



Growth, with caveats

The Centre must pay heed to RBI Governor Urjit Patel's plainspeak

The central bank was not expected to tinker with key policy rates in its first monetary policy review of 2017-18 unveiled on Thursday, following its decision to shift from an accommodative to a neutral monetary policy stance in February. The Monetary Policy Committee chaired by Reserve Bank of India Governor Urjit Patel has, in fact, decided to raise the rate at which the central bank borrows funds from banks (the reverse repo rate) by 25 basis points, from 5.75% to 6%, while leaving other policy rates untouched. This marginal change is aimed at sucking out from the system excess liquidity that remains a lingering concern, despite coming off its peak in the aftermath of the demonetisation exercise. The RBI has also proposed a new liquidity management tool that awaits government approval, making the draining of surplus liquidity a critical priority all through this year. The efficacy of the RBI's liquidity management toolkit will impinge on another key concern: inflation, which is expected to climb to 5% by the second half of this fiscal. The RBI says achieving the stated target of 4% inflation even next year could be challenging, with no "lucky disinflationary forces" expected, such as benign commodity and oil prices. It has also pointed to a one-time upside risk to inflation with the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax.

The RBI is quite optimistic about an uptick in the economy this year, projecting 7.4% growth in Gross Value-Added, compared to 6.7% in 2016-17. Along with improved prospects for the world economy a rebound in discretionary consumer spending at home is likely, in line with the "pace of remonetisation" and investment demand on account of lowered interest rates. While the government may take heart from the higher growth projection, it must pay equal heed to Mr. Patel's plainspeak on four key issues. First, the need to urgently resolve the surge of bad loans on bank books, for which the RBI will unveil a new Prompt Corrective Action framework by the middle of this month. Without this, a virtuous cycle of healthy credit growth necessary for investment and job creation will remain elusive. Second, the RBI has reminded the government there will be "clearly more demand for capital" in the coming days. The government's allocation of ₹10,000 crore to recapitalise public sector banks is obviously inadequate. Third, while banks have reduced lending rates, the RBI has pointed out there is room for more cuts if rates on small savings schemes are corrected. Though a formula-based rate was adopted to set these rates last April, small savings schemes still deliver 61-95 basis points higher returns than what they should if the formula is followed, as per the RBI. Most important, the government must not ignore Mr. Patel's categorical call to eschew loan waivers of the kind just announced in Uttar Pradesh. This, he warned, would crowd out private investments and dent the nation's balance sheet.

Barbarism unlimited

A man has been murdered by cow vigilantes. The murderers must be brought to book

The death of a man from injuries at the hands of "cow protection" vigilantes in Rajasthan's Alwar district rightly animated Parliament. The details of the violence inflicted by a mob on Saturday are chilling and vividly caught on mobile phone video, and demand an assurance from the government that justice will be done. It is unfortunate that as the opposition raised the issue, the response from the treasury benches was anything but satisfactory. In fact, coupled with comments from spokespersons of the BJP and even the Rajasthan Home Minister, the message from the authorities indicates that an outrageous equivalence is being sought to be made between the lynch mob's actions and the victims' alleged — simply "alleged" — actions. The facts are these. Pehlu Khan, the deceased, and four others were on their way back to Haryana after buying cattle in Jaipur. A mob set itself upon them in Behror on the Jaipur-Delhi National Highway. The violence was explained as an attempt to prevent the "illegal" transportation of cattle. Instead of condemning the violence and stating that nobody has the right to attack individuals no matter what they may and may not have been doing, all that has emanated from ministers at the Centre and in Rajasthan is evasive prevarication. State Home Minister Gulab Chand Kataria said no one had the right to take the law into his own hands, but added it was "all right" that those illegally moving cattle were nabbed. In the Rajya Sabha, Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi implied that no incident of such cow vigilantism had occurred.

Over the last three years, governments in different States, most of them ruled by the BJP, have tightened existing laws against cow slaughter. It is no accident that the period has been attended by an aggressive vigilantism. From the killing of a man in Dadri in Uttar Pradesh in 2015 on suspicion that he had beef in his possession, to the flogging of a group of Dalit men who were skinning a dead cow in Una in Gujarat last year, cow vigilantes, in the guise of being gau rakshaks, have created an atmosphere of fear. It is disturbing that legislative initiatives and mob violence have been moving in step. It is also true that while distancing organisations of the Sangh Parivar from the incidents, individuals affiliated to these organisations, including the BJP, have played down the instances of violence by focussing on how the alleged crimes had offended believers. And in this constant din of pledging support to the larger effort to protect the cow, there is little official deliberation on the actual implementation of anti-cow slaughter laws, let alone a recognition of the incentives these laws create for the illegal movement of animals across jurisdictions. By failing to condemn lynch mobs for murder and bring vigilantes to book, the government only diminishes Indian democracy.

