



A thought for today

In a mature economy like India's an independent central bank, responsible central bank, is really central to success

BEN BERNANKE

Miles To Go

It is premature to conclude India has entered a new era on inflation, focus on reforms instead

The headline inflation in June was 1.54%, breaching the range of 2% to 6% Reserve Bank of India targets. What adds salience to the June number is that once again forecasts, including that of RBI, have overestimated inflation. This unsurprisingly leads to calls for a reduction in RBI's policy rate and a narrative of a central bank out of sync with reality. However, it is prudent to look beyond headline numbers to ask questions of the nature of the current inflation trajectory and the relevance of a reduction in RBI's policy rate to boosting economic growth.

The highlight of the downward drift in inflation rate over the last year is the spectacular collapse in food prices. To illustrate, last June food prices were inflating at 7.79% but a year later they contracted by 2.12%. This trend coincides with a year in which the economy was unsettled on account of demonetisation. It is difficult to disentangle the impact of this shock from other factors influencing agriculture, which makes it unwise to conclude we have entered an era of stable food prices. This does not preclude the possibility of an interest rate cut by RBI's monetary policy committee in the near future. But as yet, there is no convincing explanation of a paradigm shift in India's inflation trajectory.

If there is a cut in interest rate, will it revive private investment? Unlikely, as private investment has not been positively influenced by the current spell of loosening monetary policy which began in January 2015. The weak financial state of some heavily indebted companies and the attendant bad loan problem of banks have dragged down investment and sentiments. In this scenario, interest rate cuts are unlikely to offset a host of other negative factors.

The way out is for the government to build on some structural reforms it has initiated. Institutional changes such as retooling the inflation fighting architecture at RBI should be allowed to play out. This ought to be supplemented, on the interest rate front, by the government scrupulously following its own rules to link small savings rate to market rates. With the mandate that NDA has and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's credibility it is time for a serious attempt to reform India's land and labour markets. They have a greater bearing on India's future than interest rates.



Virgin To Cow

Now the censor board wants to beep out Amartya Sen - it's becoming dottier by the day

Maybe he sees himself as a superstar. It's not just that ever since Pahlaj Nihalani took office as the chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification in January 2015, it has been ceaselessly in the spotlight. That February itself he set both filmmakers and audiences to scratching their heads - by objecting to "double meaning any kind of words (sic)". But what couldn't have been known in those early days was how the dominion of sarkari scissorhands would expand in ever more capricious ways. Latest headlines concern an attempt to lord over The Argumentative Indian, a documentary on Amartya Sen.

CBFC wants to beep out the Nobel Laureate when he says 'Gujarat', 'Hindu India', 'cow' and 'Hindutva view of India'. This is passing strange. It's of course been going snip-snip on a galaxy of scenes and dialogue but one thought the general objection was to sexual or supposedly unsanskari material and swearing. Exactly what does the 'Hindutva view of India' have in common with 'virgin', 'intercourse', 'bastard', 'saale' and 'haramzade'? And since when has 'cow' become akin to a curse word that should be beeped out?

For our filmmakers it's excruciating. They have created a cinema that stands tall in the world but is being knocked about at home, gutting a key source of Indian soft power: Uda Punjab had to face off girta censor Lipstick Under My Burkha had to bust a gut to be unveiled. Centre must bring sanity back by implementing the counsel of the Shyam Benegal committee, whereby CBFC should certify films not censor them. Meanwhile Sen appreciates that even for people without an iota of interest in him, India's censor board has made The Argumentative Indian a film to watch.



Wild ghoos chase

The country's biggest service sector is in a quandary thanks to GST

Jug Suraiya



Two representatives of an unorganised sector which is the biggest service provider in India.

1st representative: This GST business is creating a lot of golmal for us. Gol has never been more mal, thanks to GST. To begin with, should what we provide be defined as a good or as a service?

2nd rep: Well, what we provide could be defined as either, or both.
1st rep: You have a point. Some would call what we provide a good, because they feel that they get something they think is good out of it. Then there are those who'd say that what we provide is really a service.

