



## Saving the Ghats

There is a need to determine how much of the Western Ghats is ecologically sensitive

The hesitation shown by the Central government in deciding upon full legal protection for one of its most prized natural assets, the Western Ghats in their totality, is a major disappointment. The idea that whatever is left of these fragile mountainous forests should be protected from unsustainable exploitation in the interests of present and future generations, while presenting sustainable ways of living to the communities that inhabit these landscapes, is being lost sight of. Quite unscientifically, the issue is being framed as one of development-versus-conservation. Given the weak effort at forging a consensus, there is little purpose in the Centre returning to the drawing board with another draft notification to identify ecologically sensitive areas. What it needs is a framework under which scientific evidence and public concerns are debated democratically and the baseline for ESAs arrived at. It is accepted, for instance, that the Ghats play an irreplaceable role in mediating the monsoon over the country and the forests harbour a rich biodiversity that has not even been fully studied. New species continue to emerge each year in an area that has endemic plants and animals, although, as the scientist Norman Myers wrote nearly two decades ago, only 6.8% of primary vegetation out of the original 182,500 sq km remains in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka taken together. The ecologically sensitive nature of the forests stretching 1,600 km along the western coast as a global biodiversity hotspot was emphasised by the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel headed by Madhav Gadgil, while for conservation purposes, the Kasturirangan Committee identified only a third of the total area. Both expert groups have encountered resistance from State governments and industries, although they mutually differ in their recommendations.

The question that needs speedy resolution is how much of the Western Ghats can be demarcated as ecologically sensitive, going beyond the system of national parks and sanctuaries that already exist. As a corollary, are other areas free to be exploited for industrial activity, including mining and deforestation, with no environmental consequences? A frequently cited example of destruction is the loss of ecology in Goa due to rampant, illegal mining. More complicated is the assessment of ecosystem services delivered by the forests, lakes, rivers and their biodiversity to communities. Mr. Gadgil, for instance, has underscored the unique value of some locations, such as those with fish or medicinal plant diversity peculiar to a small area, which should not get lost in the assessment process. All this points to the need for wider and more open consultation with people at all levels, imbuing the process with scientific insights. The sooner this is done the better. Several options to spare sensitive areas will emerge, such as community-led ecological tourism and agro-ecological farming. A national consultative process is urgently called for.

## Elusive reconciliation

Colombo must do much more to address the concerns of the Tamil minority

A United Nations report released last week on the progress of reconciliation efforts by the Sri Lankan government should be a wake-up call for President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Raising serious concerns about the delay in addressing allegations of war crimes and in meeting other promises Colombo made when it co-sponsored a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council in 2015, the report warns the government that the lack of accountability threatens the momentum towards lasting peace. It also alleges that cases of excessive use of force, torture and arbitrary arrests still continue in Sri Lanka, almost eight years after the country's brutal civil war ended. Mr. Sirisena came to power on a promise that he would restore the rule of law, end the country's international isolation and take steps towards reconciliation with the Tamil ethnic minority. The political momentum was also in favour of the government as it had the support of the dominant sections of the two largest parties in the country. In 2015, when Sri Lanka agreed to a host of measures at the UNHRC, including a judicial process to look into the war crimes, hopes were high.

Undeniably, the government has made some slow progress in addressing the issue of reconciliation. Compared to the previous regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Sirisena administration has reached out to Tamils and initiated constitutional and legal reforms. It has also passed enabling legislation to establish an Office of Missing Persons to help find some of the 65,000 people reported missing during the war. But on key issues such as establishing a hybrid judicial mechanism with domestic and foreign judges and returning the military-occupied lands to Tamil civilians in the north and east, there has been no tangible progress. The latest UN report comes at a time when over a hundred displaced Tamil families are protesting at administrative offices in the north and east asking for their lands to be returned. For its part, the government may be wary of taking quick decisions for fear of giving some leeway to Sinhala nationalist factions at a time when Mr. Rajapaksa is trying to revive his political fortunes. But this delay is alienating the government's allies, eroding the faith of the public, especially war victims, and giving more time to the opposition to regroup itself. And issues such as continuing use of excessive force and arbitrary arrests suggest that the government is either not serious in changing the way the police system works or is incapable of doing so. The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government should seize the moment and start addressing the core issues, keeping reconciliation and the future of Sri Lanka in mind.