Friendship is a flowing river

If our commitments are honest, India and Bangladesh can achieve many things that are beneficial to our people



SHEIKH HASINA

Maintenance of good relations with the neighbours, friendship to all, malice to none — is the policy I pursue throughout my life. My only desire in my political thought is to build a society for common people where none will suffer from the curse of poverty while their basic needs will be met. In other words, they will get the opportunity to have the right to food, clothing, shelter, medicare, education, improved livelihood and a decent life. I received the teaching of such sacrifice from my father. My father, Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, did his politics with a motto to change the lot of the people. Wherever there was an injustice, he would protest it. This was the policy of Bangabandhu and he was always vocal for establishing the rights of the people. And, for that reason, he had to embrace imprisonment time and again and endure persecution. But he remained firm on the question of principle. Bangladesh earned its independence under his leadership.

The support and cooperation of neighbouring and friendly countries had accelerated our goal to earn the independence of Bangladesh. Among those, India played the leading role.

India's helping hand

The Pakistani military junta started a genocide launching armed attacks on the innocent Bangalees on March 25, 1971.

In the 1970 general elections, people of Bangladesh voted for Bangladesh Awami League and made it the majority party. This is for the first time that Bangalees had got the mandate to rule Pakistan. Although the population of East Bengal constituted the majority in Pakistan, the Bangalee nation was subjected to oppression and subjugation all the time, and deprived of its rights. The nation was about to lose its right to speak in the

mother tongue. It was unthinkable to the military rulers that the Bangalee nation would ascend to state power and that was why they imposed the uneven war on Bangalees.

With the people's mandate, the Father of the Nation declared the independence of Bangladesh and directed the people to carry on the war of liberation. Responding to his call, the people of Bangladesh took arms and the liberation war began. The Pakistani rulers and their local collaborators engaged in committing genocide, rape, looting, arson and attacked the innocent people of Bangladesh. The world woke up. People and the Government of India stood beside the oppressed humanity. They gave food and shelter to nearly 10 million refugees of Bangladesh. They extended all-out cooperation in our great liberation war and played an important role in creating global opinion in favour of Bangladesh. This helped us to earn victory and the country was freed from enemy occupation.

We are grateful to the friendly people of India. The Indian government had played an important role even in getting Bangabandhu released from the Pakistani prison. Shrimati Indira Gandhi had played the leading role in earning our independence, freedom of Bangabandhu and bringing him back to his beloved people. We got her government, political parties and above all the people of India beside us during our hard times.

The killers brutally assassinated the Father of the Nation on August 15, 1975. I lost 18 of my family members, including my mother, three brothers and sister-in-laws. I, along with my younger sister Rehana, survived as we were abroad. In our bad days, India again stood beside us. I could not come back home for six long years. The Bangladesh Awami League elected me its president in my absence. I returned home with the support of the people.

In Bangabandhu's footsteps

On my return, I started a movement for the restoration of people's basic rights and democracy. We formed the government in 1996 after 21 years. I got the op-



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portunity to work for the people. I devoted myself to the task of welfare of my countrymen not as a ruler but as a servant. My father got the opportunity to build the war-ravaged country for only three and a half years. And I got the chance to serve the people after 21 years.

During that time, the people of Bangladesh realised that the objective of a government is to accomplish the task of people's welfare. We signed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Treaty ending the two-decade-long conflict. We brought back 62,000 refugees from India and rehabilitated them in the country. We signed the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty with India. The country's image brightened in the outside world.

Two steps back

A five-year period is too short for the development of any country. We couldn't win the election of 2001. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party-Jamaat-e-Islami assumed state power and destroyed all our achievements. Again, the country's progress suffered a setback. Militancy, terrorism, corruption and misrule made people's life miserable. The country became champions in the corruption index five times. The minority community became victims of torture. The country's socio-economic development had been stalled. The Awami League leaders and workers became targets of persecution. Bangladesh once again fell under emergency rule. We demanded restoration of democracy. We faced jail, torture and false cases. But finally, people triumphed.

