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## The Hindu Editorial with Vocabulary Weekly PDF

8th - 20th August 2017

### 1. India's once-shoddy transport infrastructure is getting much better

JUST after 1pm on July 31st 2012 lights blinked out across northern India. It was the world's biggest-ever blackout, affecting more than 600m people. It was also a swingeing blow to a transport system that had struggled to cope at the best of times. Hundreds of trains came to a **halt** in open country and in the tunnels of Delhi's underground railway. Some passengers had to wait for hours in shirt-drenching heat.

Five years on, India's famously creaky transport infrastructure is starting to look strong. The power on which parts of it depend has also become far more reliable. The embarrassing system-wide **collapses** of 2012, and an earlier one in 2001, are now scarcely **conceivable**. A rush to expand the electricity supply has been so successful that analysts now warn of a looming excess of generating capacity.

On paper, India has long claimed some of the world's most extensive road and rail networks. That belied reality: roads were twisting, bumpy, crowded and dangerous. Railways were largely single-track, which caused delays, or narrow-gauge, which limited their ability to carry large loads. By car or train it was rare to sustain speeds of more than 50kph (30mph). Puzzled tourists wondered why distances that looked small on a map took forever to traverse. The rail network had barely expanded since the days of the British Raj, despite having to handle some 8bn passengers a year. India's remoter corners were tied to the centre by the thinnest of infrastructure threads. Snows blocked passage to Kashmir for days at a time in winter; floods regularly cut off much of the north-east.

That is changing, too. In recent months Narendra Modi, the prime minister, has inaugurated India's longest road tunnel and longest bridge. The tunnel slashes driving time between Jammu and Srinagar, the winter and summer capitals of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, by two hours. It also makes the route **passable** all year round. The new bridge spans the vast and moody Brahmaputra river, a once-formidable barrier running through the north-eastern state of Assam. Another one nearing completion will, for the first time, link Kashmir by rail to the rest of India. Rising a dizzying 359 metres (1,178 feet) over a gorge, it is the world's tallest railway bridge.

**China does it quicker**

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With less drama, transport networks are being **overhauled**. The central government has doubled budgets for both road- and rail-building since 2012, to a combined total of close to \$30bn a year at today's exchange rate. Progress on building expressways has been unimpressive. Unlike in China, where the government has been able to build big roads at astonishing speed thanks, not least, to its ability to kick farmers off their land at will, in India a more **litigious** system makes it harder to appropriate land. India's government is also more sensitive than China's to farmers' political opinions (in India they can vote in proper elections). Building roads from which their animals and tractors are excluded is unpopular in the Indian countryside. But local governments are **paving** (□□□□□ □□□□) and widening rural roads at a rate of 117km a day.

On the railways, better signalling and tracks have pushed up the speed of faster trains to a respectable 140kph. Work is about to start on India's first dedicated high-speed rail link, a 500-km track between the western city of Ahmedabad and the commercial capital, Mumbai. When the first line of the Delhi Metro opened 15 years ago, many passengers were surprised by its fast, clean and efficient service. India's capital now has six such lines, some running below ground. Seven cities have such rapid-transit systems. Eight more are building them.

More striking still is the growth in air traffic. Domestic passenger numbers have doubled since 2010, to nearly 100m a year. Last year alone the number surged by 23%. Indian airlines are snapping up new aircraft, with some 450 in operation and more than 1,000 on order. Mr Modi's government has brought cheer to fast-growing private airlines. It plans to privatise much or all of the loss-making national carrier, Air India, and has also pushed through an ambitious scheme to encourage the use of smaller airports. Through a mix of subsidies and guarantees to airlines, plus ticket-price caps for passengers, the scheme aims to put 31 unused airports into passenger service and boost connectivity to 12 more that are **reckoned** (□□□□ □□□ □□) to be underserved.

There will be plenty of power to operate them. Installed generating capacity has more than doubled since 2007. The capacity of power projects now being built should double it again from the present level, assuming they are all completed. Improvements to transmission are no less impressive. "We have a more advanced, more flexible grid than Europe's," enthuses Vinayak Chatterjee, an infrastructure consultant. He says the country can now more easily transmit power over long distances, such as from the north-east (which has a surplus) to the often undersupplied south.

The boost to India's infrastructure has not been problem-free. An **exuberant** rush into public-private partnerships for big projects a decade ago left many private firms taking on bigger financial risks than they could manage. Many ventures stalled. Infrastructure-related deals are reckoned to account for around 10% of the nearly \$200bn in non-performing loans that currently bog down India's financial system.

The government's own projects have not all run smoothly, either. A grim report by the state's main auditing agency earlier this year painted a picture of incompetence and corruption in the Indian army's Border Roads Organisation, which is responsible for building strategic roads along India's mountainous border with China. Out of 61 roads that the agency was supposed to have built between 1999 and 2012, only 36% had been completed by 2016, the report revealed. Some of the unfinished ones came to a dead end in impassable gorges, or were abandoned because different stretches turned out to be impossible to join.

That is galling for India, which often rates its progress by comparing itself with China. Having spent three decades beefing up its own infrastructure before India began to get in on the act, the northern giant has set standards that India will still take decades more to match.

### Magical Vocabulary from "The Economist"

1. **Halt (verb)** □□□□□ □□□□□ / □□□□ □□□□ : Bring or come to an abrupt stop.

**Synonyms:** Stop, block, kibosh, stanch, stem, staunch.

**Example:** After a high speed chase lasting several minutes, the car left the road and slid to a halt .

2. **Collapses (Verb)** □□□□□ □□□□□ : (of a structure) fall down or in; give way.

**Synonyms:** Break down, go to pieces, lose control, be overcome, crumble, crack up.

**Example:** The country's economy is about to **collapse**.

3. **Conceivable (adjective)** □□□□□□□ : Capable of being imagined or grasped mentally.

**Synonyms:** Imaginable, possible, plausible, tenable, credible, believable, thinkable, feasible.

**Example:** Cars, credit cards and every other **conceivable** product are today being aimed at women.

**4. Passable (adjective)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□ □□□□ : Just good enough to be acceptable; satisfactory.

**Synonyms:** Adequate, all right, fairly good, acceptable, satisfactory, moderately good.

**Example:** In her opinion, her looks were **passable** enough to be called pretty.

**5. Overhauled (verb)** □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□□□ Take apart (a piece of machinery or equipment) in order to examine it and repair it if necessary.

**Synonyms:** Service, maintain, repair, mend, fix up, rebuild, renovate, recondition.

**Example:** A company that **overhauls** and repairs aircraft engines.

**6. Litigious (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ : Concerned with lawsuits or litigation.

**Synonyms:** Disputatious, contentious, combative.

**Example:** Our increasingly **litigious** society could also have serious consequences for dog owners.

**7. Exuberant (adjective)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□ : Filled with or characterized by a lively energy and excitement.

**Synonyms:** Ebullient, buoyant, cheerful, jaunty, lighthearted, high-spirited, exhilarated, excited, elated.

**Example:** He is an **exuberant** young man full of energy.

## 2. A Judgment for the Ages

The government has pushed the Supreme Court into a dangerous exercise: drawing the boundaries of the right to privacy. It has set the bar so low that almost any ruling by the Supreme Court will be celebrated if it pays lip service to the right to privacy. However, as history has shown us, badly drawn contours will permit the government to exploit our rights for decades. Public debate needs to rise above the government's low bar and engage with the more **nuanced** questions.

This piece begins with addressing the argument that the right to privacy is an alien western idea, and explains why the right to privacy is necessary in India. It then addresses the government's suggestion that the right to privacy can be replaced by a data protection act, by detailing how a data protection statute is much weaker than the fundamental right to



privacy. It then addresses the third popular and **fallacious** question of why we need a right against our own government when we are happy to share our private data with foreign Web-based platforms.

### India and the right to privacy

After **dispensing with** the questions that are distracting citizens from the real issue in this case, this piece discusses the **contours** of the right to privacy. It argues that they must be reinforced on a case-by-case basis in this unpredictable information age. Anything less will render the increasingly critical human right to privacy meaningless.

It is easy in a crowded country, where the feudal family structure prevails, to argue that we do not believe in privacy. This is not true. Indian cultural norms have their unique ways of protecting privacy. Additionally, when we became a democracy, we adopted certain constitutional safeguards. These safeguards include many rights **derided (ridiculed)** as alien western imports — the rights to speech, equality, liberty and privacy. To shrug them off would be to **shrug off** democracy.

We are not the only nation to struggle with what seems like an unfamiliar human right to privacy. Although elements of privacy, such as restrictions on the searching of homes, were in national constitutions, the right to privacy as a whole was not articulated in them. This articulation of right was recognised as an international human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights before it found its way to the national level. If the phrase is new to us, it is new to everyone. Democracies have adopted it because it is essential to preserving the balance of power between governments and citizens, as governments access information technology and big data.