# No time for complacency

India's economy is defying the pessimists, and the time is ripe to deepen structural reforms



N.K. SINGH

The Indian economy continues to outperform the prognosis of its critics. This is clearly true of the GDP growth estimates in the third quarter; quite at variance with what the critics of the demonetisation exercise had assumed. No doubt there could be correction in the fourth quarter, primarily to factor the impact of the informal sector. It has never been easy to capture real time data on economic activity in the informal sector. It is recognised that apart from leads and lags, the conclusions are derivative using surrogates which detract both from their timeliness and accuracy. This is not a new problem and past estimates of GDP numbers have also suffered from multiple ex-post corrections as and when data becomes unavailable.

### Digitisation dividend

Hopefully, moving towards greater digitisation and reducing dependence on cash transactions will accelerate the pace of financial inclusion and formalisation of the informal economy. Notwithstanding these, the dark prognosis of a collapse of GDP growth numbers, widespread unemployment and displacement of job workers coupled with rural distress now looks clearly misaligned with actual outcomes. The GDP estimates are supported by two other crucial independent international assessments last week. The first from the Article IV Consultations 2017 of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the second from the biennial Economic Survey of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Both these have distinct commonalities. Both conclude that Indian economic growth is robust, propelled by consumption demand and accelerated structural reforms. Both favourably allude to a rule-based framework of aligning

macroeconomic policies with global standards.

The overall macroeconomic framework, notwithstanding challenges, remains robust and credible. Continued fiscal consolidation, a modest current account deficit, subdued inflation, enhanced public and private consumption somewhat offsetting the depressed private investment support this conclusion. These augur well for continued growth buoyancy. The downside risks of exogenous shocks from sharp increases in commodity prices, particularly oil, a sudden global slowdown impacting remittances and exports or unpredictability relating to the Chinese economy now look modest. The growth projection of 7.5% (the higher side of the 6.75-7.5% range forecasted in this year's Economic Survey) for the next fiscal is however contingent on resolving several short-term challenges.

### Macro policies

First, the OECD's survey raises concerns about India's large interest payments due to the high levels of public debt as compared to other emerging economies. This is in consonance with the suggestions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Review Committee chaired by me, which projects a declining debt-to-GDP ratio to approximately 60% by 2023. Analysts believe this may be our near optimum debt levels. While the Committee's report is not yet in the public domain, there

is broad consensus that the preferred trajectory of debt with enabling fiscal deficit targets is central to macroeconomic stability. India has come a long way in discouraging fiscal profligacy. The realisation that we are best served by improving the quality of public expenditure than enhancing budgetary outlays reflects responsible leadership. It is increasingly cognisant of the inherent vulnerabilities of a fragile economy like ours. No doubt fiscal rectitude must be combined with space to enhance public outlays, particularly in infrastructure, health and education.

Second, the health of the banking and financial sector. The twin balance sheet problem of both corporates and banks, highlighted in the Economic Survey, has a relationship but would need differentiated actions. Easing one will no doubt ameliorate the other but policy frameworks are not necessarily symmetrical. The concept of a centralised Public Sector Asset Rehabilitation Agency (PARA) envisaged as a 'Band Bank' spin-off model has gained some traction. It would, however, be naïve to believe that this represents a systemic solution to the ailments of the banking sector. The classic issues of not confusing between the stock and the flow would need to be addressed. Besides, it is not easy to overlook moral hazard questions when it comes to taking an 'appropriate haircut' by all stakeholders and without assigning responsibility for the ills of the past.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

# The end of a voyage

Aircraft carrier INS Viraat will fade into history today, marking the close of an era



