

14 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

ECONOMIC GROWTH WITHOUT SOCIAL PROGRESS LETS THE GREAT MAJORITY OF PEOPLE LIE IN POVERTY.

— JOHN F. KENNEDY

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Failing the university

JNU administration's new admission procedures go against the university's ethos and character



SUKHADEO THORAT

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY is in resistance mode again. The protests, this time, have implications not only for JNU but all universities in the country. The university administration's proposed procedure for admission to PhD programmes, and the cap on number of PhD students per supervisor, following the UGC's 2016 regulation, has caused immense discontent among the students and faculty. There would be serious ramifications if other universities mechanically follow the UGC's 2016 regulations. The UGC and the university should rethink them.

Three issues are at stake. First, the 2016 regulation requires clearing a written examination and an interview for entry to a PhD programme. This change was required because, in many universities, admissions to PhD were conducted in an arbitrary manner, often leaving it to the faculty's willingness to supervise. Introduction of the written test and viva formalised the admission procedure. Recognising the university system's diversity, though, the UGC left it to individual universities to apportion weightage to the written test and the viva. The JNU administration's proposal involves one round of elimination at the written examination stage; the final selection would entirely be based on the performance in the interview. The faculty and students think this would go against the established weightage of 70 per cent for written and 30 per cent for viva. The proposal also comes at a time when there is demand for reducing the weightage of the viva to 10 per cent.

JNU's formula of apportioning weightage has evolved over a period of time based on the university's experience, much before the UGC's 2016 regulation. From 1969 till early 1984, JNU used written and viva for MPhil, PhD, undergraduate and post-graduate programmes; weightage was also given to family income, the backwardness of the district from which the applicant hailed, gender, and to first generation learners. The university undertook a major exercise in 1984, which led to the viva and the income criterion being discontinued for undergraduate and

post-graduate admission. A committee led by historian Bipan Chandra showed the courage to drop the income criteria because it was misused. Similarly, the recent demand to reduce the weightage of viva for admission from 30 per cent to 10 per cent is based on the evidence of biases faced by Dalit, Adivasi and OBC students during interviews. The administration should have considered the university's experience while suggesting elimination at the stage of written exam, without any relaxation for Dalit and Adivasi students. Students and the faculty believe that making the final selection entirely contingent on performance in the viva will go against the merit and social justice provision in the university's Act. The administration could have worked out an acceptable weightage for written and viva, and not gone mechanically by the UGC rules — they, in any case, do not ask for mechanical adherence.

The second issue relates to the cap of eight students per MPhil/PhD supervisor. This provision does not go well with JNU's research-oriented character and is also inimical to the diversity in the university system. Some universities are more research intensive than others. The UGC's cap on the number of students per supervisor is intended to reduce the faculty's burden, but that should be left to the collective decision of the faculty. In fact, the university's 126th Academic Council had decided "to implement in a phased manner the guidelines on number of MPhil/PhD students with each faculty member till the recruitment as per sanctioned strength is completed". The same academic council resolved to implement 27 per cent reservations for OBCs. The JNU faculty has supervised more students in the best interest of social justice, but it did not allow standards to fall — evident from the university being given the Visitor's Award for the Best Central University.

The students and faculty fear that the supervision cap will lead to a drastic reduction in the number of students admitted this year. Given the low enrollment in higher education, the effort should be to expand the faculty — and not reduce the intake of the stu-

dents. If all central universities apply this limit, the number of students will reduce significantly and precipitate crises. This is certainly not in the spirit of the 2016 regulation.

The third disagreement pertains to the recently modified system of faculty selection, which gives the VC the power to decide the experts who will conduct the interview. In the earlier system, the VC selected experts from a pool provided by the academic council through the centres. This time-tested system drew on the understanding that the departments know the best experts in their disciplines and at the same time left the final choice to the VC to safeguard against any bias.

At the core of these disagreements is the possibility of an erosion of a governance system that draws on collective academic opinion on the campus. Decisions on vital issues should be taken with the consent of relevant bodies, including that of the faculty and students. The UGC, in fact, encourages the use of best practices. I remember conveying the UGC's opinion as the agency's chairman: "...universities are autonomous institutes and have necessary freedom to... adopt practices which they consider appropriate for promoting excellence, and equal access within the broad framework of national policy. Thus, while... reforms have to be initiated on a priority basis, the universities, may also combine with other best practices which the university has evolved."

The UGC's role is to coordinate and maintain the standards of higher education by laying down a general regulatory framework. It provides space for the specificities and best practices that promote excellence and good governance. The UGC should issue a clarification to the universities about the flexibility on the relative weightage for written and viva, and students limit for supervision. It's equally important for the JNU to retain the present system through a dialogue with the faculty and students and convey to the UGC what suits the university the most.

The writer is professor emeritus, JNU and former chairman, UGC

MEASURING GROWTH

GDP figures point to a robust economy, but what matters is investments and jobs

IF THE RESULTS of the recent civic elections in Maharashtra and Odisha are any indication, the Narendra Modi government's November 8 decision to invalidate all existing Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 denomination notes have had no political impact. But now, it seems the withdrawal of some 86 per cent of currency from circulation has had little effect on economic growth either. Latest quarterly data on national income from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shows the country's GDP to have expanded in real terms by 7 per cent during October-December year-on-year. But more interesting is manufacturing and private final consumption expenditure: These have recorded annual growth rates of 8.3 per cent and 10.1 per cent during October-December, as against their respective rates of 6.9 per cent and 5.1 per cent for the previous quarter. In other words, manufacturing and private spending, far from suffering any setback, have registered strong rebound in a quarter where the effects of demonetisation would have been palpable, if at all.

