the American financial capital and other interested groups to restore the old economic engagement with China. It is not the US alone that has backtracked from globalisation. China too has adopted the economic strategy of "dual circulation" that focuses on strengthening domestic capabilities and reducing exposure to external factors.

Although there is widespread criticism of India's decision to turn its back on Asian economic integration, there are others who share Delhi's concerns about China's dominant economic position. In a recent book, *China's Rise and Asia's Decline*, William Bratton argues that the short-term benefits for Asia from China's growth might be temporary and will be overshadowed by the long term costs of economic, industrial, financial, and technological dependence on China.

The question of China has also shaped India's recent policies on free trade. At the end of 2019, India has walked out from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) suggesting that the costs of joining a China-centred regional economic order are unacceptable.

Although there is widespread criticism of India's decision to turn its back on Asian economic integration, there are others who share Delhi's concerns about China's dominant economic position. In a recent book, *China's Rise and Asia's Decline*, William Bratton argues that the short-term benefits for Asia from China's growth might be temporary and will be overshadowed by the long-term costs of economic, industrial, financial, and technological dependence on China.

After abandoning RCEP, Delhi has turned towards free trade agreements with countries like Australia, Britain, UAE, and Israel. This must be seen as the beginning of a process of deepening India's engagement with countries whose economies are complementary. Trade liberalisation with Europe and the US will be difficult but important next steps.

India is also arguing, much like the US and China, that no large country can simply abandon domestic manufacturing to other countries in the name of economic efficiency and globalisation. India is now taking a number of initiatives to promote domestic manufacturing in a range of sectors — from mobile phones to armaments — under the banner of "Atmanirbhar Bharat".

India's selective trade arrangements and the policies to promote domestic manufacturing have drawn much criticism at home as a dangerous return to economic protectionism and deglobalisation. While those arguments must continue, they must be related more closely to the structural changes in the international economic order.

Not now, India has had the luxury of treating its foreign economic and strategic policies as separate domains pursued by different bureaucracies with different agendas. Adapting to the current global geo-economic churn demands that Delhi find better ways to integrate its financial, trade, technological, security and foreign policies. Above all, India needs a strategy that can respond to the imperatives of building domestic capabilities, developing geo-economic partnerships, and constructing geopolitical coalitions with like-minded countries.

The writer is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"If the US continues to discard warnings from China, it will face more tensions, crises and even conflicts in the Taiwan Straits." — GLOBAL TIMES

Ideas of Indian-ness

It means much more than can be discerned from voting choices and public statements of political leaders



PRIYADARSHINI SINGH

DO MOST INDIANS see India as a Hindu and Hindi nation?

Statements by some political leaders and recent survey research seem to suggest so. At the inauguration of the Kashi Vishwanath corridor project, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that India is defined by Hindu tradition and history. Alongside, Rahul Gandhi stated that a distinction must be made between the "good", truth-seeking Hindus and the power-seeking "Hindutva-vadis". Pew Research survey findings on religion and nationhood in India in July 2021 highlighted a similar conclusion. On the one hand, valuing religious diversity (84 per cent) is among the key attributes of being an Indian along with respecting elders (88 per cent) and having an Indian ancestry (70 per cent). On the other hand, a majority also believes that being a Hindu (56 per cent) and speaking Hindi (57 per cent) are important. Among Hindus, the support is higher — for 64 per cent being a Hindu and for 59 per cent speaking Hindi is important for Indian-ness.

Understanding the meaning of this Hindu-Hindi idea of India at the grassroots is critical, particularly because it has electoral implications. As we have seen over recent decades, voting choices and electoral victories of parties are used as insights into the everyday meanings of nation and nationhood.