SRIKANT KESNUR

It was the summer of 1986 when the Indian Navy was abuzz with excitement, waiting for the arrival of INS Viraat, India's second aircraft carrier, which would radically alter the Navy's operational paradigms. It was also a time when we, as navy men, had just been commissioned. The 1980s had seen the induction of several new classes of ships. In fact, the entire inventory had undergone a sea change then with the most important of these acquisitions being the mighty Virat. We secretly nursed the ambition of driving the jumbo-sized 'Grey Ferrari' and launching her mean flying machines. A year later, I was appointed on the missile destroyer, INS Ranvir, based at Mumbai. Time flew and I soon found myself in the midst of a huge crowd that had gathered on the South breakwater

in August 1987 as Viraat drew in majestically. I shared the sense of awe everyone expressed and could sense the sheer might that she exuded.

### The carrier environment

Watch-keeping on Ranvir was a great learning curve which was made steeper by the presence of the carrier in the fleet. As any navy man will tell you, fleet operations acquire a different and distinct hue when an aircraft carrier is around. It was our great fortune that our formative years were spent in such a tough environment. Be it anti-submarine warfare or flying ops, underway replenishment or missile defence, an aircraft carrier brings in a unique set of dynamics and makes life on the bridge and operations room that much more exciting and busy not only on the "Flattop" itself but on all the combatants in her company. In a sense, we cut our teeth in the best learning environment possible.

This was also true of our time in the harbour when the carrier generated a great deal of hustle and bustle. Being in the same fleet



meant that one visited Viraat often and each time I left the ship I came away with the feeling of admiration at the way things seemed to work with clockwork precision. The crew always seemed to have an air about them and were usually the winners in most of the intra-fleet competitions, be it on the sports field or in academic endeavours. My duties over the next few years continued on other ships in the Western Fleet, and in the vicinity of the "Flattop". She continued to be the toast of the Navy and my desire to serve on her remained undiminished. Finally, in 2003, I was appointed the fleet communications officer reporting to the Western Fleet Commander. The carrier was the first choice as the flagship because of operational and administrative advantages. We spent many days on the carrier and she soon became a second home. With a better understanding of fleet operations and tactics, I was able to appreciate what working on the aircraft carrier was like. I spent many an hour trying to walk on her deck or watching her aircraft, the Sea Harriers, take off or land. I could now claim some kinship with Viraat though I was still not a fully paid up member.

Reassuring presence  
Time passed and I moved to other ships. And the aircraft carrier sailed on. But all good things have to come to an end. The news of her decommissioning has filled me with sorrow. She has been the centrepiece of the Indian Navy over 30 years, her life mirroring ours. Viraat and ships of that generation ushered in a huge change in our fleet operations and in the way we thought of tactics or imagined combat. For three dec-

nately, this government has the mindset to move away from micro-managing the economy.

### The GST transformation

Finally, for a change, balanced regional development and combining growth with employment has received extensive attention in both these reports. No doubt, the GST (Goods and Services Tax) regime and decisive move towards formalisation of the economy using technology would reduce disparities.

Local government entities need greater empowerment. These go beyond the enhanced devolution of resources based on the recommendation of the Thirteenth Finance Commission, more importantly of the Fourteenth Finance Commission. Making grants available in two parts – a basic grant and performance grant – will make a difference. Enabling local bodies to impose and realise property taxes and other levies would strengthen their financial viability. In fact, the Fifteenth Finance Commission, yet to be constituted, while reviewing the implementation of past recommendations can consider incentivising States on empowerment and delegation of powers to local bodies. Seeking to replicate best governance practices in labour and product markets among the States could also prove beneficial in mitigating inter-State growth divergence. There are other recommendations in the IMF and OECD reports relating to education, health, and tax changes, to name a few, which deserve separate treatment.