All of this would obviously fly against ground reports of production ceasing in industrial clusters from Ludhiana, Tirupur and Ichalkaranji to Morbi, Agra and Noida, alongside retrenched workers from factories and construction sites returning to their homes in Bihar, Odisha or Bundelkhand. Nor do they square up with other data indicators relating to industrial credit, automobile and two-wheeler sales or residential unit bookings across cities; all of these have registered clear negative growth since November. The CSO data, in fact, render even the government's own assessment at least until recently — of demonetisation causing a "temporary" blip in a couple of quarters and thereafter leading to a "V-shaped" recovery — irrelevant: If growth has been robust in October-December, why debate the impact of demonetisation?

There is bound to be scepticism over the CSO's latest estimates. This would be even more after the Economic Survey pegged GDP growth for 2016-17 at 6.5 per cent, down from 7.6 per cent last year. The CSO, by contrast, expects only a small dip from 7.9 per cent to 7.1 per cent for the entire fiscal. It is worth recounting the Survey's note of caution here: According to it, recorded GDP growth may understate the overall impact of demonetisation 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. That caveat needs to be factored in along with another important takeaway from the CSO data, which pertains to gross fixed capital formation. The latter — an indicator of investment activity that leads to job generation in the economy — has expanded by a mere 3.5 per cent year-on-year in October-December. And that's the real concern today, whether or not we believe that overall GDP growth is 7 per cent plus.

BLACK BAND, RED CARD

By threatening government over arrest of their colleague, IAS officers in Bihar set a disturbing example

IAS OFFICERS IN Bihar are on the warpath over the arrest of a senior member of their fraternity. Sudhir Kumar, the chairman of the Bihar Staff Selection Commission (BSSC), was arrested by a special investigation team of the Patna police recently in connection with the leak of questions and answers concerning a competitive examination. Last week, the IAS Officers Association decided to wear black arm bands to work to protest what they say was police highhandedness and threatened that no official would take up the post of Kumar, who is under suspension following the arrest. They have promised to continue the protest until Kumar is released from the jail and the case is transferred to the CBI. The IAS body also declared that hereafter verbal orders from ministers, including the chief minister, will not be obeyed.

The concern among bureaucrats for a fellow officer is touching — but entirely misplaced. Kumar has been accused of alleged irregularities and favours to his relatives by helping them access the question paper. Certainly, IAS officers have a right to defend a colleague and talk about his "unblemished record in service so far," but they are expected to know the meaning of due process and the rule of law. That's why the protest sends out a disturbing message. It has the trappings of a power elite threatening the political executive for not protecting their privileges. The government has done well not to bow to their pressure. Nearly 17.5 lakh candidates were to take the BSSC exam, which the government was forced to cancel following the leak of papers. It is important that the people behind the paper leak are traced and booked. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has said the SIT will be given a free hand to investigate and an example will be made of the investigation. There is no reason to fault the CM unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise in the police investigation. If the IAS officers want to be taken seriously, they should stand up for a fair probe. Instead, they have revealed a clannish intent to safeguard one among them at the expense of dispensing with the credibility of the executive.

The veiled threat the IAS body holds out is that officials can slow down the administration; Nitish Kumar's success as an administrator had a lot to do with the synergy and trust he had built with bureaucrats. This case seems to have breached that trust and while the government must ensure that due process is followed in this case, the officers need to step back and let the law take its course.

DOMESTIC GREATS

Cricket board has done well to honour Rajinder Goel, Padmakar Shivalkar, spinners who matched the famed quartet

BORN IN THE wrong place and at the wrong time. In Indian cricket, there isn't a better context to slip in this well-worn adage than when the subjects of the discussion are Rajinder Goel and Padmakar Shivalkar. Both were copybook, artificial left-arm spinners who happened to ply the same trade in the "spin boom" era of Indian cricket. They were consigned to domestic chores for years while the more vaunted quartet of Bishan Singh Bedi, B.S. Chandrasekhar, E.A.S. Prasanna and Srinivasa Venkataraghavan, were weaving deception at home and abroad.

Whether Goel and Shivalkar — both of them bestowed, belatedly, with lifetime achievement awards by the Indian cricket board this week — were better than the quartet is a question bound to debates, perceptions and conjectures. But the unavoidable truth is how much ever good they were, they never got to play for their country, despite being held in high regard by peers. Several times have Bedi himself acknowledged that the duo were as good as him, but were grossly unlucky. Goel and Shivalkar are among Sunil Gavaskar's chosen 31 greats in his book, *The Idols*. A cruel happenstance of time, like several Caribbean fast bowlers or Australian batsmen of their respective golden eras would accord.

However, unlike the West Indian pacemen and Australian batsmen, who had the lucrative solace of playing county cricket, Shivalkar and Goel kept toiling perpetually on Indian dustbowls at a time when Ranji Trophy was more about honour and pride than prize-money. The match fee in their playing days — 1970s and 1980s — was Rs 150 per day and the mode of transport, bus and train. If they felt cussed and neglected at times, then they were quick to put negative thoughts behind and keep playing for the love of their art. "An addiction," as Goel once said. The BCCI's gesture might have come late, but better late than never.



SAKET SONI

THE SCENE AT the Kansas bar was every immigrant's nightmare. Two Indian H-1B guestworkers, Srinivas Kuchibhotla and Alok Madasani, were sharing an after-work whiskey in a bar in Olathe, Kansas. A white American, Adam Purington, hurled racist insults at them and was thrown out. But he returned with a shotgun, shouted "Get out of my country," and opened fire. He killed Srinivas and wounded Alok, as well as an American man who tried to stop him. The shooting sent shockwaves through the United States and India. Unsurprisingly, the White House rejected any connection between President Donald Trump's hate-filled rhetoric and the shooting.

But the shooting reveals what happens when the realities of globalism meet Trump's economic nationalism. On one hand, US immigration policy imports Indian migrant workers. On the other hand, the new political rhetoric encourages Americans to see those workers as a threat. The shooting also showed the two impulses that have always coexisted in America: The racist and nativist impulses of the shooter, and the embracing impulse of another white man, Ian Grillo, who tried to stop the shooter and got shot himself.