2nd rep: So when you put the two together, you come to the conclusion that what we provide is both a good and a service. In short a good service.
1st rep: Which means we ought to charge a GST on it.
2nd rep: Not just a GST, but a double GST.

1st rep: Double GST?
2nd rep: Sure. One GST for the good, and the second GST for the service. So that's two GSTs, or a double GST. Take your pick.
1st rep: Wow. Two GSTs, huh? That's really cool.

2nd rep: Which means that on top of what we normally charge, we should add not one but two GSTs to it.
1st rep: Bang on. The problem that's creating the golmal is at what rate should the two GSTs be charged. Should it be 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent, or 28 per cent? Our union bosses can't seem to find a solution to the problem.

1st rep: That is a problem. We bribe-takers - or ghooswalas - provide the biggest good cum service in the country. But at what rate should we charge GST on the bribes, or ghoos, that we take?
2nd rep: Hey, I've got an idea! Why don't we add up 5 and 12 and 18 and 28 and charge 63 per cent GST on bribes?
1st rep: Great idea! GST zindabad - God Save Thievery.

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Allah, With Lord Shiva

Are terror and political mobilisations destroying the composite path in Kashmir and Bengal?

Saba Naqvi



I made the most extreme journey of my life, both exhilarating and terrifying as great beauty can be, two decades ago. I climbed up and down to the Amarnath cave in just 12 hours, before the yatra season began.

The traditional yatra route begins from Pahalgam and takes three and a half days to reach the cave. As mountain paths go it's tolerable. I took the route from Sonemarg that involved climbing from 9,000 to 14,000 feet and descending in 12 hours. There were four of us with four mountain guides and ponies. Two hours into the journey the track vanished and the ponies began to slip.

The guides hammered a path through the ice and we crossed glaciers in a human chain, four novices between four firm footed mountain men. I will never forget Ghulam Rasool who kept shouting "don't look down...never look down". When the path cleared we would look down at the gorge below to see mountain springs gurgling under ice bridges only to vanish in a sheet of snow.

The cave itself was a fascinating formation wedged between two ranges. Inside water dripped onto three stalagmites shaped like ice lingams, the largest symbolising Shiva, while the other two represented Parvati and Ganesh. Having reached I wanted to just collapse with exhaustion and light headedness. One can imagine people having a religious vision in such stark beauty.

Today the beauty is reportedly a little worn out and ecosystem damaged from the sheer numbers who make the journey. Downhill can be harder after a long trek as knees begin to jam. Descending after what seemed like a near death experience, I fell and went slipping down a glacier.

Ghulam Rasool and Sikander Baksh raced down and hauled me up. Allah is with you; Lord Shiva is with you, they kept repeating, as they mostly dragged me down the mountain for the rest of the journey.



Uday Deshpande

That one presumes is Kashmiriyat, a much contested phrase today suggesting an identity that cuts through religious divides. I had travelled to the Amarnath cave as part of a two year journey across India in search of syncretic traditions: at that time, one third of the offerings made at Amarnath went to the family of Adam Malik, a Muslim shepherd who was believed to have found the cave four centuries ago and led a sadhu to it.

I met the family later in Pathankot as I met the then Purohit of the cave Pandit Shyam Lal, who stood by the old legend and said that the pilgrimage was a Hindu-Muslim enterprise. But even then a counter narrative was being constructed by Hindutva ideologues who said the Adam Malik tale was rubbish and the cave was visited by pilgrims as early as 34 BC.

Kashmiriyat possibly remains a historical promise that could not be realised because the geographical location of the Valley has made it one of

Who can forget the Baul singers, a product of the Sufi-Bhakti amalgam who sing of a universal God. There are both Hindu and Muslim Bauls, the latter being called fakirs

the conflict zones of the world. Fragile traditions do not survive warlike conditions. Militancy, the flight of the Pandit community, growing retreat in Wahhabi Islam by a small section combined with the perception of India as a place that's increasingly hostile to Muslims, has only reinforced separation in the mind. In Kashmir therefore we can contemplate both the making and unmaking of a composite culture.

