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The right to food
is inviolableNo child should be denied a mid-day
meal for want of an Aadhaar number

We have not conducted any poll but empirical evidence suggests that one of the most popular words in India these days is transparency. This is not surprising since corruption has been / still is a way of life here and everyone wants the State to do all that it can to clean up the mess. However, this desire to make systems transparent could sometimes have negative consequences. Take for example, the Centre's notification to make Aadhaar mandatory for receiving benefits of programmes such as mid-day meals, supplementary nutrition (ICDS) and scholarships. According to a recent notification, students will now be required to have an Aadhaar number for getting their midday meals. Cook-cum-helpers working under the scheme will also have to furnish the same. The deadline for enrolling is June 30. Of the total enrolment of 13.16 crore children, 10.03 crore children availed the midday meal on an average basis in 11.50 lakh schools during 2015-16.

The decision has been opposed by many, who say that it is in conflict with the Supreme Court's 2014 order. This is correct. The order said that "no person shall be deprived of any service for want of Aadhaar number in case he/she is otherwise eligible/entitled". In 2015, the SC reiterated, "the Aadhaar card scheme is purely voluntary and it cannot be made mandatory till the matter is finally decided by this Court one way or the other." The scheme is a flagship scheme that aims to provide some amount of nutrition to students in government schools, special training centres and madrasas supported under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

The government wants to reach certain administrative goals such as enrolling a certain number of people in Aadhaar. But this is not a good enough reason to make young children guinea pigs? Nutritious food is an absolute necessity for children and not something that can be denied because someone forgot to enrol them in some scheme within a tight time frame. The quality of the food on offer cannot be ensured by linking it to the scheme. Denying food will also mean flouting the Right to Food Act. While using technology to cut corruption is desirable, it cannot happen at the cost of hungry children.

A radical, yet realistic move

PM Narendra Modi's Israel visit will hopefully bring
diplomacy into alignment with political reality

The wheels are in motion for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make a state visit to Israel sometime later this year. Whatever the outcome of the visit, the very act of visiting Israel will be historic. No serving Indian prime minister has visited Israel. There are also increasing signals that Mr Modi will break the traditional diplomatic hyphen New Delhi has maintained between Israel and Palestine and will not include a stopover in Palestine in his itinerary. Such a decision would fit in with Mr Modi's general attitude that foreign policy should reflect the rising global profile of India and be less concerned about ideological and symbolic actions. More fundamental is that such a trip would reflect the sea-change that has taken place between India and Israel since the former normalised diplomatic ties in 1992. Israel is now one of the three largest suppliers of arms and weapons to India, a major source of assistance in the country's counterterrorism programmes and a partner in the development of India's nuclear arsenal.

That New Delhi should have continued to follow a path of diplomatic distance and security promiscuity with Tel Aviv has not made any sense for several years now. Mr Modi's visit will hopefully bring diplomacy into alignment with political reality. The arguments against such an act have proven false. No Arab or West Asian government has diluted its relationship with India. Quite the opposite: New Delhi's relations with many such countries have never been more intimate. There remains, however, a strong humanitarian and weaker strategic reason for India to retain its support for Palestine. There can be no walking back from India's recognition of the Palestinian State and, accordingly, its belief in a two-state solution to that problem. But given the depth and breadth of India's relationship with Israel versus the residual and largely humanitarian one it has with Palestine, binding one strand to the other makes little sense.

India makes the same argument when it tries to get other countries to drop the hyphen between itself and Pakistan. There is an additional problem that the original secular Palestinian nationalism has increasingly being supplanted by an Islamic identity that New Delhi finds unpalatable. The Modi visit will be seen as radical. In truth it will be realistic, introducing policy changes that should have been carried out many years ago.

povertyline

ABHIJIT BANERJEE

The growth lies
in the detailGDP numbers seem to be an overestimation,
and given how large our informal sector is,
this could make a significant difference

There is much discussion in the press about the surprising "fact" that the Indian economy grew at 7% this last quarter, despite the demonetisation. Economic affairs secretary Shaktikanta Das, never one for understatement, declared "The numbers completely negate the kind of negative projections and speculations which were made about the impact of demonetisation."

And yet the answer to why the GDP numbers came out the way they did was already anticipated and nicely explained in the excellent Economic Survey that came out last month from the same ministry that Das works for.