Indians have always had faith in the American impulse to embrace and protect migrants. But the painful reality is that racism is the stronger impulse now — boosted by Trump's rhetoric and economic nationalism. I understand the optimistic view of the US: America gave me a scholarship to come to college and I believed I had come to a welcoming place. Donald Trump's America is

The students and faculty fear that the supervision cap will lead to drastic reduction in the students admitted this year. Given the low enrollment in higher education, the effort should be to increase the intake of the students. If all central universities apply this limit, the number of students will reduce significantly and precipitate crises. This is certainly not in the spirit of the 2016 regulation.

AFTER KANSAS

Posing as a 'model minority' cannot keep Indian migrants safe in Trump's America

different. Race-based violence against people of colour in the US isn't new. The Black Lives Matter movement emerged to demand an end to police violence targeting African Americans. What is new is that the president ran on an openly xenophobic and anti-immigrant platform, and upon his election, embraced the view that brown people are a threat. This gives a new boldness to Americans who may be ready to turn their racial and economic resentment into violence. Hate crimes and threats are surging — against Jews, Muslims, Latin Americans, African Americans and Asians.

I feel the difference every day. In the small Southern towns where I organise workers, I have a safety plan in case I am attacked. In downtown Washington D.C., I keep a safe distance from white strangers coming out of bars and restaurants. Imagine, then, what it is like for a newly arrived Indian migrant worker in a small city in Kansas. Many Indians seek refuge in the idea that being "the right kind of migrant" will keep them safe. Faced with racial threats, Indians often explain that they are doctors or engineers, that they came to the US legally, or that they are not Muslims from countries deemed national security threats. In reality, Indian immigrants are also domestic workers, nurses, taxi drivers, shopkeepers and construction workers. Indians make up the fastest-growing group of undocumented workers in the US. And increasingly, they're not just in major cities; they're in towns like Olathe.

It's time Indians abandon the myth that posing as a "model minority" will keep us

safe. In a climate of economic nationalism, an emboldened racist will not limit his violence to a nationality or visa category. According to the heartbreaking reports, Srinivas and Alok told the shooter they were on H-1B visas. It didn't stop him from firing. The only safety for Indian workers in America is in allying with the growing civic movement — led by people of colour — that works to push this country away from the impulses of the shooter and toward those of the protector.

The Indian government has, at times, been reluctant to come to the defence of Indian migrant workers in the US. It is time to overcome that reluctance. India cannot continue to send its nationals into an atmosphere of White House-sanctioned xenophobia, wait for the inevitable violence, and then rush diplomats to funerals. India needs to press Trump to stand up for the best traditions of racial tolerance, openness, and the defence of civil and human rights. It is not enough to ask for more H-1B visas. India must press Trump to reject his demonisation and criminalisation of immigrants, and instead adopt policies that let them access their rights.

Unfortunately, the attack in Kansas won't be the last of its kind. But the world's two great democracies — and the millions of people who bridge them — can turn the tide from fear and hatred back toward tolerance and love.

The writer is the executive director, National Guestworker Alliance, which represents migrant workers in the US



MARCH 2, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

OPPOSITION RALLY ADDRESSING A MAMMOTH rally at the Boat Club, Jagjivan Ram, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Vijayalakshmi Pandit reminded an attentive audience that the issue in the coming election was not merely bringing in a set of rulers. The country's form of government was at stake — whether it would be a democracy or dictatorship. Ram said at the time of independence the country's leaders decided that the people, rather than feudal lords, would rule the country. And there would be democracy and not dictatorship. However, the PM had tried to corner more power than was legitimately due to her. Vijayalakshmi Pandit said the principles for which the Congress

party had existed all these years had been thrown to the winds. Mahatma Gandhi and others responsible for Independence had fought for freedom and a democratic set-up, where there was an elected ruling party and another elected opposition party. The opposition had been elected by the people, yet they are being branded traitors.

SANJAY IGNORED SANJAY GANDHI AND his wife, Maneka, had their biggest surprise when there was nobody to receive them at the Amousi airport. There was no transport to take them to his Amethi constituency, Sanjay refused to use the official car offered to him. They had

arrived in the morning from Delhi on their way to Amethi.

GIRI SPEAKS OUT FORMER PRESIDENT V.V. GIRI said the "Emergency should not have been introduced at all. The legislation available before the Emergency was quite enough to deal with any difficult situation". "Emergency has created a fear complex in the minds of the citizens," he said. Freedoms of speech, thought and action have been throttled, going against the very spirit that the founding fathers of our Constitution intended, Giri said in an interview to Publication Syndicate, a news-feature agency.

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Make the men answer

The recent attack on a woman actor in Kerala has shaken the state. Both government and employers, including the film industry, are accountable on women's safety



PADMAPRIYA JANAKIRAMAN

THE LATE EVENING breeze brushing my face, personalised music playing in the background and banter while driving with my closest companions, driver *etta* and my paper, is my typical post-work routine. But the recent assault on my colleague has rudely shaken my desire for this well-ordered setting. It has also deeply affected my notions of safety as a film professional with respect to travelling, especially at night. As I gather together my broken faith and rationalise, it is infuriating to know that the chances of the incident occurring at all could have been minimised, if only certain steps were taken.

If only the state and Union government cared to deliver on their primary duty — the basic safety of citizens. While it is gladdening to hear of Kerala's governor, P. Sathasivam's solution-driven approach, that is hardly the comprehensive movement against such crime that the state needs. As Sonal Shah, senior manager at the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy puts it, we need to investigate our gender-blind infrastructure as mobility plans rarely collect gender disaggregated data, inequities such as daily harassment, forced mobility, forced immobility, etc.

Cities around the world have managed crime to emerge stronger: New York, for example, in less than two decades from being a cash-strapped, crime-racked city to becoming the 10th safest major city in the world today. While various kinds of non-governmental and neighbourhood groups put their hearts and minds towards solving the problem, it was the persistent, collective and aggressive effort of government agencies that brought rapid change. Community courts, NY police, NY city transit authority and the port authority worked together to find sustainable solutions for women's safety, restoring order in NY's public spaces.