My research highlights that for ordinary Indians, the idea of India has many layers. It includes cultural and civic elements; some parts of it determine political choices while others don't. Being an Indian is not just about being a part of a homogenous national community. India is a community of communities. When people talk about India, they often speak from the standpoint of multiple community locations. For example, one respondent talked about corruption in national politics but in terms of how it impacted him as a Gujarati living in a poor village. The importance of one's own religion (Hinduism) and language (Hindi) for being an Indian is meaningful because it has immense moral significance. It is the ideal horizon — a hope, a promise of a future defined by dignity, equality, justice and socio-economic development. It's this emancipatory promise of nationhood that resonates across groups. Prejudices and differences and how they project onto politics co-exist alongside valuing diversity. But the nation is not just its politics, and an Indian is not just who they vote for. Alternative ideas, inclusionary narratives exist even if the corresponding politics does not.

etc, it emerged that their idea of Indian-ness included many different types of identities. They are proud of India not only on "national" issues like "defeating" the British or the Taj Mahal but also of their community identities. As one respondent in a village in Savai Madhopur district said, "if we are talking about India, we are from Rajasthan, we should be proud of being Rajasthani". While stating this, he strongly brushed aside his friend who was telling him that he should highlight Hindu-Muslim peacefulness in their village. Another respondent, in a village in Karnataka, said that she is proud of India because "it has everything — there is Kashmir, it has gold, iron, silver, good weather and food". In fact, some of the Pew Research data also highlights this. Fifty-three per cent of Indians believe that religious diversity benefits India and only 24 per cent believe it harms it. Almost all Indians are expressly proud of their states (95 per cent) and their religion (94 per cent).

The critical thing the research highlights is that contexts impact the way people talk about the nation. And the context could include the people with whom one is discussing the idea of the nation or the political dynamics of the localities or even professional backgrounds. In my field sites, areas where there was a history of tension between religious groups, many respondents expressly said that they were proud to be Indian because of the good relationship between communities; in other sites, this was rarely mentioned.

The nation can mean much more than may be discerned from voting choices and public statements of political leaders. One respondent, a Gujarati diary owner in Savai Madhopur, educated till Class XI, said that national culture cannot be homogenised and a person born in India is an Indian because "where will the others go?". His illiterate wife aggressively said that everyone has a different language. Differentiating between the political and non-political aspects of national pride, he said that "fights between groups are about politics, now even brothers fight". His political support, however, tended towards a Hindu-centred idea of nationhood. Yet, he was proud of India because "it has everything, *dharma*, *nishkama* (secularism), *sanskrit* (culture), *vikas* (development)... *yeh toh some ki chidhai hai* (a golden bird)".

Above all, I discovered that the idea of India is meaningful because it has immense moral significance. It is the ideal horizon — a hope, a promise of a future defined by dignity, equality, justice and socio-economic development. It's this emancipatory promise of nationhood that resonates across groups. Prejudices and differences and how they project onto politics co-exist alongside valuing diversity. But the nation is not just its politics, and an Indian is not just who they vote for. Alternative ideas, inclusionary narratives exist even if the corresponding politics does not.

The writer is fellow, Centre for Policy Research, Delhi



UPENDRA BAXI

THE NUKE-WARY PEOPLE of Earth have not risen in unison to welcome the statement made on January 3 by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5). Yet, the assurance about "avoiding an arms race and not targeting each other or any other state", and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, is important.

The P5 statement reaffirms that a "nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought" because of its "far-reaching consequences". The statement further reaffirms that nuclear threats must be addressed and emphasises the importance of "preserving and complying with our bilateral and multilateral non-proliferation, disarmament, and arms control agreements and commitments". The statement also expresses a commitment to the group's Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) obligations and "to prevent the unauthorised or unintended use of nuclear weapons".

Declaring that an arms race would benefit none and endanger all, the P5 have undertaken to: (1) "work with all states to create a secure environment more conducive to progress on disarmament with the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all"; (2) "continue seeking bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches to avoid military confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability, increase mutual understanding and confidence"; and (3) pursue "constructive dialogue with mutual respect and

The right to peace

UNSC joint statement on nuclear weapons is a significant step forward

acknowledgement of each other's security interests and concerns".

This is a major statement. It is not a binding resolution and reiterates some of the core obligations of the NPT, while a review of the NPT remains postponed till August due to the Covid-19 pandemic. But none of these factors diminish the urgency and the political significance of the statement, especially given the unimagined danger posed by the 13,000 nuclear weapons currently believed to be held by a handful of countries, and the growing spectre of loose nukes, which may be deployed by armed terrorist groups for nefarious purposes.