The report actually highlights a number of model-based computations that are consistent with the now confirmed official view that demonetisation will have a small effect on measured GDP growth, but then quite bluntly declares "Recorded GDP growth in the second half of FY2017 will understate the overall impact because the most affected parts of the economy — informal and cash-based — are either not captured in the national income accounts or to the extent they are, their measurement is based on formal sector indicators. For example, informal manufacturing is proxied by the Index of Industrial Production, which includes mostly large establishments. So, on the production or supply side, the effect on economic activity will be underestimated. The impact on the informal sector will, however, be captured insofar as lower incomes affect demand for formal sector output, for example, two-wheelers."

The survey goes on to show evidence that the demand for two-wheelers crashed.

This is spot on. The problem is that there is no good way to collect data from the hundreds of millions of establishments that constitute the production sector of our economy — the farms, the one man plumbing or shoe-polishing businesses, the many, many, many kirana stores. It would just take too long and cost too much, especially since most of

these establishments keep no records.

So what the Central Statistical Organisation does instead is to start by computing total the Gross Value Added based on output figures from the larger, registered establishments (the formal sector) where all the relevant data, these days, is in a computer file, and is therefore easy to access. To get the equivalent number for the agricultural sector it uses a number of rules of thumb, such as projections of agricultural output based on the weather and some informed guesses about the planting of various crops.

For manufacturing and services, the basic rule is to assume that the output of each informal sector moves in some fixed proportion to formal sector output. That proportionality factor is updated from time to time, based on sample surveys and market estimates, but that process is obviously too slow and cumbersome (you need to figure who to survey, where they are located, how to get them to give reliable answers to questions, etc) to be done every quarter.

So when the quarterly GDP comes out it is necessarily based on proportionality factors that are dated, and in particular don't take into account the fact that certain policies, like demonetisation, have a disproportionate effect on the informal sector because much more of it is cash based. This means our GDP numbers are likely to be overestimated right now, and given just how large our informal sector is, the overestimation could be very significant.

None of this is entirely new, but it seems to be totally missed by our leaders who are happily beating their chests about our (mostly made up) growth numbers. It is not that we know that growth is down a lot, we just don't know.

In fact the most valuable contribution of the current Economic Survey is less the specific points it makes (which are also interesting and important), but its attitude. In this time of alternative facts, I am deeply grateful for its commitment to the old-fashioned view that facts are important and need to be tracked down.



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For example, to make a prima facie case for Universal Basic Income (UBI), the Economic Survey reports on a fascinating fact-finding exercise. It starts by highlighting that the budget features around 950 different central and centrally sponsored schemes for the disadvantaged, many of whom no one has heard of, with obvious consequences for bureaucratic efficiency (some have offices and staff but no real budget) and coordination (some people manage to drink from many fountains while others go thirsty because they don't know where to look). To add to that the programmes that actually have money are very badly targeted. None of the major programmes targeted at the poor spend even 40% of their resources in the poorest districts where 40% of the poor live (the median fraction for 6 programmes the Survey emphasises is 30%). There seems to be, if anything, some amount of targeting of anti-poverty programmes to the less-poor.

I also loved the use of satellite data to compute the potential property tax base for some of the bigger cities, to demonstrate that many cities are failing miserably in collecting taxes. Once again it delivers to us an important fact that we might have suspected but didn't, in any useful sense of the word, know. I was also struck by the candour with which it talked about the biggest challenge faced by the Indian economy, which is the ballooning NPAs of our banking sector, and what it means for the future of investment and growth — nothing good — and also by its candid admission that the government does not yet have a plan for dealing with it.

My hope is that the standard it sets for the way we should carry out our public debates will stick, and shame those in positions of power and influence who have embraced the culture of insinuations, braggadocio and outright falsehoods.

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newsmaker

SHASHI THAROOR Congress leader and MP

IT [COLONIALISM] IS A BRITISH PROBLEM, FIRST OF ALL BECAUSE THERE IS SO MUCH HISTORICAL AMNESIA ABOUT WHAT THE EMPIRE REALLY ENTAILED... THERE'S NO REAL AWARENESS OF THE ATROCITIES, OF THE FACT THAT BRITAIN FINANCED ITS INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND ITS PROSPERITY FROM THE DEPREDACTIONS OF EMPIRE...



Illustration: SIDDHANT JUMDE

THINK IT OVER »

POLITICS IS ALMOST AS EXCITING AS WAR, AND QUITE AS DANGEROUS. IN WAR YOU CAN ONLY BE KILLED ONCE, BUT IN POLITICS MANY TIMES.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

US will lose out if it exits the Paris climate deal

It will have to scrap its plans to be a leader in the global clean tech market, which is estimated to touch \$6tn by 2030

Darryl D'Monte

US President Donald Trump has ordered a review of all treaties the US has signed with more than a single nation and his advisers have to identify which the country ought to quit. This could lead to the US remaining with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, even as it pulls out of the Paris climate agreement of 2015, which former President Barack Obama helped to forge.