If only the film industry also took proactive measures to ensure that women — about a quarter of its workforce — are safe and clearly illustrate what they should do if they are attacked. In an industry of free entry and exit, where all you need is a recommendation for a union card, where is the guarantee of safety for anybody? Especially for women, for whom even basic facilities like washrooms and a space for changing is an aberration. I just completed working towards an upcoming Hindi film *Chef*; in a career of close to 50 films, this happens to be the only movie which boasted of a gender-equal set. If the director was a man, the producer was a woman; if the editor a guy, the production designer a woman. Working on such a set meant much to me, professionally and personally.

The sheer number of women on set demands there be a safe and gender-equal working environment. This time, my assistant didn't have to run around with a broom to get the washroom ready. On a gender-equal set, when certain facilities cannot be provided, you have someone to fall back on. Female assistant directors would use my vanity van restroom during street shootings and I would always have someone around with wardrobe malfunctions. In a crazy, high-pressure environment like a film set, eventually a peculiar kind of empathy devel-



CR Sasikumar

ops for your co-workers. This is normally missing for women professionals on other sets; how will the men know what the other sex goes through unless they engage with them? Employers in the film industry have to get gender-friendly; else, not many would risk being in front of or behind the camera.

However, even on a gender-equal set, there is no clear idea about what kind of support the fraternity can provide if an untoward incident takes place. I recall how, in my early years, a popular director ignored a young woman's complaint of a driver feeling her up — not only was she asked to overlook it, the same driver continued to ferry her around for the next 15 days. As a 20-year-old, it caused me tremendous discomfort, but I was too naive to figure out what could be done.

A decade later, with a fashionable NYU degree and Vishakha guidelines backing me, I still don't know what the recourse is. It isn't just me who's ignorant on this; AMMA (Association of Malayalam Movie Artists) members have been circulating emotional emails on how to support our recently-attacked colleague. But we should get real — being physically violated in any manner is a heinous criminal offence. As an industry which contributes significantly to the economy, shouldn't Vishakha guidelines be as applicable to this industry as it is to others?

The film industry must ensure that women — about a quarter of its workforce — are safe. For women, even washrooms and a space for changing is an aberration. I just completed a Hindi film 'Chef'; in close to 50 films, this is the only movie which boasted a gender-equal set. However, even on a gender-equal set, there is no clear idea about fraternity support if an untoward incident takes place. In my early years, a popular director ignored a woman's complaint of a driver feeling her up — not only was she asked to overlook it, the same driver continued to ferry her around for 15 days.

I was asked to write this piece as I have always travelled alone, sans parents, bodyguards and all the trumpets surrounding us stars. I respect and continue to trust all the drivers who have clocked miles with me. But let me confess — that never happened organically. It happened at the cost of being extra-cautious about what I wear, what time I travel, how I talk — doing all that a female is expected to do to survive in this country in a sane and safe manner. As a matter of fact, as I write this piece, a female colleague and I are juggling diverse permutations to find the safest way to travel from Wayanad to Calicut to catch a 6:30 a.m. flight.

Seven decades after Independence, it's shameful that the polity of India defines a woman's "boldness" by her decision to travel alone. It is high time the government — and our employers — come together on a war footing to find comprehensive solutions that are implemented vigorously, and not just announce a slew of measures for which non-outcome-based budget lines are created amidst a media outcry. It is also high time that the women of this country held their employers and government accountable, through their vigilance — and their votes.

The writer is a National Award-winning film actor, dancer and public policy researcher. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It says a lot about the United States that Mr [George] Bush can be seen now as a paragon of virtue."

—THE GUARDIAN

The shrinking Plan

Technology has made the idea of decentralised planning tangible



BIBEK DEBROY

I HAVE quoted from this book in the past, but there is no harm in doing so again. This quote is from Alexander Campbell's *The Heart of India*, published abroad in 1958. The book is "banned" in India. The word "ban" is often used loosely. This book has never been published or printed in India. The ban (Customs notification No. 49, dated March 11, 1959) is on imports into the country. It is an extremely patronising book, though that should hardly be a reason for a ban.

There is a section about a meeting with Vaidya Sharma of the ministry of planning. "He (Vaidya Sharma) put away the housing development papers and talked again about the Five-Year Plan. 'We have now entered the period of the second Plan. The first Plan built up our food resources; the second Plan will lay the foundations for the rapid creation of heavy industry. Delhi, as the capital of India, will play a big part, and we are getting ready to shoulder the burden. We are going to build a big central stationery depot, with a special railway siding of its own. There will be no fewer than 12 halls, each covering 2,000 square feet. They will be storage halls', and, said Sharma triumphantly, 'we calculate that the depot will be capable of an annual turnover of 1,400 tons of official forms, forms required for carrying out the commitments of the second Five-Year Plan!'"

Richard Mahapatra is the Managing Editor and publisher of *Down to Earth*. In the current issue (February 16-28 2017), he writes, "Many old-timers, gathered around a Murphy Richards transistor in a library, would react to the approval of the five-year plan, as a grave voice of the newsreader would inform about allocations. In colleges, the economics professors would read out the new priorities to students and often, shyly, hint at lucrative academic opportunities and new subjects for applying for scholarships. Not going into the details of whether planned development did any good or harm to India, the five-year plans were always good experiences."

I will not get into the merits/demerits of planned development, not only in terms of historical context, but also its continued relevance/irrelevance. (In view of the Campbell quote, perhaps I should have said reverence/irreverence.) As students, we were reverently taught, and studied, plan models. I don't know if this reflects my jaundiced view, but the charm of plan models probably died out with the Fourth Plan (1969-74), at best, the Fifth (1974-78). Once rolling plans (1978-80) got going, plan models gathered moss. Incidentally, the number of equations in any plan model was almost entirely driven by the computing power one could rustle up.