What of Bengal, where local Islam was syncretic in its origins

and articulation? There is still to be found in the very different beauty of the mangrove forests in the Bay of Bengal, something as strange as a Muslim Goddess, whose idols resemble the Shakti figures so popular in the state. But she is Bonbibi, a Muslim who is meant to be the keeper of the forest.

There are too in Bengal the patachitra painters who have a genuinely fluid identity: they are Muslims who sing and paint pats (scrolls) about Hindu divinities and epics and many have two names: the Hindu "professional" name, besides their "real" Muslim names. And who can forget the Baul singers, a product of the Sufi-Bhakti amalgam who sing of a universal God.

There are both Hindu and Muslim Bauls, the latter being called fakirs. Religious puritans do not like the Bauls and even two decades ago I found examples of Muslim clerics issuing fatwas against them.

Today, the puritanical Islamic orders have only expanded in Bengal and they see the syncretic traditions as "impurities" carried by converts that must be purged. Indeed the tragedy is that many political parties that set out to "protect" secularism also give cover to the headline mullahs and clerics. They really do not give much thought to what is evolving as long as the vote lands in the ballot box.

Juxtapose that with the narrative of Hindutva forces in expansion mode who amazingly enough in the India of today, have been emboldened enough to suggest that Hindus are in mortal danger in Bengal! Ideologues of the Hindu right have been saying that Sharia law is sought to be imposed in parts of Bengal: they use fake images and exaggerated narratives, but the grievance is built on the imagery of the mullah brigade having a measure of political patronage.

Can fragile traditions survive the consequences of vote bank cultivation and then mobilisation on community lines? One no longer knows how things will turn out. I have lost some faith but hang on to beautiful memories.

The writer is a journalist and author

'Muslims in Kashmir have condemned Amarnath yatra attack ... Islam is not for what happened, militants defaming it'

After 7 pilgrims were killed and several injured in the first terrorist attack on the Amarnath yatra in over a decade, Nirmal Singh, deputy chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir spoke to Rohit E David on questions being raised on security lapses, the political fallout of the terror attacks and how local Kashmiris from across the religious and political divide came together to condemn the violence.

■ This gruesome attack on the Amarnath yatra is the first such terror attack on pilgrims in over a decade. Why do you think terrorist groups changed strategy this time?

This attack happened on an Amarnath yatra bus. This vehicle was not part of the routine yatra convoy. The people who were onboard this particular bus had their darshan on July 8 and while coming back they stopped at Srinagar. What happened was that from this point they started on their own without informing the police.

Over the last few years militants have been trying to attack the yatra but they were not succeeding. This attack on the Amarnath yatra has been mounted by terrorists to gain the attention of the world. Militants are showing that they are desperate.

A few militants have been killed in the last couple of days. We are after the

terrorists who have massacred these innocent people. This is a proxy war which is backed by Pakistan. After Prime Minister Narendra Modi completely isolated Pakistan diplomatically, this desperation is being shown by the militants.

■ BJP general secretary and the party's Kashmir point-person Ram Madhav has said that there was no security lapse but a senior CRPF official and J&K CM herself has said that a security lapse has happened. How do you explain this dichotomy?

The pilgrims who were attacked started on their own and didn't follow the standard procedure. Yes, there was a security lapse. The travellers in the bus had passed through a police post; they should have been stopped over there. Minutes after that, the tyre of the bus burst. It took time for them to fix it and there was no security check post after that in the area, which led to this attack.

■ Doesn't this attack demonstrate

that Kashmir is going from bad to worse?

No, absolutely not. Now, Kashmir is slowly returning to normalcy. We are fighting against terrorism at the highest level. There is no compromise on terrorism and separatism. The Kashmiri people are coming out in favour of peace.

This government has provided an atmosphere of development in the state. J&K police is tackling terrorism head on. There has been a positive change: a number of Kashmiri youth are coming forward to join army and police force. More jobs are being created for the youngsters. We are ensuring that students get adequate facilities at the school level.