The national election was held after seven years in 2008. Winning the election, we formed the government. We started implementation of a Five Year Plan and 10-year-long Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan. We have been working to turn Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed one by 2041. The people of

Bangladesh started getting the benefit of it.

Bangladesh is marching ahead. We earned over 7.1% GDP growth. Inflation is contained within 5.28% and the poverty rate has been reduced to 22%. At this moment, on many socio-economic indicators, Bangladesh's standing is better than many other South Asian nations whereas a few years ago our position was at the bottom. But we still have a long way to go to ensure prosperity of the people. And we are working towards that end.

My objective is to fulfil the dream of Bangabandhu through building a hunger- and poverty-free Golden Bangladesh being imbued with the spirit of the War of Liberation.

Regional cooperation the key

I always refer to poverty as the main enemy of this region. A large number of people of Bangladesh and India suffer from malnutrition. They are deprived of their basic needs. Lack of nutrition is impeding the growth of a huge number of children. They don't have proper medicare and schooling. We have to change this scenario. We have the ability. The only thing we need is to change our mentality. I think eradication of poverty should be the first and foremost priority of our political leaders. And, in today's globalised world, it is difficult to do something in isolation. Rather, collaboration and cooperation can make many things easier. That is why I always put emphasis on regional cooperation and improved connectivity.

I believe in peace. Only peaceful co-existence can ensure peace. There are some issues between us. But I believe that any problem can be resolved in a peaceful manner. We have demonstrated our willpower through the implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement. There are some more issues like sharing of waters of the common rivers (the Teesta issue is currently under discussion) that need to be resolved. I'm an optimistic person. I would like to rest my trust on the goodwill of the great people and the leaders of our neighbour. I know resources are scarce, but we can share those for the benefit of the people of both countries. We

share the same culture and heritage. There are a lot of commonalities (at least with West Bengal). We share our Lalou, Rabindranath, Kazi Nazrul, Jibananda; there is similarity in our language, we are nourished by the waters of the Padma, Brahmaputra, Teesta; and so on. The Sundarbans is our common pride. We don't have any strife over it. Then, why should there be any contention over the waters of common rivers?

Our foreign policy's core dictum is: 'Friendship to all, malice to none.' The Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, defined the policy. We are also inspired from his words: "The very struggle of Bangladesh symbolised the universal struggle for peace and justice. It was, therefore, only natural that Bangladesh, from its very inception, should stand firmly by the side of the oppressed people of the world." At international forums, we support all international efforts towards building a just and peaceful world.

In recent years, especially after 2009, when my party assumed office, cooperation between Bangladesh and India has been bolstered manifold. Rail, road, and waterway connectivity boosted. Trade, commerce and investment maximised. People-to-people contact also got momentum. Such mutual cooperation is definitely benefiting our people. Relations, at a personal or national level, largely depend on give-and-take measures. Mexican Nobel Laureate Octavio said 'Friendship is a river'. I think that the friendship between Bangladesh and India is like a flowing river and full with generosity. This is the spirit of the people of the two neighbours. I think if our commitments are honest, we would be able to achieve many things that are beneficial to our people. On the eve of my four-day visit to India, I myself, and on behalf of my countrymen, would like to convey the warmest greetings to the people of India. I hope that the cooperative relations between Bangladesh and India would reach a new height through my visit.

Sheikh Hasina is the Prime Minister of Bangladesh

Why a Federer is forever

Experience has never shackled Roger Federer, explaining his success at the grand old age of 35



N. SUDARSHAN

Father Time has left nobody untouched. Not Sachin Tendulkar, not Leander Paes, not Viswanathan Anand. The mind wants to continue, but the body doesn't follow. When the body shows signs of pulling itself together, the mind is all over the place. It magnifies every loss and hurries one towards the finish. As the legendary John McEnroe wrote in his memoir *Serious*, "It's never possible to be prepared when the future takes over from the past."

In the last three months, however, a certain Roger Federer has seemingly defied all such hypotheses. At the grand old age of 35,

popularly called the daddy of the tour, for he always travels with his wife and four kids in tow, Federer won a Grand Slam title at this year's Australian Open after a gap of nearly five years. The 18th Major has now been backed up with the Indian Wells-Miami Masters double — a feat which he last accomplished at his peak in 2006 — and a return to the top five in the ATP rankings.