In our student days, we rarely read plan documents and we certainly didn't read annual reports of the Planning

Commission. Let me now quote from the 1977-78 Annual Report of the Planning Commission, during the rolling plan era: "The Commission has suggested two new developments in the evolution of the country's planning methodology, viz. (a) the adoption of the rolling plan system and (b) the preparation of comprehensive area development plans at the block level. Year-to-year targets will be set for sectoral outlays and output for major sectors within the Five Year Plan; performance against these targets will be reviewed annually... There is no basis for the apprehensions expressed that the introduction of a Rolling Plan system would mean the abandonment of long-term objectives, reducing the commitment of resources for development, and freeing the implementing agencies from any accountability for non-achievement of targets. The modifications proposed will not mean either the abandonment of perspective planning or the replacement of the discipline of a five-year framework by ad hoc annual decision-making. A new 15-year perspective plan will be prepared for charting the longer-term course of development of the economy as a whole. The Perspective Plan would provide the framework for investment decisions in long-gestation projects for which a five-year horizon is inadequate, and for planning for land use, water resources, oil and mineral development and manpower."

I have refrained from quoting from the decentralised planning sections. In hindsight, both ideas seem prescient and both have a rationale, though Vaidya Sharma wouldn't have approved.

Decentralised planning lacks the raw appeal that centralised mathematical models possess. Even now, students are fascinated by the Oskar Lange kind of idea of a central planning board completely replicating the market through a tatonnement (trial and error) process. Note that decentralised planning received lip service since the First Plan (1951-56) — District Development Councils were formed, the Planning Commission formulated guidelines for district planning in 1969.

A Manual for Integrated District Planning was prepared by the Planning Commission in 2009. The last quote is from that manual: "From the late sixties to the mid-eighties, the trend was towards greater centralisation of administration. Due to the absence of concerted political and administrative support, panchayats had by the late sixties been superseded in most states. The formulation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), implemented mainly through line departments led to the virtual collapse of the district planning process. Though there were several efforts to stem the tide, (Dantwala Committee, G.V.K. Rao Committee), these were largely unsuccessful."

The supercomputers of the 1970s were primitive. Forget those, in its heyday of modelling, the Planning Commission didn't have access even to mainframes. But that remained the aspiration and decentralised planning seemed to replace it in every district with what are now called tablets.

The writer is member, Niti Aayog. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POVERTY SIGNS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The great deception,' (IE, March 1). The rising inequality as reported by Oxfam is visible worldwide. Protests, anti-immigration policies and violence over basic needs are fallouts of such inequality. The rise of the political right across the globe is a sign of growing distrust with the present efforts in reducing inequality. The need of the hour is to introduce comprehensive policies and reforms, to reduce income gaps and ensure optimum standard of living for all.

Amit Verma, Bareilly

POLITICAL VANITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Myth-shattering mandate' (IE, March 1). It is true that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the most popular Indian leader, but it is contestable if he is the most credible political leader. It is also true that the BJP has won elections to state assemblies and local bodies. But it has also lost some, most notably, Delhi and Bihar. Confidence is good but over-confidence is bad. Less than 10 days are left for the verdict of the ongoing elections in five states. We will know if the BJP's winning streak continues.

Kush Mehndiratta, New Delhi

ROAD NONSENSE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Lack of space derails plan to redesign roads' (IE, February 28). After assuming office, Delhi's AAP government decided to redesign 11 stretches of roads. The decision was based on the recommen-

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number. THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

datations of two AAP ministers Satyendra Jain and Gopal Rai, who visited Sweden to study road design. The government provided Rs 100 crore for the redesign. Now, the government has realised that the proposal is impractical since the lack of space militates against the redesign. I wonder why the ministers had to go to Sweden if they did not understand even the fundamental requirement of space for roads. Had they visited the offices of the National Highway Authority and the Central Road Research Institute, they would have got workable solutions.

Sham Langer, Delhi



TELESCOPE BY SHAILAJA BAJPAI

Twisted discourse

TV got worked up over Gurmehar Kaur for all the wrong reasons

"NATIONALISM VERSUS Free Speech" (CNN News 18). "#Fanatic Fury" (Times Now). "Patriot wars" (India Today). "Battleground University" (NDTV 24x7). Azaadi, anti-national, anti-India.

Sounds familiar, right? The headlines are the same, the language is identical, the narrative interchangeable. A meeting, "separatists", protests for and against, violence, police (in)action, political barbs, bullying, character assassination — chaos.

Only the names have changed. Replace Kanhaiya Kumar with Gurmehar Kaur, JNU with DU (or LSR) and you are watching television frame the news of February 2016 and February 2017. The march of time changes calendar dates but the "#March for India" (Times Now) seemingly treads the same path.

Except. Except (and Donald Trump has made repetition the new normal) on this occasion, English TV news took you to the crossroads where you could turn right, left or go straight after a Ramjas College seminar was cancelled, following protests by the ABVP against Umar Khalid speaking there, and Gurmehar Kaur's post, "I am not afraid

of ABVP" saw a deluge on social media with threats of rape and violence against her.

Monday, TV news was flooded with outrage. If you went left, you would hear people like Professor Aditya Mukherjee (JNU) say that the nation was being tested, "I can hardly recognise this as my country. This is the beginning of fascism." If you went right, you heard Saket Bahuguna (ABVP) condemn the threats against Gurmehar, but oppose all "anti-national slogans" (Left, Right and Centre, NDTV 24x7). And from nowhere, we were talking Maoists, Bastar, terrorism.

If you stayed in the centre, you had all the news channels — yes, Times Now included, which believes it is the nation — stick to the core issue. As CNN News 18 put it, "Online bullies troll martyr's daughter" or "Tolerant India stung" (Times Now).

The story of the day could have been the Ramjas row and how social media has become a minefield of abuse, appropriating the national discourse and setting the political and social agenda. Bahuguna touched upon it briefly, suggesting that social media should be "regulated". We can't do better than to quote CNN's Jake Tapper against such

censorship: "No".