The government has offered to enact a data protection act **in lieu of** the right to privacy. This has unleashed the dangerous idea that a data protection statute is a substitute for a fundamental right to privacy.

### Why it's a fundamental right

A data protection statute is **flimsy** in comparison to a fundamental right to privacy. It can be **repealed** or amended, and other laws can be written to prevail over it. The government can exempt itself so that we have rights against private companies but not against the government. In contrast, the fundamental right to privacy cannot be taken away or **undermined** by the government: every law and every action threatening that right can be challenged before the judiciary. If we have a strong fundamental right, the government

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will never be able to give itself the power to go through our emails, search engine history, cupboards, pockets or texts without having to justify its intrusions and searches to the judiciary.

We have never needed a fundamental right to privacy more. The government is monitoring citizens closely, interlinking databases from transport and bank accounts to school enrolment and mobile phone connections. Recent news suggests that it will be adding data from our social media accounts to this. The consequences are terrifying. Interlinked databases can lead to comprehensive discrimination such that HIV-positive people, people with mental illness, terminal illnesses, divorces or marginalised community backgrounds are denied jobs, homes and medical care. At its worst, unrestricted monitoring of citizens can lead to identification and suppression of dissent in a manner **reminiscent** of Stasi Germany. With no independent information and no dissent, there is no democracy.

The argument that government access to our personal information is justified because Facebook has it anyway is fallacious. Neither entity should have unrestricted access to this information. Governments are currently far more powerful than Facebook, with their control of the police, the army and other instruments of force, which is why human rights protect us from government power. However as online platforms amass power and influence, they pose a potential threat to human rights. Work is being done on ways to hold them also accountable.

### **Contours of privacy**

The potential contours of the right to privacy are really the critical question in the case before the Supreme Court. The court must guard against upholding the right but defining its contours in a way that undoes it. This was the court's big mistake in its phone-tapping judgment, where it created such an ineffective oversight mechanism that it might as well have permitted the government to tap phones at will.

There is no need to create new limits for the right to privacy if the Supreme Court rules that it may be read into the rights to life, liberty and speech as it has in the past, or read into any other fundamental right in the future. The judiciary can then continue applying the existing grounds of restriction from the Constitution.

If the Supreme Court is to rule in a truly meaningful way this time, it will need to define the right to privacy in a manner that makes it difficult to undermine. It can outline the core of this right with examples, to ensure that privacy **jurisprudence** moves forward, not backwards. It can articulate clearly what cannot be excluded from the of the right to

privacy, such as surveillance of communication, access to personal data, publication of personal information and the interlinking of databases of personal information.

But most importantly, the court can acknowledge that it is impossible for judges in 2017 to comprehend the future threats to the right to privacy that technology will invent; it can give future Supreme Court judges the power to use its privacy principles to adjudicate these cases.

Future judges will be confronted with the Internet of Things, big data, bio-hacking, algorithms and potentially even artificial intelligence, and a country in which a citizen is monitored down to her heartbeat. Technology is already able to predict our moods, political leanings, retail preferences, relationships and medical condition with **eerie (strange)** efficiency. This will only escalate. If we, the citizens of India, want to hold on to our power and agency, we will need the right to privacy to guard against this invasiveness.

### Magical Vocabulary from “The Hindu Editorial”

**1. Nuance (Noun)** □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□ / □□□□, □□□, □□, □□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□ □□ □□□ : A subtle difference in or shade of meaning, expression, or sound.

**Synonyms:** Fine distinction, subtle difference, shade, shading, gradation, variation, degree, subtlety, nicety.

**Example:** He needs to get a little bigger, but he understands the **nuances** of a difficult position.

**2. Fallacious (adjective)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : Based on a mistaken belief.

**Synonyms:** Erroneous, false, untrue, wrong, incorrect, flawed, inaccurate, mistaken, misinformed.

**Example:** Having money makes you happy is a **fallacy** because happiness has nothing to do with wealth.

**3. Dispense with (Phrasal verb)** □□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□ : Get rid of something (not in a need).

**Synonyms:** Separate, cast loose, disconnect, disengage, dispense with, waive, relinquish, forgo, foreswear, forego.

**Example:** People who believe we can **dispense with** government subsidies don't realize how much they need them.

**4. Contour (noun) Contour :** An outline representing or bounding the shape or form of something.

**Synonyms:** Figuration, Delineation, Silhouette, Outline, figure, silhouette, profile.

**Example:** We take for granted the unique shapes and **contours** of ourselves, as easily as we forget, or perhaps don't consider, our ancestry.

**5. Shrug off (phrasal verb) □□□□□ :** To ignore something unpleasant or offensive as if it meant something else.

**Synonyms:** Brush Off, Dismiss, To Remove, To Ignore.

**Example:** She **shrugged off** the criticism as harmless.

**6. In lieu of (adverb) □□ □□□□□ □□/ □□ □□□□ :** In place of something; instead of something.

**Synonyms:** Instead of, for, in lieu of, in personal capacity , Alternatively, In place of, As a substitute.

**Example:** We gave money to charity **in lieu of** sending flowers to the funeral.

**6. Flimsy (adjective) □□□□□□□/□□□□□□□/ □□□□□□ :** Comparatively light and insubstantial; easily damaged.

**Synonyms:** Insubstantial, thin, weak, unconvincing, slight.

**Example:** Some have supposed on very **flimsy** evidence that he quarrelled with the WB court.

**8. Undermine (verb) □□□□□□ □□□□/ □□□□□□□□ □□□□ :** Damage or weaken (someone or something), especially gradually or insidiously.

**Synonyms:** Subvert, undercut, sabotage, threaten, weaken, compromise, diminish, reduce, impair, mar.

**Example:** That **undermined** the hard power strategy of the country in a very concrete way.

9. **Reminiscent (adjective)** □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□: Tending to bring a memory, mood, or image, for example, subtly or indirectly to mind:

**Synonyms:** Redolent, resonant, remindful, evocative.

**Example:** The boy spread his arms with a small grin, taking on a pose reminiscent of a model.

10. **Jurisprudence (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□ : A division, type, or particular body of law

**Synonyms:** Constitution, Legislation, Statute, Regulation, impounding.

**Example:** In the High courts, **jurisprudence** is often used to help make rulings on difficult cases.

11. **Purview (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□: The scope of the influence or concerns of something.

**Synonyms:** Area of operations, operational area, limit, range, border, boundary, limitation.

**Example:** It is not within the **purview** of the legal system to help us grieve.

12. **Eerie (adjective)** □□□□□□ / □□□□: Someone or something that is mysterious, frightening, spooky and creepy.

**Synonyms:** Uncanny Strange, Bizarre, Weird, Frightening, unnatural.

**Example:** The sky became dark quickly, causing an **eerie** glow from the oncoming storm.

### 3. China's grand project

Western firms are coining it along China's One Belt, One Road.

"MUTUAL benefit, joint responsibility and shared destiny," sings a **choir** of **enthusiastic** schoolgirls in a music video called "The Belt and Road, Sing Along" from Xinhua, a news service run by the Chinese government, that mixes shots of cranes and shipping containers with people enjoying foreign landmarks. Western firms are scarcely less **optimistic**. Launched by China in 2013, the One Belt, One Road policy, known as OBOR, has two parts.



There is a land-based “belt” from China to Europe, evoking old Silk Road trade paths, then a “road” referring to **ancient** maritime routes.

OBOR will span 65 countries and China has so far invested over \$900bn in projects ranging from highways in Pakistan to railway lines in Thailand. Western multinationals, spotting a **bonanza**, are selling billions of dollars of equipment, technology and services to Chinese firms building along it.

America’s General Electric (GE) made sales of \$2.3bn in equipment orders from OBOR projects in 2016, almost three times the total for the previous year. John Rice, the firm’s vice-chair, expects the firm to enjoy double-digit growth in revenues along OBOR in coming years. Other firms, such as Caterpillar, Honeywell, and ABB, global engineering giants, DHL, a logistics company, Linde and BASF, two industrial gas and chemicals manufacturers, and Maersk Group, a shipping firm, rattle off lists of OBOR projects. Deutsche Bank has structured eight trade deals around it and has an agreement with the China Development Bank, one of China’s policy lenders, to fund several OBOR schemes.

All the activity has confounded early **sceptics**. They noted that in the past 15 years as China industrialised, the country’s companies ran construction projects over an expanse approximately equivalent to the built area of all western Europe with very little help from foreign firms.

Yet OBOR has highlighted that Chinese groups have little experience abroad, and that their Western counterparts offer a technological edge and thorough knowledge of local conditions across the OBOR region, from Tajikistan to Thailand. Partnering with Western multinationals also gives Chinese companies credibility, particularly with financial institutions. One Western executive admits that Chinese companies make liberal use of his firm’s name in OBOR project presentations to raise finance even though it is only marginally involved.