Following an injury-hit 2016, those who still kept faith in Federer have no doubt tasted salvation now. But elite sport is much more than that. Fandom in sport is selfish and rarely leaves space for the struggling team or athlete because people always want happy memories. There is an enormous difference between how an elite champion sees himself beyond a certain point and how his supporters see him. If anything, Federer's achievements — the successes of the last three months, and dispiriting losses



AFP

in the four and a half years prior to that — reveal this sporting dynamic in all its glory.

The last time Federer had a similarly gratifying run was in 2015, when he finished runner-up at Wimbledon, U.S. Open, ATP World Tour Finals and won the Cincinnati Masters. It, however, didn't elicit a response similar to the one we see now primarily because things are too result-oriented for fans but not

as much for the player himself. Perhaps the reason why he has been so successful for so long is that he can still not win certain things and yet consider the process itself as a triumph.

The Zen of detachment

In late 2015, Federer was in fact asked how he has been able to manage such a long career. "A change is how you manage your experience," he said. "Because experience can be a very good thing, but sometimes it can also be a hindrance. You're not playing as freely, you're playing the percentages too much. It becomes too calculated. I have to remind myself to play like a junior sometimes."

Play like a junior is what Federer has done this year. That he has bested his nemesis Rafael Nadal en route to each of his three titles lends a degree of immortality unseen in recent times — though to be fair, Fe-

derer still doesn't own Nadal the way the Spaniard has owned Federer.

Then again, the great perspective he has will tell him that this phase will not last forever. The World No.1 ranking may still come to him, but he has already made it clear that it's not something he wants to grind himself towards.

During Wimbledon 2016, while previewing Federer's semi-final against Canada's Milos Raonic — which he eventually lost in five sets — Paul Annacone, the celebrated former coach of Pete Sampras and one who coached Federer to the 2012 Wimbledon title and to the No. 1 spot, told *Sports Illustrated* that he had never been around a player who did a better job of "kind of detaching from any wasted energy".

The ringing endorsement of the same is 2017 thus far.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Escalating tension

China knows well that the Dalai Lama is a spiritual leader who has visited Arunachal Pradesh several times in the past. So why is it protesting now ("Ties severely damaged, says China", April 6)? China must learn to respect the sovereignty of India by strengthening ties instead of needlessly poking its nose in India's internal affairs and issuing damaging statements which will only escalate tension in the border areas, serving nobody's interest in the long run.

K.R. SRINIVASAN,
Secunderabad

Farm loan waiver

The United Progressive Alliance government's loan waiver scheme of 2008 helped it retain power in 2009 ("In largesse we trust", April 6). Since then, political parties have dangled the carrot of farm loan waivers to woo voters.

There are existing provisions to help farmers who are not able to repay loans for reasons that are beyond their control (natural disasters or an unexpected crash in market prices). Relief could include rescheduling of repayment instalments, converting accumulated interests into long-term loans to be paid after a holiday period, reduction in interest rates, and so on. Loan write-offs could be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the protected nature of the distress. An across-the-board loan waiver does not make any distinction between farmers who have not been affected in any way and those who face agrarian distress owing to various reasons. However, it is unfair to blame the political class alone for resorting to fiscal adventurism to capture or retain power. The voters seem to be easily enticed by promises of loan waivers

without considering the fact that the beneficiaries will have to share the burden of the waiver money along with the larger society in one form or another. The simple yet unacknowledged fact is that money for the waiver has to come from somewhere. In the long term, loan write-offs will come to bite all of us in one way or another in the form of unforeseen costs.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ Farm loan waivers have become sops that populist politicians misuse with no regard for the welfare of farmers and the development of agriculture. Uttar Pradesh, which is the largest contributor to India's agricultural output, deserves better in terms of follow-up policies enabling greater infrastructure investment, better technology, crop insurance systems, and plugging leakages in the field-to-

market chain. The farm economy needs to be strengthened. We must empower farmers to claim their remuneration instead of letting the middlemen and cartels rob them of the price of their efforts. Loan waivers are only momentary relief; hence, an efficient long-term agricultural policy is to be framed to stop this vicious cycle of debt and distress across India.

SALINI JOHNSON,
New Delhi

■ While larger plans to improve the farm sector are welcome, the loan waiver scheme of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh and the order of the Madras High Court directing the Tamil Nadu government to extend a similar farm loan waiver scheme for small farmers can't be dismissed as an ominous trend for a country that could face a Malthusian nightmare in the future. With the country's

population projected to increase, with the continuing loss of huge swathes of farmland to industry and real estate, and with the massive displacement of farm labour, could India slide back into the dark days when it imported wheat under PL-480 from the U.S.? There is widespread concern that the exchequer has lost trillions of rupees in nearly a decade in distributing tax largesse to industry, besides trillions in non-performing assets with the public sector banks, created largely by the rich and famous. Any farm loan waiver across the country will be chicken feed in comparison.