Around ten polytechnic colleges are being built in the state. Tourism infrastructure is getting special attention because it is the main source of income in the state. We are trying to give round-the-clock electricity to the locals.

■ Could the attack on Amarnath yatra deepen

Hindu-Muslim tensions?

No. After the attack it was the Kashmiri people who came out to help the injured. The Muslim community in the state has condemned the attack on the Amarnath yatra. They have come out with placards saying this is an attack on humanity. Islam is not for what has happened. Such militants are defaming Islam.

■ But why are large parts of Jammu and Kashmir turning into havens for terrorists?

It was in south Kashmir where militants had such hideouts. Now, they are on the run. Terrorists are not able to survive at one place for a longer period. The Kashmiri people are informing the police about miscreants.

■ Doesn't Kashmir need a more mature political approach?

Definitely, everything has to be sorted out on the talks table. We are prepared to listen to everyone who wants to speak within the framework of the Indian constitution - even with the separatists - but they have to abide by our structure. However, these people need to stop supporting and glorifying terrorists.

■ Senior VHP leader Pravin Togadia has demanded the dismissal of the PDP-BJP government in the state after this attack. Your views?

I will not comment on this.

dilbert



Knowing When To Speak And When Not To

Arup Mitra

Words are a kind of action. So, by not speaking, we take recourse to non-action.

Interestingly, in certain moments, non-action can be much better than any action we pursue. For example, mindlessly one may attack you with provocative words just because he has not got what he expected from you. In such situations we usually try to offer a rational explanation, yet it may not be received with due respect. The best course of action then is to keep quiet.

Many people interpret quietness to be a sign of ignorance, the lack of intelligence and even of being at fault. But we forget here that silence helps us save our precious energy to deal with the wrong interpretation more effectively than engaging in exchange of words. Words beget words; they clash with each other and like a web of words, they keep us bound within limits. Beyond words, lies the unlimited sky, which can only be

realised, not expressed.

Through silence, we enter deeper layers of consciousness. We move from one world to another, and ultimately, we may reach a state of one, all-pervading consciousness, which connects entire manifestation. At times, we have the desire of conveying something to someone, but due to certain reasons, we may not do it. Automatically the task will be done if we are able to communicate at a higher plane.

When young Narendranath (later known as Vivekananda), tormented by misery in the family following his father's untimely death, approached Ramakrishna, the latter suggested him to pray to the Goddess who could bestow anything one asks for. However, having said that, Ramakrishna communicated at a higher plane that such a prayer must not come from Narendranath, as

he is meant to work for entire humanity. And that is what happened - he could not pray for any material comfort; only knowledge, conscience, non-attachment and selflessness could be sought.

In Buddha's middle path, silence takes an important position. Instead of wasting words and energy on unnecessary issues, change the course of your route and move away if someone tries to challenge you. Engaging in too much discussion and debate may be good to sharpen your intellect but it can, at the same time, reduce the mental strength, distract from the key area and weaken focus and faith. To acquire profundity, one must remain in isolation for long hours.

Like a reservoir collects huge quantity of water and then allows multiple springs to flow simultaneously, the mind in isolation builds up tremendous

capacity to carry on creative work. As a result one can pursue multiple tasks productively. Besides, the practice of performing meditation while working is possible only with silence.

How to take the entire range of activities as a mode of worship in life and how to remain connected with the Supreme in the midst of all activities are some of the biggest challenges in life. Silence is helpful and initiates in us the process to overcome all attachments that we may develop with karma.

Overcoming karma may appear easier compared to knowledge acquisition and dedication, but performing selfless action is the most difficult task. In silence, we encounter the crudity of mind; how the delusion and dust of desire has made it unhealthy and incapable of undertaking bigger tasks. Once mistakes are identified and the willingness to rectify our selves is developed, perfection follows automatically. In silence, we learn to live and let others live in peace.



Sacredspace

Take A Pause

We will be more successful in all our endeavours if we can let go of the habit of running all the time, and take little pauses to relax and re-centre ourselves. And we'll also have a lot more joy in living.

Thich Nhat Hanh