

GST will result in economic gains

The new tax regime will burnish the PM's reformist credentials

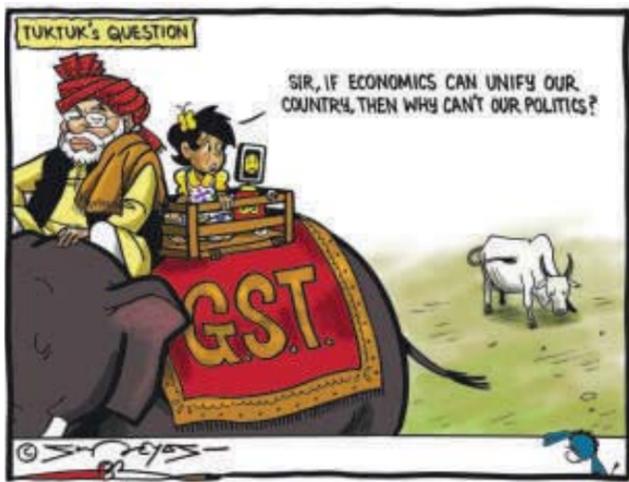
Earlier this morning, India moved to a new Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime that unifies the country into a common market. As expected of a disruptive reform — GST definitely qualifies as one — this change will cause some disruption. Some experts have said the move has been rushed and that various pieces of the infrastructure required for the new tax regime aren't fully ready. Truth is, no one can or will ever be fully prepared for something like GST. The change could have been set for September 1, and people would still be asking for more time. In its purest form, GST, experts said, would add between 1 and 2 percentage points to India's growth rate. That's between \$20 billion and \$40 billion added to the country's Gross Domestic Product. The regime that India has just moved to isn't as pure as it was originally visualised. It was in the interests of the states to ensure their revenues were protected. And it was imperative, as far as the Centre was concerned, that the new regime did not translate into higher prices (that would have been political suicide). The result is a compromise — a far-from-simple structure replete with multiple rates. Worse, there are exemptions. And still worse, there are cesses (taxes on the tax). Finally, it has also meant the creation of an anti-profiteering body that is straight out of the Licence Raj era.

There is no denying that even in this flawed form, the GST regime will be simpler than the old, and, consequently, will result in some economic gains, but it is difficult to ignore what could have been. Still, the new tax regime does unify the country into one market, and taxes final consumption rather than intermediate use. The hope now is that the government will, over time, bite the bullet on some of the exemptions and cesses and simplify the structure further.

The most significant collateral benefit of GST is what it has done to the government's reformist credentials. Not since Manmohan Singh went all out to ensure the clearance of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal has a government shown the kind of purpose the NDA has in ensuring the passage of the GST laws. Over the past few weeks, it has also moved rapidly ahead with what many consider an impossible task — the privatisation of the State-run Air India. Not many would have bet on a new indirect tax and a decision on AI's privatisation happening in the same week.

bigdeal

SHREYAS NAVARE



anotherday

NAMITA BHANDARE

States, like individual citizens, need to be brave

She has five tattoos and, under her baseball cap, hair coloured ash blue. Born with spina bifida, she often travels alone in her wheelchair. In the Rio Paralympics she took a bronze in the 100m breaststroke but was a Singaporean icon well before that. Yet, the one reason to listen to Theresa Goh is this: Her bravery. Goh laughs — she does this a lot — when you talk of her courage in recently coming out as gay to Singapore's largest daily, The Straits Times. "It was easier for me," she shrugs. "I don't have to worry about food on the table or losing my job or the support of my family, friends and sponsors. It's not that easy for so many others." So, why come out? "This is the role I am in — a queer, disabled, paralympic medalist athlete," laughs the 30-year-old. "I did not choose it, but I am in service of a greater good, of a more inclusive society." Goh is one of three brand ambassadors at

Singapore's annual LGBTQ rally, Pink Dot, now in its ninth year. The event, being held today, is a reminder that Singapore, like India, criminalises same sex relationships. Singapore's Penal Code absorbed India's section 377, word for word. In 2007, Singapore scrapped 377, but continued to criminalise sexual acts between men under a new section, 377A. As a woman, Goh is not violating any law, but finds it appalling that, "We pay taxes same as everyone else, so why don't we have the same rights?" Included in those rights is the right to marry. Singapore's argument for retaining 377A is that the majority of its citizens are in favour of it. Certainly some Christian and Muslim religious groups remain loud opponents to the idea of same sex relationships. But proof of a new climate can be seen in the growing support for Pink Dot. This year, when foreign sponsors were banned, 120 local sponsors stepped in (there were just five last year), raising over \$240,000. "We believe a society will thrive with tolerance and diversity," one of the sponsors, Jane Goh, was quoted in The Straits Times. Speaking to Theresa Goh at a coffee shop