It would be dangerous if the decision-making ethos is stymied by growing complacency. The future may look bright but pursuing and deepening structural reforms is the way forward. The political leadership is sagacious in recognising this. After all, as Albert Einstein once said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

N.K. Singh is a former Member of Parliament and Chairman, FRBM Committee. The views expressed are personal

ades, she showcased India's blue water capability across the seas. When the security environment in the neighbourhood was fraught with uncertainty, her presence was deeply reassuring as she protected and projected India's maritime interests in the neighbourhood and beyond.

Twenty years ago, on January 31, 1997, when another iconic ship in India's naval history, INS Vikrant, and India's first aircraft carrier, was decommissioned, I saw many navy men of that era who had been associated with her with hardly a dry eye. The thought of it being the turn of Viraat now induces the same feeling in our generation of officers and sailors. We may not wear our hearts on our sleeves but to recollect the lyrics of the famous Manna Dey song, Viraat has been both our "Aar-zoo" and "Aabrooh". When the naval ensign is lowered for one last time on her today, March 6, 2017, she will slowly fade away and mark the end of an era. But she will live forever in our memories.

Commandore Srikanth Kesnur is a serving Naval Officer

## 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.

### Climate of hate

Close on the heels of the brutal slaying of an Indian software engineer in Kansas – which had all the markings of a hate crime – comes the report of the killing of a young businessman in South Carolina. Though the racism angle has been played down, one is inclined to take the assertion with a pinch of salt ("Indian store owner shot dead outside home in U.S.", March 5). Considering the fact that there have been a spate of incidents in the recent past, the claims of the government that it has been taking steps towards their prevention rings hollow as the Trump regime seems bent upon creating an atmosphere of insecurity for all immigrants. The Indian Embassy in tandem with the Ministry of External Affairs should liaise with the authorities in the different states in the

U.S. and ensure that adequate protection is given to all Indians. Most of them have legal rights to pursue their vocations and can by no means be bracketed with illegal immigrants or refugees.  
C.V. ARAVIND,  
Bengaluru

### Here comes the bride

I firmly believe that it is people's power that will change the destiny of this country and revive its past glory ("Village of bachelors carves out a road to welcome its first bride", March 5). More than smart cities and smart villages, India needs smart people. Instead of waiting for the government to solve problems, people should form groups and work towards their betterment. Other backward villages which have been neglected by the government should come forward and emulate the example. NGOs should

also support such initiatives.  
VEENA SHENOY,  
Thane, Maharashtra

### Neduvassal stir

Before branding any project as harmful it is necessary to dispassionately make a detailed, objective and unbiased analysis of its merits and demerits ("Talks fail, Neduvassal stir to continue", March 5). Hydrocarbon exploration is a high risk investment and risk assessment is all the more important for successful project portfolio management. Since the Petroleum Ministry has clarified that state-of-the-art technology is being used, all aspects to safeguard the environment are sure to be taken care of. The issue can be subject to public debate. There can also be consultations with experts on the subject. People of the area should be taken into confidence. Let

us avoid sensationalising or politicising the issue. Had we stopped the operationalisation of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in deference to the opposition and mass protests some time ago, we would have lost a great source of power generation which now helps the country and the State. Tamil Nadu has attained near self-sufficiency in power generation now.  
RAGHAVAN SAMPATH,  
Chennai

■ The extraction of oil, methane, lignite, shale gas and other natural reserves cannot be at the cost of the cultivation of paddy, banana, coconut and other crops. To say that farmers must be "patriotic enough" to make sacrifices in the larger interest of the nation is to allow and legitimise depredation to the benefit of plutocrats. The interest of farmers living with nature in

the vast expanses of the Cauvery delta must come first. No task is more important than protecting our land, our air and our water from greed and gratification for ourselves and posterity.  
G. DAVID MILTON,  
Maruthancode, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu

### Aadhaar insistence

The Railway Ministry's move towards an Aadhaar-based online ticketing system is unjustified and arbitrary ("Rlys. to make Aadhaar mandatory", March 6). It is strange that the government should resort to such draconian measures in utter defiance of the Supreme Court's ruling that Aadhaar should not be made mandatory. Even in the case of concessions to senior citizens proceeding on a rail journey, the existing condition of producing photo identification is fair enough. An insistence of