The P5 statement was followed by a warning from UN Secretary-General António Guterres that nuclear annihilation is "just one misunderstanding or miscalculation away". Bold action on six fronts was necessary, he said. First, that member states should chart a path forward on nuclear disarmament; second, they should agree to new measures of transparency and dialogue; third, they should address the "smoldering" nuclear crises in the Middle East and Asia; fourth, they should strengthen the existing global bodies that support non-proliferation, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); fifth, they should promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology; and finally, they should remind "the world's people — and especially its young people — that eliminating nuclear weapons is the only way to guarantee that they

will never be used".

Gandhi taught us that the right to peace is an essential framework for all human rights and that waging peace is everyone's work, regardless of vocation, profession, or discipline. Peace is necessary for rights, freedom, equality, and justice and for that reason, we need what Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. called "education in the obvious" — namely, peace education. This is required at multiple levels, ranging across the planetary, global, supranational, regional, national, and local levels of social cognition and action. These spheres are intensely related, critical and transformative. As Betty Reardon writes: "... the general purpose of peace education... is to promote the development of an authentic planetary consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human condition by changing the social structures and the patterns of thought that have created it." If this "transformational imperative" is placed at the centre of peace education, there will be a "profound global cultural change" that will influence ways of thinking, world views, values, behaviours, relationships, and the structures of public order — "a change in the human consciousness and in human society of a dimension far greater than any other that has taken place since the emergence of the nation-state".

Critical peace education should form a number of tasks. Among these are: Bearing witness to negativity (that is, telling the truth

about the realities and inequalities of this society); throwing light on spaces for possible actions that can challenge these realities; and acting to borrow the words of the introduction to Rita Verma's 2017 book *Critical Peace Education and Global Citizenship* as the "critical secretary of the people, programmes and practices that are actually interrupting the dominant relations and building workable alternatives to them in educational institutions, communities and other sites". Instead of creating cadres of techno-policy intellectuals, peace education requires the creation of a mass of "critical secretaries" to people's movements.

Gandhi would have certainly welcomed the slender but significant UN Resolution 39/11 (November 12, 1984), which "solemnly proclaims that the peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace" and equally solemnly declares that the "preservation of the right of peoples to peace and the promotion of its implementation constitute a fundamental obligation of each State". The subsequent UN Resolution 53/243 B, declaring a programme of action for a culture of peace (1999) also owes a great deal to Gandhi's legacy and mission. May the managers of our education system no longer privilege ignorance and the promotion of social indifference, resilient even now.

The writer is professor of IIL, University of Warwick, and former vice-chancellor of Universities of South Gujarat and Delhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PETTY POLITICS

THIS IS WITH reference to the column P Chidambaram, "Service and Servitude" (IE, January 30) on the proposed amendment in the service rules. His claim that the shortage of IAS officers in the central government is PM Modi's fault is absurd. Every IAS officer knows that he has to serve in the state of allotment and the Centre. They aspire to get a central deputation as that gives them an opportunity to learn. So why this shortage? As an IAS officer, I know that one weapon a CM has to harass an upright IAS officer is to keep shunting her from one useless post to another, she does not like to lose. And if she wishes to go on central deputation, then not to send her name to DoPT and, if she somehow gets selected, not to release her. The central government suffers. It is surprising that Mr Chidambaram should talk of work culture. During the UPA, the NAC, an unconstitutional body, under Sonia Gandhi, was the de facto power. No wonder we had scam after scam. PM Modi has brought in discipline, done away with multiple power centres and what is more, done away with corruption. With a 360-degree review, the process of empowerment has become streamlined and fair.

Prabakar K Basu, former secretary, Ministry of Agriculture

TAX CUTS NEEDED

This refers to the editorial, "Why FM must not cut taxes" (IE, January 31). While the logical argument against cutting taxes is right, we must remember that inflation is at record levels and the common people are

facing the twin pressures of low income hike and inflation. Corporate tax cuts in the previous years have resulted in record industrial growth in India and undertaking of fresh capex across industries. In the same spirit, the finance minister should slowly reduce the tax burden of individuals to revive the animal spirits across the nation and the consumer sentiment. The fiscal deficit will be covered up by the record spending and hence the GDP growth. One more year without any tax cuts for individuals will not bode well for the ruling party in the upcoming election.