### **Below the belt**

Some executives worry that OBOR may have its downsides in the longer term. China wants to open up new markets for Chinese firms in sectors that are currently dominated by Western companies, across industries ranging from engineering and telecoms to shipping and e-commerce. Western firms are profiting handsomely from OBOR itself, but Chinese ones even more so. A database of open-source information collated by the Reconnecting



Asia Project, run by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a think-tank in Washington, DC, shows that 86% of OBOR projects have Chinese contractors, 27% have local ones and only 18% have contractors of foreign origin.

Chinese firms are moving beyond contract work to become operators of projects and investors too. Their Western competitors may win lots of business in the OBOR countries only for as long as their technological advantage lasts. That lead in turn will be **eroded** as Western companies work with Chinese partners on OBOR. In 2016 alone, ABB did business with more than 400 Chinese enterprises, helping them adjust for huge differences in construction and engineering standards across countries. Such firms will learn and advance in the process.

Yet for now, Western companies are focused on the opportunities. Jean-Pascal Tricoire, the Hong Kong-based chief executive of Schneider Electric, a French energy-services firm, says that for his company OBOR is one of the most important plans of the early part of this century. Honeywell has recently formed a team called “East to Rest” that manages sales and marketing to mainland firms that are expanding abroad. As a goateed singer in Xinhua’s music video promises Chinese viewers, “when Belt and Road reaches Europe, Europe’s red wine is delivered to the doorstep half a month earlier”. For years to come, OBOR looks likely to be the toast of Western boardrooms, too.

### Magical Vocabulary from “The Economist”

**1. Choir (noun)** □□□□-□□□□□: An organized group of singers, typically one that takes part in church services or performs regularly in public.

**Synonyms:** Singers, chorus, chorale, choral society, consort.

**Example:** He soon became our church organist and also helped with the church **choir** .

**2. Enthusiastic (adjective)** □□□□□□□: Having or showing intense and eager enjoyment, interest, or approval.

**Synonyms:** Eager, keen, avid, ardent, fervent, passionate, ebullient, zealous

**Example:** The cold wet evenings are not a deterrent to the training of the **enthusiastic** group.

**3. Optimistic (adjective)** □□□□□□□: Hopeful and confident about the future.



**Synonyms:** Hopeful, confident, positive, cheerful, cheery, sanguine, bright, buoyant, full of hope.

**Example:** I am guardedly **optimistic** that the president will nominate a strong conservative.

**4. Ancient (adjective)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□ □□□ □□ : Belonging to the very distant past and no longer in existence.

**Synonyms:** Of long ago, early, prehistoric, primeval, primordial, primitive, of yore, foregone.

**Example:** Such fires were rare in the past; most **ancient** blazes barely reached waist level.

**5. Bonanza (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□ A situation or event that creates a sudden increase in wealth, good fortune, or profits.

**Synonyms:** Windfall, godsend, boon, blessing, bonus, stroke of luck, jackpot

**Example:** We joined the Common Market, which was going to give us all a **bonanza** of prosperity.

**6. Sceptics (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : A person inclined to question or doubt all accepted opinions.

**Synonyms:** Agnostic, atheist, unbeliever, nonbeliever, disbeliever, doubting Thomas

**Example:** Good journalists should be outsiders, questioners, **sceptics** , empathisers.

**7. Erode (verb)** □□□□ □□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□□□ : To cause to diminish or deteriorate.

**Synonyms:** Disintegrate, crumble, deteriorate, corrode, spoil.

**Example:** All of this leaves gnawing questions, questions that **erode** consumer confidence.

## 4. The price of jam How and why road-pricing will happen

IN **1868** the world’s first traffic light was installed outside the Houses of Parliament. The gaslit signal controlled the flow of London carriages—at least for a few weeks. For, soon



enough, the gas ignited. The resulting **explosion** knocked the helmet off a policeman's head, and left him badly burned.

Efforts to ease **congestion** no longer literally blow up in your face, but recent schemes have run into trouble, too. In 2003 Ken Livingstone, then London's mayor, introduced a congestion-charging zone (CCZ). Motorists pay up to £11.50 a day (\$15.20) to drive into the centre of the city. Since 2000 the number of cars entering central London has fallen by nearly a quarter. But congestion is rising again, a result of vans and taxis clocking up more miles within the zone, as well as new lanes for buses and Lycra-clad **commuters** that have reduced the road space for cars. More minutes are lost to delays than before the CCZ. The average vehicle speed has fallen from 19.9 miles (32.0km) per hour in 2013 to 17.7mph (28.5kph) in 2016.

In response, London, like other heaving parts of the world, is looking at a more radical approach to reduce congestion. In January the London Assembly, the elected body that oversees the mayor, published a report calling for the city to develop a system of road-pricing that varies by when, how much and where drivers use the roads. Singapore, which already has the world's most comprehensive road-pricing system, is introducing a new one in 2020 that uses cars' global positioning systems (GPS) to charge motorists more **precisely**. Other schemes are being tried out in American states such as California and Oregon.

All of which pleases economists. Using prices to ration a **scarce** resource, such as space on busy roads at busy times, makes sense. Those who consume a good should pay for it. Road-pricing is also more efficient than the typical ways drivers are charged for imposing costs on others: taxes on fuel and on car ownership. Neither penalises driving in congested conditions, which causes extra pollution and crimps productivity by delaying workers and deliveries, and disrupting supply chains. And although congestion zones help, they are blunt instruments; ideally, road pricing would adjust to traffic flows in real time.

Yet economists are not normal people. Most voters hate taxes on driving. Even if they grudgingly accept existing ones, they **squeal** about any increases. In Britain, which Margaret Thatcher called a "great car-owning democracy", duties on fuel have been frozen since 2011 following pressure from drivers' groups. Nineteen American states have not raised their "gas taxes" in at least a decade; Oklahoma's levy has been frozen for 30 years.

### **The not-so-fast and the furious**

Many drivers would rather "pay" by queuing than through road-pricing. The Netherlands hoped to run a 60,000-vehicle trial of road-pricing in 2011, on the way to a nationwide



scheme. But opposition politicians and motoring organisations fought so hard that the plans were dropped.

Governments will nevertheless soon have to find new ways of making drivers pay. That is not because congestion will worsen otherwise—though it will. Rather, tax revenue from motoring is drying up.

One reason for this is the spread of ride-hailing and ride-sharing. In London drivers for firms like Uber can circulate all day inside the CCZ, picking up fares, while being exempt from the charge. The number of private-hire vehicles that entered the zone at least once rose from 50,000 in March 2013 to 85,000 in November 2016. The number of licensed drivers rose from 67,000 to 115,500 over the same period. (In the future self-driving cars may replace these workers, further depleting government coffers, since there will be fewer car owners to tax.) In total private-hire vehicles make up 38% of car traffic in central London, almost double the share of traditional black taxis.

The second reason for dwindling revenue—increasingly efficient cars—is even more important. Cars’ fuel efficiency has roughly doubled in the past 25 years. Partly as a result, the tax take from fuel and vehicle duties in Britain has declined by £812m per year in real terms over the past five years, according to Gergely Raccuja, an economist who on July 13th won the Wolfson prize, an economics competition run by Policy Exchange, a British think-tank, for a paper on road taxation. During the same period the total amount of miles driven increased.

Electric vehicles will further widen the gap between traffic and taxes. Paal Brevik Wangsness of the Institute of Transport Economics in Norway, the country where electric-car ownership is highest, points out that electric vehicles not only incur no fuel duty, but often attract government subsidies. British drivers, for example, can get £4,500 off the cost of electric cars such as a Nissan Leaf or a Tesla Model X. Even if these types of subsidies fall as cars become cheaper, they will require infrastructure such as charging points and cables.

### **Get your motor runnin’**

For Mr Raccuja, a fair and radical way to pay for the costs of car use would be to scrap duties on fuel and ownership, and replace them with a “road tax”. His new levy would be a per-mile charge that varied depending on a car’s weight and emissions, thereby making drivers with road-crushing and air-polluting vehicles pay more. Mr Raccuja notes that the charge could also be higher in more congested places.

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Such schemes will doubtless **infuriate** motorists. But there are reasons to believe that a shift toward road-pricing is not just increasingly urgent, but also more **plausible**. London's CCZ was brought in against stiff opposition. Today just one-fifth of Londoners oppose the idea of a more sophisticated road-pricing scheme, according to the London Assembly. After a seven-month trial in 2006, Stockholm residents voted narrowly by 53% to 47% to make the city's congestion zone permanent. But by 2011 polls showed that about 70% of residents backed the scheme.