Aadhaar is nothing but a coercive method of bringing the entire population under the Aadhaar net.  
K. NATARAJAN,  
Madurai

### World Birth Defects Day

It is unfortunate that not much attention was paid to the observance of World Birth Defects Day (March 3). Birth defects, or congenital anomalies, constitute an abnormality of body structure or function present since birth. There are an estimated 4,000 or more types of such defects. Whenever any defect/anomaly is detected in scans during pregnancy, comprehensive prenatal counselling must be undertaken. Most anomalies can be corrected with very good results.  
DR. VENKATA SUBBARAO GURRAM,  
Hyderabad

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# Indiscriminate discrimination

The tools of prejudice, once unleashed, do not differentiate one community from another

SANDEEP BHARDWAJ

U.S. President Donald Trump, in his address to Congress, may have denounced the killing of Indian engineer Srinivas Kuchibhotla in Kansas, but it is hard to ignore that his own polarising presidential campaign has directly led to the current intolerant climate in the U.S.

On the surface, this killing may seem like a case of mistaken identity. In a misguided stab at self-preservation, some NGOs have recommended to the Hindu community in the U.S. that they should appear more “assimilated” or highlight their identity. But doing so would be to ignore a crucial lesson from this tragedy: the tools of prejudice, once unleashed, can be indiscriminating in choosing their targets.

## Historical persecution

The first Indian migrants to reach the U.S. understood this lesson well. Arriving in the beginning of the 20th century, they faced severe persecution and bigotry. For decades before their arrival, American society had been perfecting the mechanisms of oppression against various communities: the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, African-Americans and Native Americans. Now these tools could be turned against the Indians.

The first wave of Indian migrants to the U.S. was a few thousand in number, consisting mostly of unskilled farmers from Punjab and former soldiers of the British empire. Making their way via Canada, these migrants first arrived in Washington where they found work in the lumber industry. Just months after their arrival, they became the target of resentment from white workers who were afraid of cheap Asian labour. On September 5, 1907, a mob of several hundred white people rounded up about 700 Indian workers and forced them to leave the town of Bellingham. Two months later, 500 Indian workers were similarly driven out of the town of Everett. Indian workers in Tacoma were attacked by another mob, although in this case they managed to fight back.

The total number of Indians in Washington could not have been more than 2,000, which was hardly an economic challenge to the state’s population of over one million at the time. Yet the xenophobic mob was quick to act and could do so with impunity because it was an established practice in the state for over two decades. It had begun in 1885, when 500



Driven out: “The first wave of Indian migrants to the U.S. became the target of resentment from white workers.” The Bellingham Herald dated 1907 reports the persecution of Indians in Bellingham, Washington. SOURCE: PAUL ENGBLESER

Chinese workers were similarly driven out of Tacoma.

Marginalisation of Indians was widespread. They were not allowed into local unions or churches. In many towns, local real estate agents refused to sell them property. Collectively referred to as Hindus – although most early migrants were Sikh – they were mocked by the media. Several local politicians and officials openly endorsed violence against them to keep “the East Indian on the move”. Immigrants from other parts of Asia had been facing such persecution for many years; Indians were just added victims.

By the turn of the decade, most Indians had been driven out of Washington. Along with new immigrants, they made their way to California, where the Indian population reached close to 3,000. However, here too, the forces of racism greeted them. A pre-existing ‘Japanese and Korean Exclusion League’ was quickly renamed as the ‘Asiatic Exclusion League’ and its members trained their guns on Indian immigrants. “Wholesale landings of large number of Hindoos” was widely decried.

## Racial theories

At first, Indians proved to be a challenge to the half-baked racist ideologies prevalent at the time. South Asians were believed to be of “Aryan

descent”, the same as Europeans. But this obstacle was quickly overcome. Racist propaganda admitted that the Americans were distant cousins of northwestern Indians. However, “our forefathers pressed to the West, in the everlasting march of conquest, progress and civilisation. The forefathers of Hindus went east and became enslaved, effeminate, caste-ridden and degraded,” one exclusionist leader wrote. Partly due to such propaganda, by 1917, immigration from India and other Asian countries was practically barred.