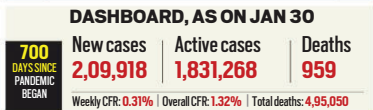
Gaurav Gupta, Pune

SCHOOLS AND VIRUS

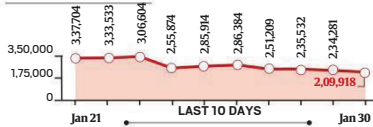
THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Unlocking Classroom" (IE, January 31). From the number of hospitalisations in the current wave of Omicron it seems that virus is not as lethal as the Delta variant was. The time has come to give a virus the "virus". School closures in India are one of the longest in the world and that too at a time when we don't have digital infrastructure on the same scale as the western countries. Our education system was already in need of reforms in the pre-pandemic era. Steps like NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat are steps in the right direction but what is needed is funding. With the Union Budget coming, it is a good opportunity for government to set up funds for education.

Dewang Ganesh Thosar, Raigarh

TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE



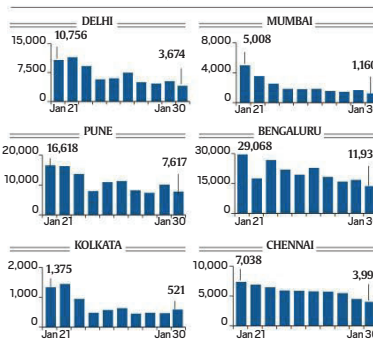
NEW CASES, DAILY



SURGE IN THE STATES

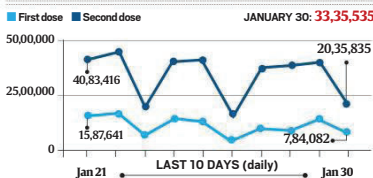
State	New cases	Active cases	Deaths	Weekly positivity
Kerala	51,570	3,55,314	475	51.60%
Karnataka	28,264	2,51,114	68	22.43%
Maharashtra	22,444	2,27,71	62	17.54%
Tamil Nadu	22,238	2,03,926	38	18.81%
Andhra Pradesh	10,310	1,16,031	12	30.11%

CASES IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS



TOTAL TESTS	72,89,97,813
TESTS ON JAN 30	16,07,115
WEEKLY POSITIVITY	14.66%
OVERALL POSITIVITY	5.67%

INDIA TOTAL DOSES **166,03,96,227**
(Adults 1st dose: 89,41,54,295; adults second dose: 70,83,84,203; 15-18 age group first dose: 4,59,59,539; precautionary doses: 1,18,58,190)



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SIMPLY PUT

What the Survey says

Economic Survey 2021-22 focuses on the post-pandemic recovery, noting the availability of fiscal space for the government, and analyses a range of aspects including inflation, energy prices and global uncertainties.

PRANAV MUKUL & SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 31

PUTTING THE spotlight on the way forward after the pandemic, the Economic Survey of 2021-22 has analysed aspects such as inflation, global liquidity measures, and rising energy prices to detail the risks for the economy going ahead. It has also taken stock of growing revenues to indicate the availability of fiscal space, should the government see the need to provide additional support.

The Survey has noted that growth in 2022-23 will be supported by widespread vaccine coverage, gains from supply-side reforms and easing of regulations, robust export growth, and the availability of fiscal space to ramp up capital spending.

Fiscal space

The Survey notes that buoyant tax revenues and government policies have created "headroom for taking up additional fiscal policy interventions". Stressing the need to continue the focus on capital expenditure, it has indicated that the government is on course to achieve the fiscal deficit target of 6.8% of GDP for the current year. Revenue receipts of the Centre during April-November 2021 have gone up by 67.2% (YoY) against an estimated growth of 9.6% in the 2021-22 Budget Estimates. The estimated tax collections provide the cushion to support growth next year.

The Survey also argues that the banking sector is well placed to support the economy, as it is now "well capitalised and the overhang of Non-Performing Assets seems to have structurally declined".