KANGAYAM R. NARASIMHAN,
Chennai

Miraculous recovery

Central Reserve Police Force officer Chetan Cheeta's miraculous recovery after being struck by nine bullets is yet

another example of the indomitable spirit of India's defence services ("CRPF officer bounces back after 9 bullets, 16 days in coma", April 6). On-field battles seem easier compared to life battles in intensive care units. And the brave officer has shown that he was equally prepared for both. The team of doctors that took care of Mr. Cheeta during this critical time also deserves appreciation. However, the one thing that struck me was Mr. Cheeta's wife Uma Singh's wish to see her husband again in uniform. This is the highest level of one's devotion to duty. A cheetah is the fastest cat in the wild. The brave officer has shown that he carries no less of that attitude when it comes to guarding his own nation.

KIRAN BABASAHEB RANSING,
New Delhi

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LEFT, RIGHT, CENTRE

Is there racism in India?

The Indian government must acknowledge there is deep-rooted prejudice



SAMUEL JACK
is president of the Association of African Students in India

← LEFT In India, racism is practised in some quarters and by some Indians. This is evident in the manner in which we are treated when we seek extension for our visas, in the problems we face in getting accommodation in the country, and in the general treatment of viewing us with suspicion. The prejudice and stereotypes are all too apparent. When we seek accommodation, most landlords come out with an emphatic 'no' without offering any explanation. We are left with little choice and make do with what we get. We are

biased with a situation where we cannot even communicate with our neighbours in case of an emergency. How do we talk with each other with so many stigmas attached to us? How do we even begin to counter the prejudices?

Bias linked to caste system
To an outsider like myself, when I begin to process this blatantly discriminatory attitude, I find that this racism is linked to the prevalent caste system which is very hierarchical. Black people, Dalits and untouchables somehow seem to be linked to this caste system which is

discriminatory and excludes people. Indian kids smoke in public places. Yet when we smoke, we are always supposedly smoking marijuana or weed, when there are many Indians who smoke the same. How can Africans playing loud music be an excuse to beat them up and complain to the police when Indians do the same? I am not saying black people don't smoke weed or don't do drugs but isn't that true of others too? So, why single us out? Why do people here become aggressive when they see us on the streets? Students from the Northeast face the same problems like us.



Is Punjab's drug problem because of us? The State is reeling under a drug crisis affecting many young men. In Goa, the drug problem is largely due to Europeans and Russians who, along with local leaders, peddle drugs, but will India discriminate against them? They give some donations to NGOs and nobody dares speak against them. The Class XII student who passed away in Greater Noida recently unfortunately died of a drug overdose. He was an addict. You will be amazed to see what Indian school children are smoking. Unfortunately, Africa becomes a binary for

most Indians. The impression is that we hail from a backward continent, which is simply not true. Some African countries have better human development indicators than India and have a robust democracy. Indians went as indentured labour to the African continent and elsewhere. If that is an acknowledged fact, how do Indians reconcile with their racist attitude towards us? If Indians went as indentured labour and Africans were treated like slaves, isn't there a common history of discrimination that binds the two?

The wrong colour?
Right from when we land here, our colour becomes an excuse for Indians to display all their prejudices.

An extension of our visas which should not take more than seven days takes at least three months for us. Police verification becomes an excuse for extortion. Policemen keep calling at odd hours. We are deeply disappointed and hurt that the Government of India has not condemned the attacks against us. The government must say this is wrong and that it will deal with it in an appropriate manner. The government has to acknowledge there is a deep-rooted prejudice first. It is only after you acknowledge the problem that you can address it. But the Government of India appears to be in denial. Due to the hostility of some Indians, the number of African students coming to study in India may come down.

What we are witnessing is the conflict of cultures which is a law and order problem, not racism



RAKESH SINHA
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→ RIGHT Some sporadic incidents cannot, and should not, lead one to brand any society as racist. Of course, one cannot deny that there has been some violence against people of African origin in some parts of the country. But a majority of these incidents have not been motivated by the colour of the nationalities involved. The reasons are sex, drug trafficking and behavioral patterns which unsettle the structured values cherished by locals. A society's multiculturalism depends on the blending of empathy and reason.