These absurd racial theories reached their crescendo over the struggle for naturalised citizenship. In 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that “white persons” eligible for American citizenship had to be of the Caucasian race. The decision was aimed at excluding the Japanese. Indians, hoping to circumvent the ruling, made the case that “high-caste Hindu, of full Indian blood” were, in fact, Caucasian. In 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* that intermarriages between Aryan invaders and “dark-skinned Dravidians” over the centuries had destroyed the purity of Aryan blood in India. Hence, Indians could not be considered as “free white persons” and given American citizenship. In 1926, the Indian central legislature banned Indian citizen-

ship to American citizens in response. However, it was little more than a symbolic gesture.

Over the next decade, the U.S. government used the Supreme Court ruling to strip citizenship of many Indians who had been naturalised. The ruling was reversed only in 1946, allowing a hundred Indians to immigrate to the U.S. every year. But it was not until 1965, when American immigration laws were reformed, that the second wave of Indian migration to the U.S. could begin.

## Tools of prejudice

The hostility that early Indian migrants to the U.S. faced was not due to their actions or the history of their country of origin. It was a mechanism already in place, actively oppressing other communities for decades. Given the circumstances, it was almost natural that the hostility would turn on Indians when they reached American soil. It is ironic that discrimination, when choosing its victims, can be highly indiscriminate. In early 20th century U.S., the same forces of oppression that targeted Indians were also persecuting other communities. It is this history that’s in a way, tragically, illuminating today.

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## FROM THE READERS’ EDITOR

# Serendipity and zemblanity

There are reports on official figures and explanations regarding growth, but there is a gap in critiquing big data



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

William Boyd in his 1998 novel, *Armadillo*, created an antonym for serendipity. He called it zemblanity. If serendipity implies pleasant discoveries by chance, zemblanity is “the faculty of making unhappy, unlucky and expected discoveries by design.” The novel revolves around these twin poles of serendipity and zemblanity, bringing out our daily life that oscillates between utopian dreams and a dystopian reality.

Last week, I was torn between serendipity and zemblanity. I was asked to review a book for *Frontline* magazine, *Weapons of Math Destruction*, by Cathy O’Neil. Dr. O’Neil started the Lede Program in Data Journalism at Columbia. Her earlier book, in collaboration with Rachel Schutt, *Doing Data Science*, remains one of the finest textbooks in big number-crunching. However, her latest book explains the inherent problems in big data. She establishes the ironic relationship between the high assumptions behind mathematical models and the inequality they breed. The assumptions are that mathematical models would ensure greater fairness, eliminate bias, and judge by universal rules. But in reality, the book explains how these models become toxic by reinforcing stereotypes, by being opaque and incontestable, even when they are wrong. Reading Dr. O’Neil’s book was a moment of serendipity to learn about the tyranny of numbers.

## India’s growth story

The zemblanity moment happened when the Central Statistics Office (CSO) retained its January estimate for growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016-17 at 7.1%. If these figures were right, it meant that independent economic forecasters had got their estimates about the potential slowdown due to demonetisation completely wrong. This newspaper’s Editorial, “Resilience reaffirmed” (March 2, 2017), reveals the dilemma in accepting these figures at face value. It read: “The Survey had also made a cautionary assertion that recorded GDP growth would ‘understate’ the overall impact of demonetisation as ‘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.’ When dealing with statistics, it is safer to keep all the caveats in mind.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi used these

figures at an election rally at Maharajganj in Uttar Pradesh. “On the one hand are those [critics of note ban] who talk of what people at Harvard say, and on the other is a poor man’s son, who, through his hard work, is trying to improve the economy,” he said. This was indeed a powerful political rhetoric that may well resonate with the people. But does it really address the problems relating to big data collection, its analysis, and the models?