Vaccine economics

The Survey says the progress of vaccination should be seen not just as a health response indicator, but also as a buffer against economic disruptions caused by repeated pandemic waves. This is based in part on the assumption that private consumption "is poised to see stronger recovery with rapid coverage in vaccination and faster normalisation of economic activity", and the importance of vaccination in the re-opening of contact-intensive sectors.

Inflation pressures

The Survey flags inflation as an issue. It has noted in particular that while India's CPI inflation — 5.2% in 2021-22 (April-December) — is within the targeted tolerance band, WPI inflation has been running in double digits. This is partly due to base effects; however, "India does need to be wary of imported inflation, especially from elevated global energy prices".

Elevated inflationary pressures could potentially lead to unwinding of liquidity measures by systemically important central banks, including the US Federal Reserve.

GROSS DOMESTIC OUTPUT



Source: National Accounts Statistics (NSO), MOSPI

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT



Source: MOSPI, DPIIT

38 PAGES TO ALMOST 900; NOW DOWN TO 413

THE ECONOMIC SURVEY assesses the health and status of the economy, and sets the stage for the Union Budget. In his preface to this year's Survey, Principal Economic Adviser Sanjeev Sanyal has said the document presents the economic report card of the government, and suggestions on possible reforms.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1950-51, the Survey was initially fewer than 50 pages long, and was part of Budget documents. It contained a brief outline of economic developments of the previous year. The Survey of 1957-58 had just 38 pages, and was primarily descriptive with not much analysis and policy prescriptions, Sanyal has said.

AN ANALYTICAL CHAPTER on the country's medium-term challenges

and macro-economic prospects was added in 2008-09, following the global financial crisis of 2007-08. In 2013-14, the statistical appendix was published as a separate volume. In 2014-15 Survey was in two volumes: Vol 1 addressed topical policy concerns; Vol 2 was the traditional Survey along with the statistical appendix.

THE 2020-21 SURVEY "consisted of 335 pages in Volume 1, 368 pages in Volume 2 and a statistical appendix of 174 pages — a total of 877 pages", Sanyal has written. It allowed space for new ideas and themes, but was also "unwieldy", he said. This year's Survey has been trimmed down to 413 pages.

PRANAV MUKUL & ANCHAL MAGAZINE

Global uncertainty

While the sizeable accretion of foreign exchange reserves — \$613.6 billion as of December 31, 2021 — makes India's external sector resilient for the withdrawal of liquidity measures, the Survey points out that the overall balance of risks for global trade is tilted to the downside.

The biggest downside risk comes from the pandemic, it says, along with longer port delays, higher freight rates, and the shortage of shipping containers and inputs such as semiconductors. Supply-side disruptions, exacerbated by recovery in demand, pose significant risks for global trade.

Energy risks

The report calls for a "diversified mix of sources of energy of which fossil fuels are an important part", but simultaneously calls for focus on building storage for intermittent electricity generation from solar PV and wind farms to ensure on-demand energy supply.

It asks the government to focus on the pace of the shift from conventional fossil-fuel-based sources; and encourage R&D to ensure an effortless switch to renewable sources of energy.

Supply side reforms

The Survey says the post-Covid economy will not merely be a "re-inflation" of the pre-

Covid economy and, therefore, simply building it back with demand measures "is not a solution". It calls for emphasis on developing a supply-side strategy to deal with the long-term unpredictability of the post-Covid world, emanating mainly from factors such as changes in consumer behaviour, technological developments, geopolitics, climate change, and their potentially unpredictable interactions.

Industrial growth

The industrial sector, which suffered due to pandemic disruptions, is likely to record a growth of 11.8% in 2021-22, the Survey says. Although performance slowed during the year, the gradual unlocking of the economy and measures such as the PLI scheme for various sectors, along with policy initiatives for the emergency credit line guarantee to micro, small, and medium enterprises will help aid the pace of recovery, the Survey noted.

"The pace of this recovery and further growth is likely to continue due to consistent efforts of the government to bring in various structural, fiscal and infrastructural reforms in addition to a slew of measures/schemes like the production linked incentive scheme (PLI) to support industries," it said.