However, TV news did not stick to the present. As is its wont increasingly, it took its lead from social media and the news became an April 2016 video by Gurmehar — who had lost her father to an attack by militants in Kashmir — in which she said, amongst many other statements, "Pakistan did not kill my father, war killed him."

Last year, that statement did not evoke even a meow, let alone a cat fight on prime time TV debates. This week, however, it unleashed a furious controversy over "Free Speech v/s Patriotism" (why did TV channels frame it as such?) which used tweets and comments from Virender Sehwal and Randeep Hooda to athletes Deepa Malik and Babita Phogat, amongst many others critical of that particular Gurmehar comment.

There was a passing "Tsk, tsk" at the rape threats to the young student, but the talk turned to nationalism or anti-nationals, although Bahuguna categorically stated that Gurmehar was "absolutely not" anti-national (NDTV 24x7).

If all of this wasn't confused and confounding enough, the politicians waded

in. Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijju tweeted, "Who's polluting this young girl's mind?", and went on to give interviews throughout Tuesday where he spoke of the "leftists" and the "far left" posing a threat to India, bringing up Afzal Guru and terrorism — he even spoke of her father's troubled soul, thereby further muddying the waters.

To their credit, TV news anchors repeatedly reminded politicians and panelists of how a young woman was being hounded. And Gurmehar was the best argument against all criticism: In interviews across channels, she came across as an intelligent, articulate person suddenly "nervous" and scared, someone who was forced to retreat to the safety of her home to avoid becoming a victim of Breaking News. Maybe that's why, by Wednesday, everyone, politicians, ABVP, were at pains to "reclaim" her.

This is how news can be twisted out of context. As happened at the Oscars where Warren Beatty was handed the wrong envelope for Best Picture, the wrong story can become the news of the moment.

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How about that Donald Trump tonight! Home run, I say! And so presidential — on the way out, he didn't grab a single p****!

BILL MAHER Comedian and political commentator; 6.5M TWITTER followers



PAPER CLIP

FLAGGING INTERESTING RESEARCH

MEDICINE PREGNANCY

Published in Human Reproduction,

AUTHORS: Rajeshwari Sundaram, Sunni Mumford and Germaine Louis

Obese couples may take longer to conceive

COUPLES WHO are obese may take longer to achieve pregnancy than partners who aren't as overweight, a recent US study suggests.

In the current study, neither male nor female obesity alone was linked to taking a longer time to conceive, but when both partners were obese, the couple took up to 59 per cent longer to conceive than non-obese counterparts. "If our results are confirmed, fertility specialists may want to take couples' weight status into account when counselling them about achieving pregnancy," said lead study author Rajeshwari Sundaram of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Bethesda, Maryland.

The researchers focused on the relationship between pregnancy and body mass index (BMI), a ratio of weight to height. A BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered a healthy weight, while 25 to 29.9 is overweight, 30 or above is obese and 40 or higher is termed as morbidly obese.

Researchers categorised individuals into two subgroups: obese class I, with a BMI from 30 to 34.9, and obese class II, with a BMI of 35 or greater.

Then the researchers compared the average time to conceive for couples where neither partner was obese to couples where both fell into the obese class II group.

After accounting for other factors that influence fertility such as age, smoking status, exercise and cholesterol levels, obese class II couples took 59 per cent longer to get pregnant.

About 40 per cent of the men and 47 per cent of the women also had enough excess fat around the midsection to potentially influence fertility. In addition, 60 per cent of the women and 58 per cent of the men said they exercised no more than once a week, the researchers report.

Beyond its small size, another limitation of the study is that it wasn't a controlled experiment designed to determine whether obesity directly causes infertility, the authors note. It also focused on couples in the general population, not people undergoing treatment for infertility, so the results might not reflect what would happen for all couples trying to conceive, the researchers point out. REUTERS

Pakistan's Terror-Finance Time-Bomb

Islamabad is now feeling the heat from the global Financial Action Task Force — but this isn't the end of the Lashkar-e-Toiba story



BEYOND THE NEWS

BY PRAVEEN SWAMI

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

DAYS AFTER 26/11, with the threat of an India-Pakistan war just beginning to recede from the minds of policy-makers, United States diplomat Bryan Hunt met Pakistani Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif for a leisurely breakfast to discuss the next steps in the war against terror.

Key terror commander Hafiz Muhammad Saeed had been arrested on December 12; the next morning, the portly politician told Hunt that "he intended to completely shut down the Jama'at-ud-Dawa." The diplomat was impressed: "The unwavering attitude displayed by Shahbaz Sharif in shutting down the Jama'at-ud-Dawa bodes well for the crackdown," he reported in a classified cable to the State Department.

Less than a year later, in October 2009, Saeed walked out of prison — efforts to keep him in jail, other diplomatic cables record, sabotaged in no small part by Sharif and his brother, now Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The terror commander soon became a key figure in Pakistan's Islamist politics. He sought to create a loyal constituency among the religious right for the army, then besieged by jihadists determined to overthrow the state.

Now, Saeed is back in detention again — because no less than Khawaja Asif, Pakistan's Defence Minister, said at a conference in Germany last month, that he could "pose a serious threat to society". No one knows what that threat is, though, because no criminal charges have been brought. There has been no explanation, either, of why Pakistan is holding Saeed, other than that it is in national interest.

It probably isn't a coincidence, though, that the action against Saeed came on the eve of a meeting, last month, of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) — a multi-nation body made up of 36 members from developed countries, and eight regional bodies

which mirror its work.

The FATF's Paris plenary meeting, held from February 19-24, is believed to have given Pakistan another 90 days to act against the finances of terrorist groups like the Jama'at-ud-Dawa. Failing to do so could, potentially, lead to the country being placed on a black list that could raise the costs of interacting with the global financial system: trade, remittances, loans, bilateral and multilateral aid.

Two years ago, the country had bought time to avoid this outcome. In a February 2015 statement, the FATF said it had removed Pakistan from a list of nations which were subject to ongoing monitoring, saying the country had "established the legal and regulatory framework to meet commitments in its action plan regarding the strategic deficiencies that the FATF had identified in June 2010".