Ever since the government decided to change the base year for GDP calculation from 2004-2005 to 2011-2012 under Prime Minister Modi’s regime, there are more questions than answers about almost all our economic data. We are still not sure about the quantum of notional increase as against the real increase in GDP because of this shift. Second, to have a comparative analysis, we need data that are aligned to a set of rules and categories without introducing a new variable. But this was not available even for the latest Budget figures.



The Budget that was presented on February 1, 2017 removed for the first time the distinction between plan and non-plan categories. The government also merged the Railway Budget with the Union Budget. One has to first actively disaggregate the figures sector-wise and department-wise to compare the figures with earlier estimates and arrive at some meaningful comparisons. In this context, there is no conclusive method to understand the real impact of demonetisation on India’s growth story. According to Pronab Sen, former chief statistician of India, the informal sector in India accounts for about 45% of gross domestic product (GDP) and nearly 80% of employment. If this sector is not taken into account, then the metadata not only remains inadequate but also may be seen as a deliberate move to mislead.

While this newspaper has done an excellent job in reporting the official figures and explanations, there is a gap in interpreting and critiquing big data. With policy decisions becoming a product of mathematical models and data, it is worth creating in-house expertise in this crucial area as the next step in public interest journalism.

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## SINGLE FILE

# Stealing the initiative

The BJP has scored a win with the scrapping of the steel flyover project in Bengaluru

T.M. VEERARAGHAV



Usually, things made of steel are expected to last a long time. But a proposed steel flyover in Bengaluru, commissioned by the Congress government in Karnataka at a cost of ₹1,791 crore, ended up being a political steal for the BJP. The project, to construct a 6.7 km-long six-lane flyover, was proposed in 2010, ironically

when the BJP was in power, to deal with Bengaluru’s notorious traffic situation. It was mentioned in the State budget in 2014, estimated at that time to cost ₹1,130 crore.

However, in September 2016, when the State Cabinet cleared the project, it put the cost at ₹1,791 crore. Resident groups called it “obnoxious” and galvanised to protest against it. They formed an extraordinary human chain along the Airport Road where the flyover was to be constructed, and discussed it on Twitter where it trended as #SteelFlyoverBeda (We don’t want a steel flyover).

Congress leaders dismissed the protests and alleged that it was a motivated campaign by the BJP and a Rajya Sabha MP, Rajeev Chandrashekhar, who is seen to be close to the BJP. Apart from civil society and well-known personalities, the Namma Bengaluru Foundation, which is funded by Mr. Chandrashekhar, played a key role in the protests.

The government, however, was determined. Even serious questions about how the cost of the flyover was calculated, tenders allegedly without due process were awarded, and a stay order by the National Green Tribunal did not deter it.

## Corruption allegations

Things began changing when BJP State president B.S. Yeddyurappa claimed, about a month ago, that he had evidence to prove that large “kickbacks” from awarding contracts for the project were paid to Congress leaders. Initially this was dismissed as a political allegation but later, when Mr. Yeddyurappa said that he would make public the contents of a diary belonging to Congress MLC K. Govindaraj, the issue began to simmer. The Congress, in turn, released a video of a purported conversation between Union Minister Ananth Kumar and Mr. Yeddyurappa, claiming that they were conspiring against the State government.

The contents of the diary were then “leaked” to the media. They suggested that bribes amounting to ₹65 crore were paid to the top leadership, sending the Congress into damage-control mode. The BJP demanded a CBI probe.

The State government, which had until then held a tough stand, was forced to retreat in order to avoid further snowballing of the controversy. This meant that the BJP won politically. Given that there is only a year left for the State Assembly elections, the State government buckled under pressure.

Nothing has changed in Bengaluru’s traffic situation though. After he announced that the project was scrapped, Minister for Bengaluru Development and Town Planning K. J. George was asked if there was an alternative project to ease the traffic. His answer: ask Rajeev Chandrashekhar.