Public spending

After a slowdown in the first half of the ongoing financial year, capital expenditure by the Centre revived during October-December, the Survey notes. The first-half slowdown was mainly on account of Covid-19-led restrictions. During April-November 2021, capital expenditure grew by 13.5% (YoY), with focus in infrastructure-intensive sectors like roads and highways, railways, and housing and urban affairs. "The increase, the Survey says, was particularly substantial given the high YoY growth in capital expenditure registered during the corresponding period of the previous year as well.

Way forward

Basis the macro-economic stability indicators, the Survey believes that the Indian economy is "well placed" to take on the challenges of 2022-23. The government's strategy has been to not pre-commit to a "rigid response" while using safety nets for vulnerable sections, and responding iteratively based on Bayesian-updating of information.

The Survey proposes use of the Agile approach to policymaking with 80 high-frequency indicators in an environment of "extreme uncertainty". The approach, used in project management and technology development, assesses outcomes in short iterations while constantly making incremental adjustments. The suggestion is based on the availability of a "wealth of real-time data" to take feedback-based decisions, the Survey says.

'Maus' and the novel protest against a school ban

PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 31

A UNANIMOUS decision by the McMinn County school board in Tennessee to pull Jewish-American cartoonist Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* from its syllabus has seen a unique protest — on January 28, the Pulitzer Prize-winning book climbed to the top of Amazon's bestsellers list in fiction satire and comics and graphic novel. On Sunday, for all books, *The Complete Maus* held number three spot and the first volume, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*, number two.

Why the ban

On January 10, at a meeting of the school

board, members found objectionable some depictions in the book based on the Holocaust experience of the author's Jewish Pole parents. The board cited eight swear words and a nude illustration. The move met with protest locally and worldwide. The board upheld the decision, stating that it was not a ban, but a replacement with a more suitable text for the intended age group.

Holocaust memories

Sensitised from 1980-91 in Rwanda, an experimental magazine brought out by Spiegelman and his wife Fanny Mouly, *Maus* is based on a series of interviews Spiegelman took of his father Vladek, and brings alive the horrors of the Holocaust.

The book alternates between two timelines — 1930-45 when Vladek and his wife survived Auschwitz, and 1978-79, in Spiegelman's youth, before jumping to 1986 in the second instalment.

In a twist to the Nazi propaganda that characterised Jews as vermin, Spiegelman's hand-drawn illustrations depict people with animal characteristics — the Germans are shown as cats, the Poles as pigs, while Jews, in general, are depicted as mice.

Spiegelman's audacious experiment elevated a mass medium like comics to serious literature. The book has been translated into over 30 languages and won several awards, and is the only graphic novel to have won the Pulitzer Prize list date.

The protests

The protests are a reaction to a right-wing push for cultural conservatism in America and across the world, that is increasingly resulting in a censorship of academic and literary freedoms and free speech. Author Neil Gaiman tweeted, "There's only one kind of people who would vote to ban *Maus*, whatever they are calling themselves these days." Dot Maggie Smith tweeted, "We've lost our damn minds if we think that to keep kids safe in school, we need to ban books, not assault weapons".

In an interview to CNN, Spiegelman, 73, said of the school board decision: "It has the breadth of atrocity and fascism about it."

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Kerala's proposal to limit Lokayukta's powers, and laws in other states

APURVA VISHWANATH &
SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 31

THE KERALA government proposes to amend the Kerala Lok Ayukta Act with an ordinance, a move that has drawn criticism from the opposition.

What change has been proposed?

The cabinet has recommended to the Governor that he promulgate the ordinance, which proposes to give the government powers to "either accept or reject the verdict of the Lokayukta, after giving an opportunity of being heard". Currently, under Section 14 of the Act, a public servant is required to vacate office if directed by the Lokayukta.

The stated reason for this is that the state's Advocate General K Gopalakrishna Kurup has given his opinion green-lighting the amendment. However, the move is widely seen as a fallout of the Supreme Court's refusal in October last year to stay the Lokayukta decision holding CPM(M) leader K

T Jaleel guilty of nepotism. Jaleel, who was Higher Education Minister during Pinarayi Vijayan's first term as Chief Minister, had to resign after the Lokayukta decision. The Lokayukta is also currently investigating cases against Vijayan himself and Higher Education Minister R Bindu.