Car owners may become less of a political force, at least in cities, as people opt against getting behind the wheel. In many rich countries the share of 20-somethings with driving licences is falling. The number of car-less households in America declined from 1960, when the US Census began tracking it, until 2010, since when the tally has begun to tick up. McKinsey, a consultancy, estimates that one in ten vehicles sold by 2030 will be for ride-sharing.

Technology will also make it easier to try road-pricing, including in poorer cities like Jakarta and Bangkok, where traffic is **horrific**. In the past, schemes might have relied on cameras to recognise number plates. Today transponders can ping a radio signal used to track a car's movement. But even that gizmo will soon be obsolete. Many premium vehicles are already connected to the internet using mobile-phone networks. By 2020 most new cars will come with these connections as standard. Together with GPS technology that means it will become easier to track the use of vehicles wherever they are.

Singapore is the model others will try to follow. The world's first CCZ was introduced there in 1975. It used paper permits to control access to a central zone until switching to electronic sensors in 2008. If average speeds are deemed too slow over a three-month period, then the city raises the cost of entrance. According to Woo Sian Boon of Singapore's Land Transport Authority, congestion has fallen as motorists have switched to less busy routes or to the city-state's public transport, or travelled at off-peak times when charges are low.

From 2020 Singapore will take an even more **sophisticated** approach. It will use GPS to vary the amount drivers pay based on distance, time, location and vehicle. The scheme will reduce the need for the unsightly gantries that log drivers in and out. Drivers will receive real-time information about the cost and busyness of roads, encouraging them to consider other routes.

Although less ambitious than Singapore's plans, several American states are using technology to experiment, too. The likes of California and Colorado have accepted federal



grants for trials of various pay-to-drive schemes. The biggest, OReGO in Oregon, started in 2015. Around 1,500 people have signed up. Drivers have devices fitted in their cars that take data from the engines' computers. The gadgets record the amount of fuel used and distance driven, and transmit the data via mobile networks. Motorists are charged based on how far they drive, with each mile costing 1.5 cents, whatever the location or time. Any state fuel tax they have paid (30 cents a gallon) is refunded.

The aim of OReGO is relatively narrow: to find a way to protect state taxes on motoring, even as cars become more fuel-efficient. Whether it will replace the state fuel tax is unclear. Nevertheless, innovative schemes such as OReGO may start to weaken the taboo against new taxes.

They also raise concerns about how motorists' data are used. Tech firms and carmakers are competing for access to the reams of data that drivers create. This can be used to sell them additional services based on location (take a journey on a hot day and your car may tell you where to pull in for an ice cream), the state of their vehicle (by using sensors to suggest maintenance) or the way they drive (by sharing data with insurance companies). Firms can also aggregate data to help create the algorithms for driverless vehicles.

Although Singapore's authorities may not fret much about privacy, others do. The American Civil Liberties Union, an advocacy group, has been active in Oregon; it worries about data leaking or being stolen. In 2015 the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, a think-tank, pointed out that it is often unclear who owns drivers' data and whether they are anonymised.

### Head out on the highway

Clearing this up is possible. And once motorists have become used to the idea of paying for the road space they take up, rates could be tweaked to account for the noise, pollution and the risk of collisions in each location. For the time being governments, national and metropolitan, are proceeding cautiously. But as fuel-tax revenues dry up, that is sure to change.

## Magical Vocabulary from "The Economist"

1. **Explosion (noun)** □□□□□□/ □□□□: A violent and destructive shattering or blowing apart from something, as is caused by a bomb.

**Synonyms:** Detonation, eruption, blowing up, bang, blast, boom, kaboom.

**Example:** The recent **explosion** of popular anger comes after centuries of misrule.

**2. Congestion (Verb)** □□□□ / □□□□ : The state of being overcrowded, esp. with traffic or people

**Synonyms:** Crowding, overcrowding, obstruction, blockage, traffic jam, bottleneck, snarl-up.

**Example:** The incident caused **congestion** on surrounding roads as police cleared the area..

**3. commuters (noun)** □□□□□□□□: A person who travels some distance to work on a regular basis.

**Synonyms:** Daily traveler, traveler, passenger, straphanger.

**Example:** The company provides showers and lockers for bicycle commuters.

**4. Precisely (adverb)** □□□□□□ □□□ □□ / □□□-□□□ : With precision or absolute conformity or in exact terms; without vagueness.

**Synonyms:** Accurately, exactly, clearly, distinctly, strictly.

**Example:** They would stay for **precisely** 60 minutes, and when they left, the fate of the village would be sealed.

**5. Scarce (verb)** □□□□□□ / □□□□: (Especially of food, money, or some other resource) insufficient for the demand.

**Synonyms:** Insufficient, deficient, inadequate, lacking, wanting, at a premium, paltry, negligible, rare.

**Example:** They are used to increase public health and conserve **scarce** resources.

**6. Squeal (verb)** □□□□□□□□ : Make a long, high-pitched cry or noise.

**Synonyms:** Ccreech, scream, shriek, squawk

**Example:** They **squeal** , shiver and cling on to one another, complaining about the temperature.

**7. Infuriate (verb)** □□□□□□□ □□□□ : Make (someone) extremely angry and impatient.

**Synonyms:** Enrage, incense, anger, inflame, exasperate, antagonize, provoke, rile, annoy, irritate.

**Example:** If there is anything that **infuriates** me, it is being ignored or dismissed.

**8. Plausible (adjective)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : (of an argument or statement) seeming reasonable or probable.

**Synonyms:** Credible, reasonable, believable, likely, feasible, tenable, possible, conceivable, imaginable

**Example:** These are all **plausible** objections to globalization as the defining element in contemporary order.

**9. Horrific (adjective)** □□□□ / □□□□□□: Describing unpleasant events or experiences or causing horror.

**Synonyms:** Dreadful, horrendous, horrible, frightful, fearful, awful, terrible, atrocious, heinous.

**Example:** The **horrific** accident happened when the two sides of a grave he was digging caved in on him.

**10. Sophisticated (adjective)** □□□□ / □□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□: (of a machine, system, or technique) developed to a high degree of complexity.

**Synonyms:** Revolutionary, futuristic, avant-garde, complex, complicated, intricate, highly evolved.

**Example:** In the India, we are more subtle, we are more **sophisticated**.

## 5. Supplemental income

The concept of a basic income must be qualified to restrict beneficiaries to groups that are easily identified.

There has been a lot of discussion on universal basic income (UBI) in both developed and developing countries. The primary objective is to enable every citizen to have a certain minimum income. The term 'universal' is meant to connote that the minimum or basic income will be provided to everyone irrespective of whatever their current income is. The adoption of a universal basic income can impose a burden on the fiscal which is well beyond the capabilities of most developing countries, including India. In discussing the applicability of the concept of basic income to India, three questions arise. The first is whether it should be 'universal' or 'restricted'; the second is what the level of minimum income is and how



this is to be determined; and the third is about the financing mechanism for implementing such a scheme.

### **Cash versus services**

Above all, there is a philosophical question, whether support to **vulnerable** sections should be in the form of goods and services or as cash. Cash gives the **discretion** to beneficiaries to spend it any way they like. But it is assumed they would be wise in their discretion. On the other hand, the provision of services or goods directly to beneficiaries may be directed to achieve certain objectives in terms of nutrition or health or education. In the provision of services, the concern is about leakages and quality of service. Some countries have adopted a middle path of conditional transfers, which means that transfers in the form of cash are subject to the condition that they are spent on meeting defined needs.

However, as far as India is concerned, we are not starting with a clean state. There are a whole lot of services provided by the state, and it would be impossible to knock them off and substitute them with general income support. We need to think of income support as a supplement to services already provided even though a hard look at some of the provisions is absolutely essential. Poor quality of services from government-run institutions has become a matter of concern.

### **'Universal' or restricted?**

Coming to the concept of the UBI, it is necessary to first decide whether income supplements should be 'universal' or limited to certain easily identifiable groups. Most calculations involving the provision of income to one and all are beyond the capabilities of the present Central government Budget unless the basic income is fixed at too low a level. It is extremely difficult to cut so-called implied subsidies or hidden subsidies in order to fund resources, as some proponents argue. These supports range from subsidised bus fares to subsidised power tariff. The attempt must be to think in terms of reducing the number of beneficiaries using easily definable criteria. Elaborate exercises for identification will defeat the purpose. It is true that a universal scheme is easy to implement. Feasibility is the critical question. There is also the consideration of fairness. But strict targeting will run into complex problems of identification.