Chances of conflicts are higher when empathy and reason diminish. What we are witnessing is the conflict of cultures which is a law and order problem, not racism.

The case of Western societies
Racism is a negative value of life which is not a part of the Indian psyche. That said, no society or nation can claim to have achieved a completely ideal stage where its citizens are on their best behaviour. Whether a society is racist or becoming racist can be judged only by the collective consciousness of larger masses. Unprovoked incidents

against Indians or Asian nationals in the form of violent attacks in Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand tell us that all is not well with the melting pot of Western societies either.

The notion of the Other is historically rooted in the Western civilisation trajectory which erupts whenever societies face an economic or political crisis. While the notion of egalitarianism rests easily with elites there, this feeling does not find resonance with the masses. There is a huge disconnect between academic discourse on egalitarianism and social realities.



India's history and the psychology of its masses have remained unchanged for as long as one can remember. During the anti-colonial movement, leaders of the freedom movement wisely secularised the struggle against colonial forces. Indians had no problem when two westerners, George Yule (1888) and William Wedderburn (1889) became presidents of the Indian National Congress (INC). Acceptance is the norm in Indian society. There is an interesting observation in the 1911 Census report that Indians had no problems stating their religion. However, what mattered to most surveyed

was social status. Historically, India has welcomed people of different races and creeds. The INC participated in the anti-apartheid conference in 1927 in Brussels.

We are one family
It is this credo of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the whole universe is one family) which led Indians to embrace victims of religious or racist persecutions. In 1931, as the Census data revealed, there were 24,000 Jews and 109,754 Parsis in India. They played a significant role in our freedom movement and in economic activities that shaped India. In the first session of the INC, there were nine Parsi delegates, and two each from the Muslim and Christian communities, of a total of

72. Their representation kept swelling in successive Congress sessions. Moreover, there has been consensus for Anglo-Indian representation in Parliament. The fundamental rationale underpinning this has been one of cherishing diversities. However, in India there have been clashes between Dalits and upper castes and some violent incidents against students from the Northeast. But drawing a parallel with racism would not be correct. Racism is based on hatred which makes conciliation between people of different groups virtually impossible. Spiritual democracy is the basis of our secularism and our multiculturalism negates perpetuation of conflicts. These have little to do with race.

Early education is an important field for providing the basis for independent and critical thought



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↑ CENTRE The remarkable 1952 novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison is about the experience of being black in the U.S. Its opening paragraph has the following lines: "I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me".

The novel's protagonist goes on to say that "the invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with

who I come in contact".

What is the peculiarity of the Indian eye that makes blackness such an invisible - that is, insignificant - thing as to take an axe to it when it seeks normal, human visibility, expressing the same desires and anxieties as those who think of themselves if not as completely white then at least something like possessing whiteness?

Confront the 'messy' present
We should, for a start, begin with history. There are, by now, a number of books and exhibitions about an

Indian past that was apparently far more tolerant of blackness. Historians speak of an easy intermingling between Indians and people of African origin, with Indian noblewomen taking African men as lovers, and slaves being raised to the status of rulers.

But to invoke history is to only add to the problem of Ellison's protagonist's invisibility in the Indian present. History is easy. It is the present that is messy. A certain kind of, albeit well-meaning, history has convinced us that we were, in fact, good and tolerant in the past and hence that goodness must



lie somewhere submerged among us, only needing minor prodding to emerge as joyful guiding light of the present. Indians love history because it allows an exit route to not having to deal with the present.

To the extent that 20th century racism has been addressed in the West, it is not through constant references to the Black Madonna in Christian iconography and Shakespeare's *Othello* in literature. No. It has been done through addressing the root causes and reasons for intolerance in the present.

We in India refuse to deal with

our present because history is such everlasting comfort.

Strategies for the present
What of the present, then? We could begin with school education. This crucial realm is one where ideas of the false basis of race and racism are almost never touched upon. While it is more difficult to influence attitudes in the domestic sphere, early education is an important field for providing the basis for independent and critical thought. But our social science school books continue to deal with 'tribes' - a category that flows on to blackness in general - in terms of their proximity to 'civilisation'. The term itself - its bloody history, for

example - is hardly ever examined. We are willing to put up with the 'uncivilised' as long as they know their place. We might also consider another strategy for the present. Our cities are now places where we increasingly have declining tolerance for strangers. We primarily extend courtesies to those we know, and exhibit hostility to those outside our circles of familiarity. Do we not need an education on how to live with strangers? Accounts of the past - fascinating and important in themselves - are about the past. The past is, actually, another planet and cannot be a guide to what is to be done now.