How was the Lokayukta Act originally envisaged?

The central Lokayukta and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 was notified on January 1, 2014. The law was a result of demands of several decades for stronger anti-corruption laws. The Act provides for establishing a Lokayukta headed by a Chairperson, who is or has been a Chief Justice of India, or is or has been a judge of the Supreme Court, or an eminent person who fulfils eligibility criteria as specified. Of its other members, not exceeding eight, 50% are to be judicial members, provided that not less than 50% belong to the SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, or are women. The Lokayukta is also currently investigating complaints against public servants, a definition that includes the Lokpal chairperson and

members. The Lokpal was appointed in March 2019 and it started functioning since March 2020 when its rules were framed. The Lokpal is at present headed by former Supreme Court Justice Prakash Chandra Ghose.

As per statistics on its official website, the Lokpal received 1,427 complaints in 2019-20, 110 in 2020-21, and 30 in 2021-22 up to July 2021. Due to a delay in framing rules, one of the judicial members, Justice (Retd) Dilip B Bhosale, has resigned.

How does it work in the states?

Lokayuktas are the state equivalents of the central Lokpal. Section 63 of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 states: "Every state shall establish a body to be known as the Lokayukta for the State, if not so established, constituted or appointed, by a law made by the State Legislature, to deal with complaints relating to corruption against certain public functionaries, within a period of one year from the date of commencement of this Act." Originally, the central legislation was envisaged to make a Lokayukta in each state mandatory. However, regional parties and the

BJP, which was in opposition then, argued that this would be against the spirit of federalism. The law then created a mere framework, leaving it to the states to decide the specifics.

Which states have Lokayuktas?

When the 2013 Act was passed, Lokayuktas were already functioning in some states — including in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka where they were very active. Following the Act and the intervention of the Supreme Court, most states have now set up a Lokayukta.

In 2018, the Supreme Court had expressed concern that Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh had not appointed any Lokayukta or Up-Lokayukta. It asked the chief secretaries about the steps taken for this appointment, and "if so the stage thereof... The reasons for non-appointment of Lokayukta/Up-Lokayukta... be also laid before the court."

However, given that states have autonomy to frame their own laws, the Lokayukta's

powers vary from state to state on various aspects, such as tenure, and need of sanction to prosecute officials. Examples of the laws in some states:

NAGALAND: On 3 August 2021, Nagaland passed a law allowing itself the power to keep the post of the state Lokayukta vacant for a year. It was also criticised for a political appointment: Up-Lokayukta Mangang Lima is a member of the ruling National Democratic Progressive Party. The new law came on the heels of the retirement of Lokayukta Justice (Retd) Uma Nath Singh. Justice Singh was working from Delhi citing restrictions on travelling due to the pandemic. The state moved the Supreme Court, which observed in January last year: "We don't understand this. How can a person be a Lokayukta while sitting in Delhi just because this is pandemic times... You are de-manning your office." Subsequently, Justice Singh resigned.

GOA: Goa's Lokayukta does not have powers of prosecution. On his retirement in June 2020, Justice (Retd) Prafulla Kumar Misra said he had left office "disenchanted"

with the state government that had not acted on even one of the 21 reports that he submitted against public functionaries during his nearly four-and-a-half-year tenure.

BHARAT: In March last year, Bihar passed a law that sought to punish people filing false cases before the Lokayukta. The offence would carry a jail term of up to three years. The move was criticised on the ground that it could be misused against whistle-blowers.

UTTAR PRADESH: In 2012, Uttar Pradesh passed a law increasing the tenure of Lokayukta to 8 years. Then Lokayukta Justice (Retd) N K Mehrotra, who was appointed on March 16, 2006, got a two-year extension with the amendment. The Supreme Court upheld the law in 2014.

In 2015, the state brought another amendment removing the High Court Chief Justice from the selection committee. This came in the wake of Justice DY Chandrachud, then Chief Justice of the Allahabad HC, disagreeing with the proposal to appoint Justice (Retd) Ravindra Singh as Lokayukta, citing his proximity to the Samajwadi Party that was in power then.