The FATF statement, however, noted that Pakistan was obliged to continue working with its Asia-Pacific Group, "as it continues to address the full range of AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/ Countering Financing of Terrorism) issues identified in its mutual evaluation report, in particular, fully implementing UNSC Resolution 1267."

But in 2015-16, diplomatic sources say, Pakistan conspicuously failed to comply with its commitment to implement Resolution 1267, which obliges countries to freeze all financial assets that could aid listed entities.

Earlier this year, an Indian Express investigation showed that the Jama'at-ud-Dawa's charitable arm, the Falah-i-Insaniat foundation, was raising funds for the organisation through proxy bank accounts, which it openly advertised through Facebook — with no action from Pakistani police authorities.

The issue in fact dates back to 2011, when Pakistan almost ended up in serious trouble with the FATF because of its failure to enact appropriate anti-money laundering and terror financing legislation. Though there was substantial resistance to action against the Jama'at-ud-Dawa, Pakistan's financial establishment made clear that the opposition would come at a considerable cost.

Following protracted wrangles, Pakistan's National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA) released a list of banned organisations in December 2014. The Jama'at-ud-Dawa was listed as having been "under observation" since 2007, while the Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation was not mentioned.

Then, following a demand from former US secretary of state John Kerry, an amended list



Protests condemning the recent series of deadly suicide bombings, in Karachi, Pakistan. AP file

of banned organisations was released, which showed the Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation and Jama'at-ud-Dawa as having been proscribed — not placed under watch — in March, 2012, and December, 2008, respectively.

But the list disappeared, along with NACTA's entire website. A series of contradictory statements followed, with Pakistan's then defence minister insisting there was no reason to ban the Jama'at-ud-Dawa, while the Foreign Office insisting that it indeed had been banned. Saeed himself put the issue to rest days later, leading a rally in Karachi.

Now, NACTA's latest list says the Lashkar-e-Toiba has been banned since 2002, but the Jama'at-ud-Dawa and Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation are listed as having been placed on a watch-list only in January this year. There is no mention of the earlier listings, nor reference to any legal proceedings that might have followed from them.

What might Pakistan hope to achieve

through what is, after all, a not particularly cunning charade? The answer might well be: time. For all its effusive talk on China, Pakistan still remains critically dependent on Western economies.

Pakistan's biggest export destinations are, in descending order, the United States (\$3.6 billion), China (\$2.8 billion), Afghanistan (\$2.2 billion), Germany (\$1.7 billion) and the United Kingdom (\$1.7 billion). The United States is planning to triple aid to Pakistan this financial to \$900 million, but half of that will be contingent on military action against its jihadist proxies, the Haqqani Network; \$300 million promised last year was not disbursed since the action never materialised.

Even though the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor promises a staggering \$51 billion, much of that is to come from private corporations, and may thus never materialise; it is, moreover, long-term funding, which is no substitute for badly-needed

short term aid.

Put simply, Pakistan needs to stay on the right side of the United States — and with President Donald Trump in office, may well fear that the long leash it enjoyed might finally have run out. Seeking an exit from Afghanistan, Islamabad fears, Trump might just be willing to ratchet up the pain on Pakistan to levels past administrations were unwilling to countenance for fear of losing influence with the nuclear-armed state.

This is good news for India: fear of Western sanctions will compel Pakistan to restrain its jihadist proxies and that will give New Delhi some breathing space along the Line of Control and in Kashmir. This breathing space will not, however, be infinite. The Lashkar-e-Toiba's rebirth after 26/11 is, after all, a cautionary tale: the men who bred this dragon have shown themselves to be skilled in the art of raising its spawn from the ashes, again and again.

A new travel ban is in the offing. Will it pass legal muster?

THE TRUMP ORDER

A window into a changing United States

President Donald Trump's travel ban has been frozen by the courts, but the White House has promised a new executive order that officials say will address concerns raised by judges that have put the policy on hold. The first order was met by legal challenges, confusion at airports and mass protests. The White House has forecast smoother sailing the second time around. But no matter what the new policy says, lawsuits challenging its aims are expected.

When is the order coming? The White House says it expects to issue a new order this week. Trump aide Stephen Miller said last week that the new order would be

very similar to the first, with "mostly minor technical differences." The Justice Department has said the Trump administration would be abandoning the original order, which should render moot ongoing court challenges to that order. The new order could go into effect immediately and would not be blocked by the court ruling that has kept the existing order on hold, said David Levine, a professor at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. Levine said new regulations and laws are assumed to be legal until a court says otherwise.

Can we expect legal challenges to the new order?

Yes. But four officials told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the new order will remove Iraq from the list of countries facing a temporary US travel ban. They said it would also no longer single out Syrian refugees for an indefinite ban and instead include them in a general, 120-day suspension of new refugee admissions. The officials spoke on condition of



The earlier ban led to protests across US

anonymity. There are likely to be various, other technical changes to try to head off any attempt by Washington state and Minnesota, the two states whose lawsuit led to a court order that halted the order, from moving

quickly for a court order putting any new ban on hold. The new order maintains the ban for the other six countries — Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan and Yemen.

Will the new travel ban pass constitutional muster?

That is hard to say. The 9th Circuit decision, for instance, said the first order may have violated the constitutional rights of green-card holders to a notice and a hearing before their travel was restricted. Any new policy may have to address that concern. The Justice Department has argued that a ban that exempts green-card holders and focuses only on foreigners from the seven nations who have never entered the US would be entirely legal. But the court said Washington state and Minnesota might have a valid claim that even some of those foreigners have a constitutional right to challenge the ban.

To beat the religious discrimination argument, the government may also have to overcome statements outside of court by

Trump and aides, including former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Challengers of the ban have held those statements up as evidence of discriminatory intent. The statements include Giuliani's claim that Trump had asked him how to legally pull off a "Muslim ban," and Trump's own interview statements that Christian refugees had been disadvantaged.