## CONCEPTUAL

# Structures of feeling/ Cultural theory

Raymond Williams developed the concept to describe the emergence of thought formations within a particular historical period, not only as a non-idealist, but also as a non-formal version of a zeitgeist or a world view. Feeling is not defined in contrast to thought, “but thought as felt and feeling as thought”. Williams wanted to go beyond formally held beliefs, the official discourse and received wisdom, to articulate a process whereby meanings and values are continually generated, and positions taken, in actual, lived social experience.

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## SHELF HELP

# Understanding India, the outlier

A quick guide to national and State elections

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

With 29 States and two Union Territories having legislative assemblies, and a growing trend indicating that the State has become the most crucial terrain for political contests in India, elections are more than just a five-yearly affair. This is more the case now as every Assembly election result is seen as a referendum on the performance of the BJP-led government or of the Prime Minister.

Suhas Palshikar, Sanjay Kumar and Sanjay Lodha’s *Electoral Politics in India: The Resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party* has insightful essays that explain the dramatic shift in 2014 that saw the beginning of a long slide for the Congress and the converse for the BJP. Drawing from surveys led by the Lokniti team of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, this volume offers a useful index of what the determinants of voter choice in favour of the BJP were in

2014. Pradeep Chhibber and Rahul Verma write that a vote shift to the right on economic policy, and upper and non-dominant OBC consolidation benefited the BJP in Hindi-speaking areas.

The Lokniti surveys help provide a time series-like data on voter choice, preferences on socio-economic issues, and reasons for voter participation. They even address the puzzle as to why India seems an outlier among other electoral democracies. India is among the few countries where the poorer segments vote in much larger numbers than the well-off. The surveys indicate confidence among voters in elections as they believe that registering an electoral mandate is empowering.

Palshikar, K. C. Suri and Yogendra Yadav’s *Party Competition in Indian States: Electoral Politics in Post-Congress Polity* relies on rich information on political contestation at

the State level and its impact on the regionalised and fragmented national polity since 1989.

That India has successfully imbibed electoral democracy is evident in the near-uniform rise in voter turnout across most State elections over the last decade. A stable operationalisation of regular legislative elections with a great degree of contestation has been a norm too, irrespective of whether or not the States are relatively poor in economic indices. This has belied most Western political scientists’ research studies which aver that democracy tends to consolidate further only in countries that have strong economic indices. *Democracy and Development* (Adam Przeworski et al.) is an example of a quantitative analysis of elections across countries. This should lead researchers to go beyond such methods to study the resilience of electoral democracy in countries like India.

## FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 6, 1967

# Rajasthan Opposition leaders held

The Rajasthan United Front opposition leaders took out a mammoth black flag procession to-day [March 5, Jaipur] to protest against the Governor’s decision to call the Congress to form the Government in the State. Five opposition leaders were taken into custody, besides others numbering more than a hundred, for defying the order under Section 144 Cr. P.C. in force in certain parts of the city... Raising anti-Congress and anti-Governor slogans and shouting “save democracy”, the procession started this morning from the heart of the pink city and proceeded towards the Governor’s residence.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 6, 1917

# Jubbulpore bribery case: D.T.S. convicted

At the Allahabad High Court to-day [March 6, Allahabad], Mr. Justice Tudball and Mr. Justice Rafique delivered judgment in the case against J.H. Frere, lately District Traffic Superintendent G.I.P. Railway, Jubbulpore, and his cook, in connection with alleged taking of bribes from his subordinates. Their Lordships dealt with the evidence in full and found both accused guilty, remarking, when dealing with his financial position, accused Frere made no attempt to explain how he spent so much money without drawing on his account, and holding that in spite of discrepancies, the evidence was in the main true against the accused and that Frere had taken bribes through the medium of his cook.

## DATA POINT

# Making America hate again

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s statistics on hate crimes in the U.S. showed a drop in incidents from 2010 but an uptick in 2015.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has tabulated 1,372 hate crimes between November 9, 2016 (the day after the U.S. presidential elections) and February 7, 2017, indicating a sharp increase since Donald Trump’s victory.