### **Minimum increase**

The issue whether the scheme should be universal or restricted depends on the level of basic income that is proposed to be provided. If we were to treat the cut-off used to define

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poverty as the minimum income, then the total fiscal burden would be **enormous**. This apart, there is no consensus regarding what that cut-off should be. Our analysis using different poverty lines shows that poverty is concentrated around the poverty line. In fact, more than 60% of the total poor lies between 75% of the poverty line and the poverty line. Therefore, what is needed is a supplement to fill the poverty gap. One alternative would be to determine the required income supplement from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The total annual income supplement can be equivalent to 100 days of the wages prescribed under the MGNREGS. This is equivalent to ₹20,000 per year. This amount can be treated as the income supplement.

The next question is who the beneficiaries should be. Here again, it is difficult to cover the entire population. Even providing one person per household with this income will mean ₹5 lakh crore per annum, which is 3.3% of GDP. Perhaps what is feasible is a scheme which limits the total expenditure to around 1.5 to 2% of GDP, which is between ₹2 lakh crore and ₹3 lakh crore. We need to evolve a criterion which can restrict the total cost to this amount. One way of doing it will be to limit it to all women above the age of 45. This is an easily identifiable criterion because Aadhaar cards feature the age of the person. However, this is only one alternative. But others may be thought of. Restricting the beneficiaries to the elderly or widows or those with disabilities may have only a limited impact. Making available a minimum of ₹20,000 per year for almost 10 crore people — which means a total expenditure of ₹2 lakh crore — must make a dent on poverty since at least half of them would be for the poor or people a little above the poverty line.

### **Financing the scheme**

The feasibility of raising even ₹2 lakh crore is not easy. Some analysts have suggested that we can remove all exemptions in our tax system which would give us enough money. Apart from the difficulties in removing all exemptions, tax experts advocate removing exemptions so that the basic tax rate can be reduced. Perhaps, out of the ₹2 lakh crore which is needed, ₹1 lakh crore can come from the phasing out of some of the expenditures while the remainder must come from raising additional revenue. Perhaps, one can phase out the MGNREGS, which will realise close to ₹40,000 crore. The employment scheme is very akin to the proposed scheme. Fertilizer subsidies are another item of expenditure which can be eliminated. Perhaps, requesting higher income groups to forego supplemental income will reduce the expenditure, as has been done successfully in the case of cooking gas.

To conclude, introducing the UBI is unrealistic. In fact, the concept of a basic income must be turned essentially into a supplemental income. Such a scheme will be feasible provided

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we restrict the beneficiaries to groups which can be easily identified. This restriction essentially comes from fiscal compulsions. Regarding finances, it is not easy to remove all implicit subsidies. The design for financing the scheme has to be viewed in a more pragmatic way. Restricting the fiscal burden to 1.5 to 2% of GDP seems desirable and feasible. Half of this can come from phasing out some of the existing expenditures while the other half can come by raising fresh revenue. Lastly, the proposal here refers only to the income supplement that can be provided by the Central government. Similar efforts can be made by the respective State governments, if they so desire.

## 6. India must protect its food-givers

The slogan **Jai Jawan Jai Kisan** holds **resonance** for the spirit of those who secure us along the borders and those who provide us food. But over the years, our 'kisan **consciousness**' just seems to have **vanished** into thin air, leaving millions of our farmers struggling for a basic livelihood. We appear to have consistently evaded our responsibility leaving our food givers with everyday **agony** and forcing them to commit suicide, almost by the hour. Over 300,000 farmers have committed suicide in India since 1995.

A majority of them are concentrated in five major agricultural states of the country - Maharashtra Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh. Punjab and Tamil Nadu are catching up and many others are joining the list. Farmers' suicides have been steadily increasing. On an average, some 16,000 farmers ended their lives each year between 1995 and 2003 and it has been increasing since then.

India is an agrarian economy with more than 70 per cent citizens depending directly or indirectly on agriculture. But it seems a nation of billions is heartlessly and silently witnessing its life-givers dying so helplessly. Today there is urgent need for greater awareness of the problem.

Why are farmers forced to kill themselves? **Vagaries** of the monsoon, flood, drought, high debt, unthinkable pressures to pay off loans, unkind government policies and sometimes personal problems lead to sheer helplessness. But it seems some politicians and ruling parties in states as well at the Centre have discovered new **alibis** – marital discord, love affairs and impotency – to explain farmer suicides.

While nothing can be more farfetched than assumptions like these, it is not really shocking because often thoughtless and non-functioning bureaucrats feed such irrational **hypotheses**

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to unconcerned ministers who parrot them without checking facts. The logic is simple. The more they invent new reasons for farmers' suicides, the less may be the blame on the government. There are two types of farmers; the rich and the poor.

According to official figures, rich farmers, with large land holdings constitute only 5 per cent of the farming population. The rest are medium and mostly poor. The poor ones form bulk of the farming community and they either have only a few bighas of land or have been reduced to being landless agricultural labourers. Needs of their family and the aspiration to upgrade make them cultivate the lands of village landlords or 'zamindars' on a sharing basis. For this, many take loans from moneylenders who are often the big landowners themselves.

If because of a bad monsoon or any other reason the crop fails, the farmers lose on two fronts - less produce and inability to pay off loans. This cycle of misery goes on season after season. But why do farmers take loans from private money-lenders at higher interest rates and with stringent conditions; why not from banks when we have a robust banking system? Sadly, even shockingly, our banking system is rich-friendly.

It may be impossible to obtain even a small loan without pledging an asset. Poor, landless farmers have nothing to offer and are thus kept out of the loop. So the cycle continues for poor farmers and they are forced to die with debt. It's an irony that our banks are bleeding with over Rs.9 lakh crore as Non Performing Assets standing as loans to the rich who lead expansive lives, while poor farmers kill themselves every day.

This must change. Indian agriculture is almost fully dependent on Nature's moods and the crop pattern is based on that. Kharif and Rabi indicate the two crop-growing seasons. Kharif crops are monsoon crops such as rice, moong, corn, sugarcane, cotton etc.; they are sown in May-June and harvested in October November.

Rabi crops like wheat, mustard etc. are grown during the winter - their seeds are sown at the beginning of winter and are harvested in spring. If the weather lets the farmer down, the crops fail. Going by rainfall data of the last 100 years, it is clear that almost every year or two, drought chases some regions of India and at times many, thus severely affecting all calculations of farmers and planners. We must educate people. In a country where people in the system are ignorant and unmindful of the basic crop blueprint, can we really expect them to understand the woes of farmers and deliver solutions?

How can we have the focus on something that's not in our knowledge bank or active consciousness? Why just babus and irresponsible Members of Parliament I bet 80 per cent of our students in great universities and institutions, readying to become future policy



makers or planners, have little knowledge about Rabi or Kharif crops and how they are linked to a farmer's life and future.

It's time to work at the grassroots in order to transform the status of agriculture and lives of farmers, once and for all. Recently Chief Justice J. S. Kheher and Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, agreeing with the Centre, observed that time and proper management were needed for implementation of policies and that farmers' suicides cannot be tackled overnight. True, no big problem can possibly be solved overnight, but I think the 'words and tone' of our learned judges here should have been of grave 'concern and caution' rather than **trite** logic applicable almost anywhere.

At the very least they could have appointed a high level committee under the chairmanship of a retired Supreme Court Judge with five experts on agricultural-related issues as members. The issue calls for determined will. It requires remedial measures at all levels.

No issue of national dimension can be dealt with overnight. However the incidence of suicides – by the day, by the hour almost – should provoke realisation of an emergency situation, one that demands urgent justice. What should the government do now? I often hear thinkers, planners and concerned citizens ask about a problem that has not just become a national stigma but has been eluding solutions.

The need of the hour is innovative thinking to transform the agriculture sector and the lives of our farmers. In every district, we should have multiple vegetable mandis - small, medium and large - proportionately customized as per needs. The idea should be to provide easy and instant access to poor farmers, many of whom can't even carry produce to a distant marketplace.

The government should encourage either public-private partnerships or even private sector initiatives to bring about a coldstorage revolution in the country. Our vast country needs thousands of area specific mini cold-storages, so that farmers of nearby villages can store their produce without fearing wastage and the compulsion to sell at distress prices. As a country with varied geography, we have large banks of fertile lands suited for specific vegetables and fruits or particular grains. After studying land potential, we must create SAZ - special agricultural zones - and encourage farmers to go for specific cultivation for best export quality produce.

Let this produce from our SAZs be exported around the world to ensure more profits for our farmers. Let our young men and women be trained with required skills to understand the cultivation process, crop-insurance, packing of products, branding, global market dynamics,

export and international distribution processes so that they become facilitators for our simple farmers. In return, they should get exclusive commissions out of the profit.

By this device, we can solve the problems of youth unemployment and at the same time vastly transform the lives of poor farmers too. The Prime Minister is an **astute** and resolute planner. He has been trying to create a niche for the nation in the new age world.

His transformative zeal and skill are not hidden from anyone. One hopes that understanding the extreme plight of the poor 'food givers to the nation', he would create happiness for them and stability for the nation.