The 9th Circuit did not fully address the issue, but did note that courts assessing the motive of a government action can take into account statements by decision-makers.

What might happen to the existing challenges?

If the original executive order is formally rescinded and replaced, then lawsuits challenging it would be effectively nullified as the focus turns to the new policy, legal experts say. Even so, arguments made by lawyers for Washington state and Minnesota that appeared to sway the 9th Circuit could easily be recycled in another or amended legal challenge. AP

Shoot-at-sight is not unjustified. But that alone can't stop poaching

The BBC documentary on Kaziranga and the action against a Corbett official, who issued a shoot-at-sight order, show there are no easy ways to combat poaching



IN FACT

BY JAY MAZOOMDAAR

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

EVEN AS the controversy over a BBC film on alleged excesses in Kaziranga — documenting what it says are the "dark secrets" of forest guards who "shoot and kill" humans inside the park — continues, the acting director of Corbett, who reportedly issued a shoot-at-sight order while launching an anti-poaching drive last week, has been relieved of the additional charge of the tiger reserve.

The freedom given to forest guards to use lethal force to stop poaching in India's prime tiger reserves — they have "legal immunity" in Kaziranga and Corbett — has triggered a raucous debate between conservationists and human rights activists.

On the ground, however, such a strategy is neither "unwarranted" nor "successful". And therein lies the rub.

First things first. shoot-at-sight does not mean forest guards can gun down anyone

they spot inside the forest. It means that they are empowered to open fire if they cannot satisfactorily establish the identity or purpose of an intruder. A protection force is in any case entitled to retaliate if attacked. The distinction here is that the guards are allowed to shoot as a pre-emptive move before they are shot at.

Often, that power is the difference between life and death for guards in Kaziranga where poachers are known to carry Kalashnikov assault rifles. Forest guards with their usual .303s have a slim chance without a first-mover advantage. The resulting edginess has led to cases of unarmed villagers having been shot inside the park. But politically incorrect as it may sound, some collateral damage is inevitable in a war zone.

Kaziranga is very much a war zone, particularly after sundown, with gun-toting men on either side. Unlike many other protected forests, it has no village inside and, therefore, there is no question of villagers entering or leaving the park in an emergency, or entertaining guests at unusual hours. That makes anyone who is spotted a suspect.

In Africa, where organised gangs mowed down elephants and rhinos in thousands, a similar strong-arm response was felt necessary. Allowed to open fire if threatened with lethal force, rangers in South Africa's Kruger National Park reportedly killed nearly 500 poachers from neighbouring Mozambique between 2010 and 2015.

In 2013, after it had lost more than 1,000 rangers to poachers over a decade, Tanzania



Confiscated ivory being burnt. Reuters file

launched Operation Terminate to protect Serengeti National Park.

While there is no denying that firepower is required to take on heavily-armed poachers — many of whom are ex-soldiers in Africa and ex-militants in Assam — to what extent does this strategy help conservation? And how responsibly do forest authorities use such powers?

To answer the second question first, the records are not redeeming. Tanzania suspended Operation Terminate within months after complaints of harassment, torture and killings. An inquiry revealed that 13 civilians had been executed and more than 1,000, in-

cluding pastoralists, arrested. A minister who had called for illegal ivory trade operators to be executed on the spot, was sacked.

In Kaziranga, too, there have been allegations that guards settled personal scores in the name of anti-poaching operations, and even colluded with the very poaching syndicates they were supposed to be fighting. The park authorities were accused of harassing local villagers while shielding political bigwigs whose names had allegedly surfaced during investigations into poaching.

Even if these are considered avoidable pitfalls of an otherwise essential strategy, the guns have at best worked as a limited and

temporary deterrent to poaching. Even after hundreds of poachers were killed in Kruger after 2010, for example, 557 instances of rhino poaching were reported during January-August 2015, and 458 in 2016.

In Kaziranga, forest guards shot dead 45 poachers over 2014 and 2015, and at least 44 rhinos were poached in the park during the same period. On average then, the annual loss on each side was of roughly 22 lives. In 2016, not more than 5 poachers were killed, while at least 17 rhinos were poached. Gunning down poachers over several decades has not stopped or significantly reduced rhino poaching.

Guns, though necessary in an emergency, cannot win conservation battles on their own. Reliance on guns tends to shift focus from intelligence-based anti-poaching drives. Worse, used injudiciously, guns alienate local stakeholders whose support is crucial for any conservation effort to succeed in the long term.

The predominant conservation model the world over still remains exclusionary. It has virtually no incentives for the local community to partner and support such measures. Instead, disempowered, persecuted and impoverished locals become easy recruits for poaching syndicates.

Admittedly, sharing the economic benefits of conservation with local communities will not immediately sever the lifelines of poaching syndicates. As the population living around India's forests increases relentlessly, a family's share in the financial benefits

shared with the community — even if it is reasonably generous — is likely to be no match for the income from a single poaching assignment.

Yet, that policy shift is necessary. More than giving forest dwellers a financial stake in conservation, it is about recognising their rights and dignity. Over time, the collective stake of these communities can grow to work as an effective deterrent. There will, of course, always be a few black sheep who will remain interested in making a quick buck. But that is why the forest department will also always have those guns.

Postscript, on Corbett

First, only a magistrate, and no forest official, can issue a shoot-at-sight order. In 2001, the Uttarakhand government had ordered that no criminal case would be filed against forest staff, pending a magisterial inquiry, for shooting someone while discharging their duty. It has been in force since.

Second, the area has a high population of tigers, and no poacher is likely to venture inside Corbett when it is easier to target the cats along the reserve's boundaries and in peripheral forests, particularly to the south and east of the reserve. No poacher was spotted during the latest anti-poaching drive.

Third, even if they enter Corbett, poachers in this part of the country are not known to carry sophisticated arms. In fact, not a single firearm has been seized inside Corbett in a decade.