IF ONE WOMAN LIKE RIO PARALYMPICS MEDALLIST THERESA GOH CAN SPEAK UP FOR RIGHTS OF LGBT PEOPLE, THEN COUNTRIES MUST STEP UP FOR AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

in a Singapore mall, it strikes me that governments, like citizens, need to be brave. If one woman in a wheelchair can speak up then surely countries must step up. A nation's progress is not merely measured in terms of GDP but also in terms of inclusion and acceptance. A nation's courage lies in being unafraid of doing what is morally right. A country's greatness lies in leading a more just world. "Be kind. Be brave. Be yourself," says Goh. It would be good if governments all over the world heard her. Namita Bhandare writes on social issues and gender. The views expressed are personal.

comment

thirdeye

BARKHA DUTT



An ode to Kashmiri policemen, the softest targets of the insurgency

Police personnel are trapped between the service to their uniform and the rage of the street

As the Kashmir Valley erupted into turmoil after the elimination of Burhan Wani, local militant of the Hizbul Mujahideen, I met two local policemen in Srinagar's Army Base Hospital. Both had been injured because of stones thrown at them during clashes with agitators on the street. It took me a while before I could persuade them to share their stories; the condition was that they were to be filmed against the light in a silhouette, so their identity would be hidden in the shadows. And that I was to not use their real names. In some ways, this expression of acute vulnerability was the precursor to the horrific, shameful mob lynching of Ayub Pandith, on the holy night of Shab-e-Qadr outside the city's Jama Masjid. For the past year, of all the security personnel operational in the state, it is the Valley's police officers who have been most imperilled by the relentless conflict. That the men I met wanted to mask their identities must never be seen an absence of courage; on the contrary these men are the hardest, bravest, most hands-on officers, anywhere in the world. When 10 terrorists laid siege to Mumbai on 26/11 for three days, despite the presence of the elite National Security Guard, I remember a police officer from Kashmir calling me to say they should have summoned a team from the Valley — so experienced are they at smoking out militants and rescuing civilians from encounters. But at the same time, Kashmiri policemen are the softest targets in this 27-year-old insurgency, trapped between the service to their uniform and the rage of the street. Because they are drawn from the same community that is often locked in bitter battle with them during agitations and protests,

they are attacked, violently, by both militants and civilians. In the sharply polarised Kashmir Valley, where jingoists and separatists have hijacked the discourse, squeezing out every inch of nuance, I cannot think of a single group that is more endangered by all sides than the Jammu and Kashmir police. Inside the hospital one policeman told me that when he travelled to the city from his village which was two hours away he made it a point to wear civilian clothes that did not out him as a cop. Else, he would be in the line of fire on the highway where protesters had blocked entry and exit points. He only wore his uniform when he was in Srinagar. "They hate us," he told me, "they talk to us about Azaadi; we talk to them about law and order." Because communities are close knit in Kashmir, multiple ironies make the situation even more complicated — like homes where one brother is a police officer and another relative a militant. The mob that lynched Ayub Pandith shouted slogans in support of Zakir Musa, the terrorist who replaced Burhan Wani briefly as the head of the Hizbul Mujahideen and who called for a caliphate in Kashmir. But Zakir's father is a civil engineer employed with the government, and one of Zakir's co-travellers, militant Ishaq Parray, aka 'Newton', is from a family where his brother-in-law is a serving police officer. Yet, videos released by Musa threatened Kashmiri men with death if they chose to sign up for the police force. The police officers I met told me they would never flinch from their "duty" but they worried for their families. "In some cases people have torched the homes of policemen. Our worry is for them". The biggest casualty of the Kashmir conflict has become the contestation of grief; lost lives are mourned and commemorated depending on which side of the ideological



■ They look at us with suspicion, they abuse us, and they loathe us. What can we do? We tolerate it, said a 34-year-old police officer. "Ya pathar, ya gaali — Either a stone or an expletive — that is my life; I am used to it now" ABID BHAT/HINDUSTAN TIMES

trenches your war is and how much what-abouts you are willing to indulge in. Mercifully, everyone rose in unison to unequivocally condemn what happened to Ayub, recoiling from its chilling ugliness. But there is merit in calling out the strange double-speak of a Kashmiri police officer where policemen who are reviled by the secessionists are then expected to protect them. In 2016, pro-Pakistan Hurriyat representative Syed Ali Shah Geelani specifically named an individual police officer in South Kashmir whom he held responsible for eye injuries caused by the use of pellet-spray guns during clashes with protesters. A terrified family, worried about repercussions to

them, then went and sought 'forgiveness' from Geelani — who snubbed them and gave no guarantees of safety. Police officers spoke to me of protesters who are no longer scared of tear gas shells and situations where backed by a crowd of a few hundred people, even women have surrounded the post of an individual officer and snatched his weapon. "They look at us with suspicion, they abuse us, and they loathe us. What can we do? We tolerate it," said a 34-year-old police officer to me, "Ya pathar, ya gaali — Either a stone or an expletive — that is my life; I am used to it now." Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal.