This has a precedent. President George W. Bush extricated the US from the UN's Kyoto protocol, which came into effect in 2005. It required all industrial countries to compulsorily reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 5% below their 1990 levels and there were penalties for failing to do so, the only obligatory measure in climate negotiations to date.

Since the US was the world's biggest emitter till 2007 when China replaced it and remains the second biggest, it bears a major responsibility for putting its house in order. A decade ago, the average American emitted 19.4 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, as against 5.1 tonnes by every Chinese and 1.8 tonnes by an Indian. While American exceptionalism touts the US as the world's leader in establishing rights to environmental information and some related areas, its overall record, as Kyoto shows, leaves much to be desired. Ironically, Trump has imposed a gag order on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issuing any public information and the agency could also face cuts of up to 70% to its climate change programmes.

If the US pulls out of the Paris agreement, it will send the wrong signals. As it is, the agreement is voluntary, with each country specifying to what extent it will cut emissions and subject itself to international scrutiny. Every year beats the record for the highest temperatures and the world is well on course to cross the 2°C increase above pre-industrial levels, beyond which there will be cataclysmic climate change.

At the protracted climate negotiations, the US leads the unofficial Umbrella group, which include Australia, Russia, Canada and Japan. At the very least, their will to combat global warming will be compro-



Activists protest against Myron Ebell, head of Donald Trump's Environmental Protection Agency's transition team, Brussels, Belgium, February 1

REUTERS

mised; Japan — although the host country for the Kyoto protocol — pulled out of that treaty after the US did so.

As the Washington-based World Resources Institute observed, climate has come the centre of the agenda of both G7 and G20. Last year, US intelligence agencies found that climate change could cause grave political and social instability worldwide, which is why G7 has commissioned a study on A New Climate for Peace and is stepping up its efforts to better coordinate strategies to contain climate security risks. The bedrock of the Paris agreement is the action which countries take at home. In the US, it is Obama's Clean Power Plan, which is part of the larger Climate Action Plan and comes under the EPA.

Trump has appointed former Oklahoma attorney general Scott Pruitt to head the agency though Pruitt sued it 13 times in the past six years, in collusion with the very industries which the regulations were aimed at. Pruitt has admitted that climate change is occurring, adding worryingly that "human ability to measure with precision the extent of that impact is subject to continuing debate and dialogue, as well they should be."

The Clean Power Plan seeks to curb

coal-fired power plants, which might fell run foul of secretary of state Rex Tillerson's assertion that he "will support US membership in only those international agreements that advance our national interests and do not cause harm to the American people or our economic competitiveness." This is reminiscent of the senior George Bush's remarks at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992: "The American way of life is not up for negotiation." However, even his son's EPA head, Christine Todd Whitman, has criticised Trump for appointing a person who is a climate change denier. Trump may well be shooting himself in the foot because he is abandoning America's plans to lead the world's clean energy industries, the global market for which is estimated to touch \$6 trillion by 2030. China is investing heavily in these and even India may get a toe in the door with its International Solar Alliance. Last month, 630 American top business leaders wrote an open letter to Trump and Congress, exhorting them to continue supporting renewables and not quit the Paris agreement.

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innervoice

The only way to do
great work is to
love what you do

PP Wangchuk

It is likely that many of us may not like the work we do. Yet we do it reluctantly because of the compulsions of circumstances or for any other reason. There is no denying the fact that your output in such cases will be compromised a lot because your heart and mind don't go into it. As a result, you are indifferent to your work and yet you somehow manage to do it.

"Love your work" is an old proverb, and it has a pointed message: The outcome of hard work with love gets great results. You not only get satisfaction in your work, even your existence gets a meaning that makes you feel proud of yourself. The purpose of life gets a fresh boost of fulfillment.

The joy of life in loving your job is best described by American entrepreneur Steve Jobs: "Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do."

That tells us that one can't have a sense of accomplishment at something until one loves it. Loving your job gets other people's applause too because you are doing something that bears fruits for all. In other words, you are working for the good and welfare of all sentient beings.

American civil rights activist Maya Angelou says this in her own inimitable words: "The secret of joy in work is contained in one word — excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it."

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