### Magical Vocabulary from "The Statesman"

**1. Resonance (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□: The quality in a sound of being deep, full, and reverberating.

**Synonyms:** Ringing, sonority, reverberance, vibrancy, sonorousness, plangency

**Example:** This **resonance** strongly stabilizes benzene and profoundly influences its chemical properties.

**2. Consciousness' (noun)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□□: The state of being awake and aware of one's surroundings.

**Synonyms:** Cognizance, knowingness, awareness.

**Example:** Studying **consciousness** tells us more about how the world is fundamentally strange.

**3. Vanished (verb)** □□□□□: Disappear suddenly and completely.

**Synonyms:** Disappear, be lost to sight/view, become invisible, vanish into thin air, recede from view, dematerialize.

**Example:** We are training people for a type of work that is **vanishing** before our eyes.

**4. Agony (noun)** □□□□□ / □□□□□ □□□□□: Extreme physical or mental suffering.

**Synonyms:** Pain, hurt, suffering, torture, torment, anguish, affliction, trauma, pangs, throes.

**Example:** Very many others suffered those same physical **agonies** .

5. **Vagaries (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□: An unexpected and inexplicable change in a situation or in someone's behavior.

**Synonyms:** Change, fluctuation, variation, quirk, peculiarity, oddity, eccentricity, unpredictability.

**Example:** The problem is that security in old age depends increasingly on the **vagaries** of the stock market.

6. **Alibis (noun)** □□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□ / □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□: A claim or piece of evidence that one was elsewhere when an act, typically a criminal one, is alleged to have taken place.

**Synonyms:** Defense, justification, explanation, reason, exculpation, excuse, self-justification.

**Example:** There are no excuses, no **alibis** and no grounds for recourse.

7. **Hypotheses (noun)** □□□□□□□□: A supposition or proposed explanation made on the basis of limited evidence as a starting point for further investigation.

**Synonyms:** Supposition, speculation, surmise, surmisal, guess, conjecture.

**Example:** The only thing you can do is say the evidence suggests that the **hypothesis** is true.

8. **Trite (adjective)** □□□□-□□□□ / □□□□□□: (of a remark, opinion, or idea) overused and consequently of little import; lacking originality or freshness.

**Synonyms:** Banal, hackneyed, clichéd, platitudinous, vapid, commonplace, conventional, stereotyped, overused.

**Example:** Children need to be aware of the real world, not force-fed **trite** fairytales.

9. **Astute (adjective)** □□□□ / □□□□□□ / □□□□□□: Having or showing an ability to accurately assess situations or people and turn this to one's advantage.

**Synonyms:** Shrewd, sharp, acute, adroit, quick, clever, crafty, intelligent, bright, smart, canny, intuitive

**Example:** She was also an **astute** businesswoman, eventually running three cafés and a catering business.

## 7. Artificial Intelligence

The recent **spat** between Elon Musk, the Chief Executive of SpaceX and Tesla, and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg has added fresh fuel to the public discourse on the future of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is at the heart of Facebook. It **thrives** on data which AI knows how to handle and analyse best. It is not concerned over privacy.

However, Musk believes that AI can take us nearer to the **apocalypse**, by running **amok**. The debate is decades old, but the future of AI may defy our wildest imagination.

When Garry Kasparov, a world chess champion, had lost his famous match against the supercomputer Deep Blue in 1997 after beating it the previous year, Time magazine had commented, "Luddites everywhere were on notice: here was a machine better than humankind's best at a game that depended as much on gut instinct as sheer calculation." A **distraught** Kasparov sighed and rubbed his face in disbelief before **abruptly** walking away.

That was the first time that a machine had beaten an expert in a game that requires intelligence. Since then, milestones have been breached at regular intervals.

In February 2011, history was made again, when IBM's supercomputer Watson beat two contestants on a TV serial called Jeopardy, answering questions that they failed to answer and processing data at an astonishing speed of 500 GB per second, with a RAM of 16 terra bytes. It had access to 200 million pages of material in its memory which it could analyse on live TV within seconds.

Watson won the \$1million prize money. We are living in the era of Artificial Intelligence in which machines have been taught to think like humans and act.

They still lack self-awareness, an essential attribute of human **consciousness** and **cognition**. Robots do not yet know that they are robots. But given the exponential growth of technology, it is only a matter of time before they acquire self-awareness that rivals human intelligence.

The logical conclusion of this process will be the development of machines whose artificial intelligence will surpass human intelligence itself, imbuing super intelligent machines to whom no problem will be difficult enough to solve.



Of course, the advent of such super-intelligent machines will take some years yet to happen. Human intelligence is essential for reasoning, planning, learning, communication (using the rules of natural language), perception, decision making, and the ability to manipulate objects and perform complex tasks.

AI today can handle only some of these tasks, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages, writing reports based on data analytics, etc., though the AI wave-front is being expanded to include new areas of cognition almost on a daily basis. Today's computers have super memories; they can easily perform millions of calculations every second and perform consistently at peak levels combining peak skills for an almost indefinite length of time. Using these calculations, they can break up an object into its tiniest elements ~ pixels, lines, circles, triangles, squares.

This is the way a machine tries to recognise patterns and identify objects. It can possibly identify a rose, but will have no idea about the 'rosiness' of roses. It cannot yet attribute any quality to an object, something the human mind does effortlessly. Machines do not also understand the simplest of things about our physical world, let alone the subtle nuances of the working of the human mind with all its complex web of emotions. Robots are just machines that can be programmed to perform certain **cognitive** tasks, but unlike humans, they cannot anticipate and plan for the future either, at least not yet.

But as human knowledge migrates to the Web, the horizon will expand exponentially. Then they will be able to read, synthesize and intelligently apply all human-machine information, and their non-biological intelligence will someday probably be able to match and then surpass 'the subtlety and range of human intelligence' in almost every sphere, as the futurist Ray Kurzweil visualises in his book, Singularity is Near.

But intelligence also needs emotion; without emotions, we would often find ourselves constrained to make judgments and decisions. The problem is, how do you create a robot with emotions and a value system? Emotions often defy logic and AI is dependent on logic and logic alone.

"Turing Test" is recognised universally as being the touchstone on which the intelligence of a machine is to be measured and determined. Turing had once said, "A computer would deserve to be called intelligent if it could deceive a human into believing that it was human." This simply means that the responses of the machine to a given situation would be no different from that of a human being.

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At Meiji University, Tokyo, scientists have taken the first step to create a robot with self awareness by creating two robots, the first of which was programmed to execute certain motions, and the second to watch and mimic the same. The next step was achieved in 2012 when a robot was created at Yale University that passed the mirror test ~ the ability to recognize oneself in a mirror, which is considered a proof of having a concept of self.

Whether it would be an intelligent design or Darwinian evolution of robotic intelligence is a question which is still openended.

Just as our intelligence was not designed by an **omnipotent** creator but had evolved gradually, it is not necessary that we have to design the intelligence of machines we create and teach them how to think; in all probability they may not think like us, but they will 'think' nevertheless. As Quentin Hardy of the University of California at Berkeley says in his essay, The Beasts of AI Island, intelligence is merely a toolbox we use to reach a given goal, which doesn't entail motives and goals by itself.

The new "Age of Thinking Machines" may even force us to fundamentally rethink and redesign our institutions of governance, allocation, and production which today are far from being perfect. Never before in the history of humanity have we experienced technology changing the entire landscape of the manmachine paradigm so swiftly and so profoundly. Revolutionary breakthroughs have been achieved in image recognition, data analysis, autonomous learning, and the construction of scalable systems.

These have spawned applications that were inconceivable only a decade ago, giving birth to systems that display significant language skills, skills for manipulating objects, learning and problem-solving abilities, factual and procedural knowledge and even some rudimentary imagination. AI is increasingly replacing human decision-making in many areas of cognizance ~ routine administration, engineering and construction, design, data analytics, and even robotics and AI programming itself.

Of course, there is still a long way to **replicate** human intelligence, but it may not lead to any humanlike intelligence. It may usher in an era in which there will probably be no such thing as 'pure' human intelligence, because all humans will be a combination of biological and non-biological systems which will constitute integral parts of our physical bodies, vastly expanding and extending their capabilities. Humans and machines will merge together to create a human-machine civilisation.

The initial impact will be highly disruptive and there will be ethical, socio-economic and other unsettling issues that will have to be addressed requiring a level of maturity that

humanity has not yet perfected. As Quentin says, “We’re building new intelligent beings, but we’re building them within ourselves. It’s only artificial now because it’s new. As it becomes dominant, it will simply become intelligence.

The machines of AI Island are also what we fear may be ourselves within a few generations. And we hope those machine-driven people feel kinship with us, even down to our loneliness and distance from the world, which is also our wellspring of human creativity.”