As told to Anuradha Raman

SINGLE FILE

Raging against insanity

Will a UN treaty to ban atomic weapons be another exercise in futility?

GARIEMELLA SUBRAMANIAM



A majority of nations, nuclear haves-nots, now negotiating a historic United Nations treaty in New York to ban atomic weapons, are demonstrating unprecedented moral leadership on a question that continues to threaten human survival. Predictably, the nine countries that currently possess these catastrophic arms, as well as others that are part of the military blocs that some of them lead, are boycotting the talks that commenced last week. Even so, the latter group can do little to prevent an agreement whose modest aim is the codification of the essential illegality of this last remaining category of weapons of mass destruction, even if their complete elimination is likely to prove more elusive.

Focus on humanitarian consequences

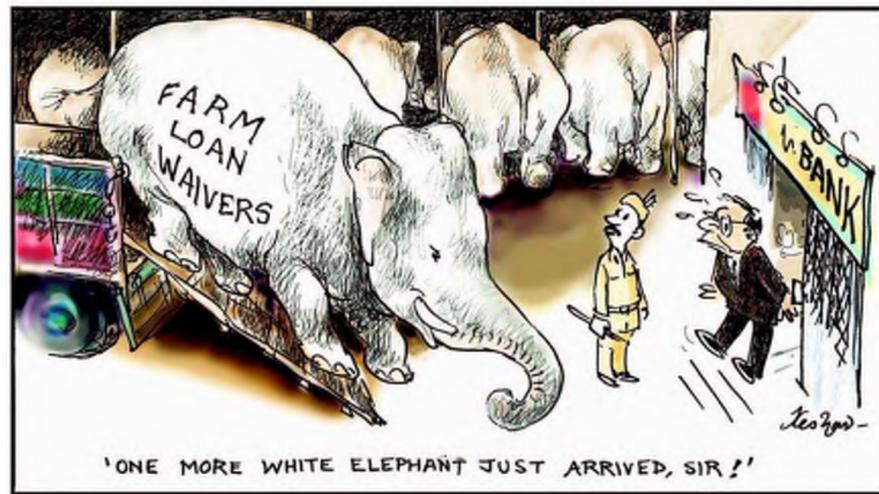
A major game changer in the decades-long global debate on nuclear disarmament appears to be the greater emphasis being placed on the humanitarian consequences of the testing and detonation of nuclear weapons. This new focus has rightly shifted attention away from the conventional narrative of protection of national sovereignty and security, one that legitimised an arms race among nuclear weapons states, inducing potential aspirants to nurture superpower ambitions.

Current endeavours towards a comprehensive pact are a result of many building blocks towards total abolition, beginning with the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice which ruled that the use of nuclear weapons had to be compatible with humanitarian law. Yet, in a split verdict, the judges ruled that it could not pronounce definitively on the legality or otherwise of their use in circumstances of extreme self-defence. The landmark outcome was seized upon by many governments and activist groups to lobby the UN with innumerable draft conventions and resolutions in the General Assembly calling for complete prohibition. Notable have been the three conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons - the last one in Vienna drew participation from over 150 nations and the UN. Ever since, the idea that targeting populated areas with nuclear weapons would constitute a violation of humanitarian law has gained traction.

Further, several resolutions of the UN General Assembly have affirmed that the use of nuclear weapons constitutes a crime against humanity.

Another rationale underpinning current efforts is also the need to address the prevailing anomaly on the road to the prohibition of all types of weapons of mass destruction. That task began with the ban on biological arms in 1975. Chemical weapons, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions have been outlawed in more recent years.

The next round of the UN talks, scheduled in late June, will grapple with practical issues of defining the scope and reach of the treaty, as well as the number of ratifications required for its entry into force. What is certain however is that once the pact becomes law, the growing stigma attached to nuclear weapons, as well as to states that flex their military muscle, will only further deepen.



CONCEPTUAL
Discourse analysis
LINGUISTICS

Often defined as the analysis of language beyond the sentence, it is the study of the ways in which language is used in texts and contexts. This contrasts with types of analysis more typical of modern linguistics, such as those concerned with the study of grammar: phonetics and phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax. Discourse analysts study larger chunks of language as they flow together. Foucauldian discourse analysis, based on the theories of Michel Foucault, for example, focusses on power relationships in society as expressed through language and practices.