far&near

KANISHK THAROOR



Why the youth in the US are growing wary of Israel

It may transform Washington's ties with Tel Aviv, and drive the latter to seek closer friendships elsewhere

Next week, Narendra Modi becomes the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel. His trip confirms a change in policy that's long been in the offing: India's abandonment of an inflexible, anti-colonial position of support for Palestine in favour of stronger commercial and military ties with Israel. Under Modi's administration, Indian diplomats refrained from condemning Israel's 2014 war on Gaza in a vote in the UN Human Rights Council — an abstention that surprised their Israeli counterparts who were used to seeing India take an almost ritual stance of solidarity with the Palestinians. Part of the thaw in relations with Israel reflects a pragmatic turn away from the old positions of non-alignment. But it isn't entirely free of ideology. Many Indians look admiringly at Israel's bludgeoning treatment of the Palestinians and at the way the Israeli military responds to Palestinian violence. Where in the past we sympathised with the Palestinians as a people oppressed by a

colonial power, now many Indians sympathise with Israel's seeming battle with Islamist terrorism. There are clear parallels between Zionism and Hindutva, two ideologies that developed in the early 20th century seeking to equip a religion with the force of a nation-state. While Indians might be warming to Israel, the citizens of Israel's greatest ally, the United States, are growing increasingly sceptical. Criticism of America's unflinching support of Israel is more palpable than before. The Boycott Divestment Sanction movement (which hopes to copy strategies used against apartheid-era South Africa to marginalise Israel) has become prominent on many college campuses. It's been enough of a cause for concern that a pro-Israel official like Andrew Cuomo, the governor of the state of New York where I live, signed an executive order promising to punish groups that sought to boycott Israel. A fixture of US presidential campaigns is the appearance candidates make at an annual conference of the American Israel



■ A man protests against a meeting between US President Donald Trump and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu REUTERS

Public Affairs Committee, a pro-Israel lobbying group. Candidates normally go to the AIPAC conference and try to highlight their love for Israel and their faith in the US-Israel alliance. Last year, it was remarkable to see Bernie Sanders (the only Jewish presidential candidate in the election) decide not to attend the AIPAC conference and then do the almost unthinkable: Insist on the rights and dignities of Palestinians. Sanders is hardly a friend of Palestine; he couldn't be confused with those European or Indian leftists practiced in denouncing Israeli excesses at the drop of a bomb. But he does reflect a shift in American society that's borne out by statistics. While more Americans still sympathise with Israel over Palestine, attitudes are changing. According to a 2016 Pew survey, in

the last 10 years, support among millennials for Israel has declined while tripling for Palestine. For the first time, more people on the American Left (classified as 'liberal Democrats') support Palestine than Israel. Israel also enjoys less support among minority groups in America. According to a 2015 study, Hispanic Americans on average were 10 points less likely to sympathise with Israel over Palestine than non-Hispanic Americans. So, too, are blacks more critical of Israel. A 2014 Pew survey revealed that African Americans were more likely than white Americans to blame Israel for that summer's conflagration in Gaza and to believe that Israel had used too much force. Blacks, Hispanics, young people and unmarried women together form what American political analysts term 'the rising electorate', which is now a majority of American voters. Staunch support for Israel remains the preserve of older, mostly white Protestants, many of whom believe in a strong US-Israel alliance for millenarian, evangelical reasons. As that group ages and others grow, changing public opinion may encourage new policy imperatives in West Asia. This is not to say that America's firm backing of Israel is about to end. Indeed, one of the few capitals where Donald Trump enjoys a genuinely warm reception is Tel Aviv. Benjamin Netanyahu sees Trump as a more reliable ally than Barack Obama, who was critical of the Israeli prime minister. Still, under Obama in 2016, the Americans agreed to a new package of military aid for Israel worth nearly \$4 billion per year. But the trend is clear. In the long-run, it may transform America's ties with Israel, and drive Israel to seek closer friendships elsewhere. Kanishk Tharoor is the author of Swimmer Among the Stars: Stories. The views expressed are personal.

Good deeds done by you will unexpectedly reward you one day



Ashok Goswami

Our scriptures are full of stories that tell us that good deeds never get wasted and come back to us in shape of good karma. Sometimes, when we are in dire need of help, it manifests from nowhere like a miracle. People, in their course of life, keep accumulating wealth without putting them into any tangible use with the hope that someday they would need it. Thereafter, too much wealth is left that leads to inheritance issues and many a times inheritors gets entangled in legal hassles. Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal. Innervoice@hindustantimes.com