Man and machine will then become one unified, hybrid entity. These entities will learn to think, emote and empathise in their own ways which might be different from our human thought processes, emotions and expressions of empathy. As the author Clifford Pickover writes, “We’ll share our thoughts and memories with them. We will become one. Our organs may fail and turn to dust, but our Elysian essences will survive.

Computers, or computer/human hybrids, will surpass humans in every area, from art to mathematics to music to sheer intellect. In the future, when our minds merge with artificial agents and also integrate various electronic prostheses, for each of our own real lives we will create multiple simulated lives.”

### **Magical Vocabulary from “The Statesman”**

**1. Spat (verb)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□ / □□□□□ □□□□ : Eject saliva forcibly from one's mouth, sometimes as a gesture of contempt or anger.

**Synonyms:** Applaud, acclaim, clap, expectorate, hawk, gob.

**Example:** There still were the little daily **spats** between them.

**2. Thrives (verb)** □□□□□□ □□□□ / □□□□-□□□□□ : Grow or develop well or vigorously.

**Synonyms:** Flourish, prosper, burgeon, bloom, blossom, mushroom, do well, advance, succeed.

**Example:** When the temperature rises and the sun shines the algae **thrives** and can produce harmful toxins.

**3. Apocalypse (noun)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : The definition of an apocalypse is an event that causes a tremendous amount of damage, perhaps even so much damage that the world ends.

**Synonyms:** Revelation, afflatus, destruction, holocaust, carnage.

**Example:** That was the food supply on which we were going to subsist after the **apocalypse** .

**4. Amok (Adverb)** □□□ □□ □□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ : Behave uncontrollably and disruptively.

**Synonyms:** Demoniac, amuck, possessed, berserk, demoniacal, amuck, murderously.

**Example:** Countries around the world are facing the problem of anarchists running **amok** .

**5. Distraught (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□ : Deeply upset and agitated.

**Synonyms:** Worried, upset, distressed, fraught, overcome, overwrought.

**Example:** The sudden loss of their beloved puppies has left owners **distraught** and desperate.

**6. Abruptly (adverb)** □□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□ : Happening quickly, suddenly or unexpectedly.

**Synonyms:** unexpectedly, hurriedly, precipitately, hastily, brusquely.

**Example:** There was nothing unusual in the final epistle to indicate why the correspondence **abruptly** ended.

**7. Consciousness' (noun)** □□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ : The state of being awake and aware of one's surroundings.

**Synonyms:** Cognizance, knowingness, awareness.

**Example:** Studying consciousness tells us more about how the world is fundamentally strange.

**8. Cognition (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.

**Synonyms:** Perception, discernment, apprehension, learning, understanding, comprehension, insight.

**Example:** The model is also consistent with the growing recognition of nonrational and nonconscious processes in **cognition** .



9. **Omnipotent (adjective)** □□□□□□□□□□ : (of a deity) having unlimited power; able to do anything.

**Synonyms:** all-powerful, almighty, supreme, preeminent, most high, invincible, unconquerable.

**Example:** More importantly, she fails - rare fallibility in a genre where the hero is normally all but **omnipotent** .

## 8. Our collective cross to bear

**Across the South Asian region, the state is culpable of empowering the mob against the weak.**

In India, thugs **assault** Dalits and Muslims employed in the cattle trade in the name of Hindu dharma, a writer is hounded out of two Bengals for saying that minorities have been ill-treated in Bangladesh, priests attack Rohingyas in Myanmar for no other reason than that they are Muslim, in Sri Lanka racists suppress a Tamil minority on grounds of difference, in Pakistan a Christian sweeper is arrested upon accusations of **blaspheming** Islam, and in Nepal people of the hill country disempower those of its plains through constitutional **manoeuvre**. Even Afghanistan, which tends to be seen mainly as the victim of big-power rivalry, has its share of home-grown domination to acknowledge in the condition of the Hazara, a people with a history of living there for at least as long as anyone else. In all these countries, an **entrenched patriarchy** ensures that women are subordinated. Thus, in parts of India it is considered normal for widows to be forced by tradition to board a one-way train to Mathura. And, amidst the beauty of Pakistan's Swat Valley, a girl child is shot and mutilated for seeking the right to go to school.

It would be difficult to name another region of the world that produces as much hate as South Asia. Is there a common thread to these **ghastly** incidents? Yes, there is. These acts are the outcome of identity politics that enforce behaviour based on sectarian values derived from religion. Of significance is that the overwhelming majority of South Asian states are formally democracies. These incidents take place while the state mostly stands by watching. While in some instances the state is an active agent of identity politics, in others it has been captured by its custodians. Across the region, the state in South Asia is **culpable** of empowering the mob against the weak.

**The cost of identity politics**

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As August 15, 1947 was a defining moment for most of the countries of the subcontinent, or at least for the largest number of its people, on this 70th anniversary of their Independence we may want to reflect on what has been gained since. It is apparent that identity politics is ripping apart the social fabric in all the countries of South Asia except tiny Bhutan. But what is less well recognised is that it may have had a role in these countries not moving forward in eliminating socio-economic deprivation, leaving it as one of the most backward regions of the world. South Asia as a region lags behind the rest of the world in human development. When the state responds to identity politics by allowing the mob to dictate its goals, it has the potential of holding back economic and social progress. While class is a significant part of the explanation of why human development has progressed so slowly here, identity politics embraced by the state **camouflages** its abject failure to advance it. This is true everywhere but it is perhaps in Pakistan that the people have suffered most from state-sponsored identity politics.

The economist Mahbub ul Haq pointed out how, on their fiftieth anniversary, while Pakistan's per capita income was 35% greater than India's it had significantly lower levels of literacy, school enrolment and access to safe drinking water. This when by international standards, India itself had low levels of these indicators and was not the best performer even in South Asia. It is not clear how much Pakistan's position has changed by now but it is notable that 50 years into independence, it was not able to provide the most basic of goods to its population. When the state is able to claim legitimacy by resort to identity politics, in this case that of religion, it escapes **scrutiny** of its record on matters secular. Haq also pointed to the dazzling statistic that during a certain phase in their history, India and Pakistan together spent more in the global arms bazaar than Saudi Arabia, a country with per capita income 25 times theirs. This draws our attention to the economic burden of defence expenditure in South Asia. However, it perhaps inadvertently assumes a certain symmetry between India and Pakistan. The territory that was delineated as Pakistan is not disputed. This is not the case with India. Pakistan's military expenditure is directly related to the reason of its state.

### **Ruptured social fabric**

The situation in India is more complex given its diversity. Its early political leadership successfully delegitimised identity politics. There had been agitations for the formation of linguistic States, of course, but they had mostly taken the form of uniting people rather than dividing them. From the 1980s this was to change, however. By now, for close to three decades Uttar Pradesh, a region the size of France and Germany combined, has been ruled by three different political formations all purveying some form of identity politics though

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the exact marker may have varied. It remains the most backward among India's States in terms of human development. Surely a relationship between identity politics and development is evident in the regional variation in India. Once confined to the States, identity politics has since come to occupy a place at the level of the Central government. Between the cynically conceived Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act of 1986 and the cunningly crafted Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Market) Rules, 2017, governance has been communalised to secure the position of political parties.

In the countries of South Asia with their diverse populations, identity politics destroys social cohesion and stands in the way of economic progress. Interestingly, this is equally true for countries with a large minority population, those with an overwhelming majority and those that are near homogenous. Thus, it is quite obvious India cannot hope to enjoy peace if its substantial religious minorities are not treated fairly. For the first time, Indian democracy is under the scanner abroad. Even after a military victory over the Tamil Tigers, Sri Lanka may have lost some international support, not to mention its relative prosperity in South Asia. And Pakistan, which though true to its name has been cleansed of the other, finds itself engulfed by Islamic fundamentalism. Pakistan's deep state is right to say that the country is a victim of terrorism but it is there for all to see that the terrorism emanating from it, targeting sites both in India and within is of its own creation. Ironically, given the intentions of the masterminds of 26/11, Muslims died disproportionately at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus in Mumbai.

### **The only path to progress**

The pursuit of identity as some preordained, undefinable and immeasurable essence exclusive to one's imagined community is a slippery slope to tread. Peace in South Asia can be assured only by secular democracy. Identity politics delays our achieving it.

Plato had thought peace can be assured only if rulers were philosophers and a philosopher was the king. In the infancy of the Indian republic its people came close to experiencing this ideal. One of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's observations was that in times of strife it is to poets that we turn. Thus, as war clouds gathered in Europe in the late 1930s, W.H. Auden wrote: "In the nightmare of the dark / all the dogs of Europe bark / And the living nations wait / each sequestered in its hate."