MORE ON THE WEB

Inside Lucknow Metro's tunnels
http://bit.ly/LucknowMetro

ACT ONE

Suicide isn't a criminal act

The Supreme Court's views on suicide over the years

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

Twenty-three years ago, Justice B.L. Hansaria of the Supreme Court described the plight of a rape victim forced to stand trial for the "crime" of attempt to suicide. In his judgment in *P. Rathinam v. Union of India* (1994), the judge described the trial in one word: "persecution".

In a passionate appeal, Justice Hansaria asked: "Why persecute the already tormented woman? Have we become soulless? What is required is to reach the soul to stir it to make it cease to be cruel. Let us humanise our laws. It is never late to do so."

It has taken Parliament over two decades since to pass the new Mental Healthcare Bill.

The Lok Sabha, late last month, passed the Bill which decriminalises a failed suicide. The Bill presumes that the person willed under severe stress and attempted suicide. In-

stead of punishing him/her under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code (attempt to suicide) with an open trial, a fine (even though in most cases a token amount) or imprisonment extending to a year, the new Bill reinvents the state in the role of a caregiver to the survivor of the suicide attempt. The goal is to prevent the person from trying the act again.

One clause in the new Bill says the government "shall, in particular, plan, design and implement public health programmes to reduce suicides and attempted suicides."

In 1985, Justice R.A. Jadhav of the Bombay High Court gave four reasons why Section 309 was unconstitutional: Nobody agrees on what constitutes suicide, much less attempted suicide; mens rea is not clearly discernible; temporary insanity, which drives suicide, is a valid defence even in homicides; individuals driven

to suicide require psychiatric care.

The Law Commission of India called Section 309 "monstrous". Criminalisation of suicide was not in tune with the global wavelength, the Supreme Court once said.

Unlike the Supreme Court's Constitution Bench which concluded in the Gian Kaur case that the right to life does not include the right to die, international case laws tolerate even euthanasia. In *McKay v. Bergstedt* (1990), the Supreme Court of Nevada took the view that the desire of a patient for withdrawal of his respirator did not tantamount to suicide but was rather an exercise of his constitutional and common law right to "discontinue unwanted medical treatment".

However, the new Bill does not define suicide. Differences among suicide researchers as to what constitutes suicide remain.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1967

Punjab Ministry refuses to quit

The Punjab Vidhan Sabha adjourned sine die to-day [April 6, Chandigarh] on a motion by the Chief Minister, Mr. Gurnam Singh, after unprecedented disorderly scenes and pandemonium. The Upper House, the Vidhan Parishad, was also adjourned in similar circumstances. There were deafening shouts and counter-shouts, loud thumping of desks, gesticulations by members. The Speaker first adjourned for half an hour and after reassembly, amidst shouts of "No, no" from the Opposition, the Speaker declared the motion to adjourn the Assembly carried.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1917

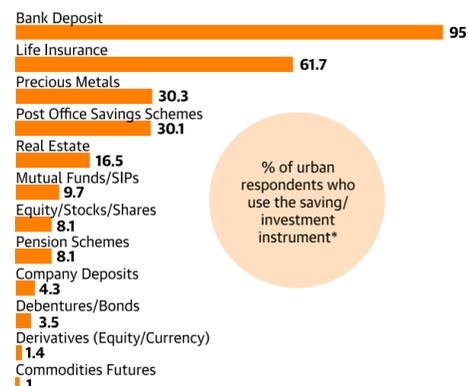
Russian Revolution: Funeral of victims

The national funeral of one hundred and eighty victims of the revolution has taken place in the presence of a million civilians and soldiers (Petrograd, April 6). Factories, shops, schools and other establishments were closed. The bodies were buried at the four corners of quadrangular space in the centre of the snow covered Marsvoepale square. Six huge processions started from different parts of the town in the morning carrying zinc coffins covered with red flags. The crowds sang the hymn "Eternal memory" alternating with the revolutionary march "You fell as victims" and the bands played the Marseillaise. The guns of the fortress of St Peter and St Paul marked the lowering of every coffin into the trench.

DATA POINT

Investing cautiously

Low-risk investments such as bank deposits and life insurance are overwhelmingly preferred by urban investors in India. Less than 10% of those surveyed said they were ready to invest in market options such as mutual funds, equity, shares etc.



SOURCE: SEBI INVESTOR SURVEY 2015; *RESPONDENTS CAN CHECK MULTIPLE OPTIONS