There is a certain **resemblance** between the moment captured by these lines and our collective condition in South Asia today. A difference though is that unlike in Europe then, hate here is not aimed outside our countries but within them. However, we cannot escape

the consequence of hate even when it is not aimed at us. South Asians can flourish only when hate is quelled. The poet would have said, "Tolerate the mob and lose your country."

### Magical Vocabulary from "The Hindu Editorial"

**1. Assault (verb)** □□□□ / □□□□ □□□-□□□ : Assault is an act that causes verbal or physical injury.

**Synonyms:** Attack, strike, onslaught, offensive, charge, push, thrust, invasion, bombardment, sortie.

**Example:** The series begins with a ferocious military **assault** on Pok.

**2. Blaspheme (verb)** □□□□□□□□ □□□□ / □□□□□□ □□□□ : The act or offense of speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things; profane talk.

**Synonyms:** Profanity, sacrilege, irreligion, irreverence, cursing, impiety, desecration, execration.

**Example:** He was detained on charges of **blasphemy**.

**3. Maneuver (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ : A movement or series of moves requiring skill and care./ carefully guide or manipulate (someone or something) in order to achieve an end.

**Synonyms:** Stratagem, tactic, gambit, ploy, trick, dodge, manipulate, contrive, manage.

**Example:** I had situated myself in the far corner of the classroom, a tactical **maneuver** on my part.

**4. Entrenched (adjective)** □□□□□□ □□□ : (of an attitude, habit, or belief) firmly established and difficult or unlikely to change; ingrained.

**Synonyms:** Ingrained, established, well-established, confirmed, fixed, unshakable, indelible, ineradicable, inexorable.

**Example:** The experiment in equality had no impact on **entrenched** discrimination.

**5. Patriarchy (noun )** □□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ : A family, community, or society based on this system or governed by men.

**Synonyms:** Brush Off, Dismiss, To Remove, To Ignore.

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**Example:** I am constantly trying to break free from the chains of male chauvinism and patriarchy .

**6. Ghastly (adjective)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□□ □□ : causing great horror or fear; frightful or macabre or extremely unwell.

**Synonyms:** Terrible, horrible, grim, awful, dire, frightening, unpleasant, objectionable, disagreeable, distasteful, awful.

**Example:** India has had plenty of **ghastly** crimes, but this was arguably the worst of the lot.

**6. Culpable (adjective)** □□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□ : Deserving of blame or censure; blameworthy.

**Synonyms:** Blameable, blamable, censurable, blameful, blameworthy.

**Example:** It is difficult to apportion blame since both sides seem to be equally **culpable** .

**8. Camouflages (verb)** □□□□□□□ : Hide or disguise the presence of (a person, animal, or object) by means of camouflage.

**Synonyms:** Disguise, hide, conceal, keep hidden, mask, screen, cover (up).

**Example:** 'I am helping you,' a man dressed in **camouflage** told a crying girl.

**9. Scrutiny (noun)** □□□□□□□ / □□□□□ □□□□□ : Critical observation or examination.

**Synonyms:** Examination, inspection, survey, study, perusal, investigation, exploration.

**Example:** Every aspect of local government was placed under **scrutiny**.

**10. Resemblance (noun)** □□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ : It is being kind of like something else, or similar in appearance to something.

**Synonyms:** Similarity, likeness, similitude, correspondence, congruity, congruence, coincidence.

**Example:** It explores many of the same themes but in a style which bears little **resemblance** to its predecessor.

## 9. Banished from Home – I

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Linking violence and trauma to the beautiful Kashmir Valley is indeed ironic. For centuries the beauty and **splendour** of Kashmir as a tranquil paradise has been glorified by poets, singers, travel writers and historians alike. As Rahul Pandita mentions in his **memoir** *Our Moon Has Blood Clots: A Memoir of a Lost Home in Kashmir*, “Kashmir is so beautiful, my grandfather used to say, even the gods are jealous of it. Not only of its beauty, but also of its contribution to art and scholarship”.

Present-day Kashmir is a troubled state, a recurrent flashpoint of political **mayhem**, especially in the post-independence period. The last few decades of the 20th century, especially the 1990s saw the **rapturous** valley being rapidly transformed into a barbaric stage of **prolonged** ethnic cleansing of the native Kashmiri Pandits. As Rahul Pandita has pointed out, though just around three and a half lakh Pandits were affected and around 700 killed, the act of **ethnic** cleansing is comparable to the shocking violence in Bosnia. What is tragic is that most of the Kashmiri Pandits have been forced into permanent exile following their persecution and displacement from the Valley. Pandita uses the word ‘home’ only in the context of Kashmir ~ “It’s only in Kashmir’s context that I use the word ‘home’. I now have a flat in Gurgaon but I use the word ‘house’ for that.” As he **asserted** in the interview: “The idea of home is lost forever.” It is this loss of “idea of home” that keeps on recurring in the writings of Pandits in exile.

It is interesting to observe that the **tyranny, subjugation** and persecution of the Pandits in Kashmir is not a new occurrence. In fact, a close perusal of memoirs and contemporary history affirms that the native Hindus had been persecuted by successive Afghan rulers in the Valley leading to mass exodus in various phases over the centuries to Jammu and other parts of northern India. From the mideighteenth to early nineteenth century, Kashmir, largely under the rule of the Afghans continued the oppression and subjugation of the native population. In fact for most Afghan rulers, tyranny, persecution and repression of the Pandits was an integral part of their political stratagem. In his book, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Walter R Lawrence commented on one of the Afghan governors, Assad Khan: “It was his practice to tie up the Pandits; two and two, in grass sacks and sink them in the Dal lake.” Besides such **humiliation**, as Lawrence affirms in his book, the Pandits were subjected to other forms of **oppression** as well: ‘The Pandits, who formerly wore moustaches, were forced to grow beards, turbans and shoes were forbidden, and the tika or forehead mark was **interdicted**. It is said that the exaggerated forehead marks and the absurdly long turbans now affected by the Pandits, still serve to keep alive the memories of the tyranny of Pathan times. The jazia or polltax on Hindus was revived, and many Brahmins either fled the country, were killed or converted to Islam.’

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It was only under the rule of the Sikhs and the Dogra regimes that the socio-economic position of the Pandits relatively improved. In October 1947, in the post-independence period, during the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh, tribal militants from Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, aided by Pakistani soldiers attacked Kashmir, butchering hundreds of Pandits. It was at this juncture that Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession with India on 26 October 1947, paving the way for the Indian army to drive away the aggressors. In the subsequent decades, Kashmiri Pandits became more vulnerable with the rise of militancy in the Valley during the late 1980s. In their quest for liberation of Kashmir the militants wanted to **obliterate** the Pandits from the valley. In July 1988 the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, a terrorist organization, officially launched its jihad or armed struggle for freedom from India.

They initiated the ethnic cleansing with the **gruesome** murder of the leading Hindu community leader, Pandit Tika Lal Taploo in Srinagar on 14 September 1989. The subsequent months witnessed assassinations of several high profile Hindu personalities. These killings included Justice NK Ganju of the Srinagar High Court and the veteran poet Sarwanand Kaul Premi. The latter, a Gandhian, had participated in the Quit India movement against British rule. Sarwanand Premi had also played a significant role in the Quit Kashmir movement against the Dogra Maharaja of Kashmir in 1946-47. An outstanding scholar, he had translated Tagore's Gitanjali and the Bhagwad Gita into Urdu, Hindi and Kashmiri. A deeply secular personality, he even treasured a rare manuscript of the Koran in his prayer room. Besides advocating the need for a secular Kashmir he became famous with his writings on the biographies of the saint poet Mata Roopa Bhawani, Swami Mirza-Kakji among others. Both Sarwanand and his son Virender were killed by militants in the most gruesome manner. Besides being shot, the police "found their bodies hanging from a tree a day later". The terrorists had "hammered nails between their eyebrows, where the tilak is applied" besides mutilating their bodies with cigarette burns. Alongside these killings, atrocities on Pandits were perpetrated relentlessly as kidnapping and physical torture multiplied. As Shaleen Kumar Singh observes in his memoir Pandits and Dogras: "The whole Kashmir scenario changed in the 1990s, when 3,50,000 Pandits migrated from the Valley and sought refuge in Jammu. Men, women, children were dazed when they found themselves housed in classrooms, temples, inns, sheds, tents and dormitories. They were perplexed and aghast to see the condition they were in. The old presented a pitiable sight. Bleak future, uncertainty and a sense of loss were writ large on the faces of all the Pandits.'

The sudden splurge of violence and fundamentalism came as a rude shock to most people in the Valley. As Subhash Kak expressed in his poem Snow in Srinagar: "Who knew then that



decades later a terror will come to Srinagar/ and I will be unable to see my home where I was born/ where we had played cowries on any new snows”.

Early in January 1990, anti India campaigns blossomed in the Valley in multiple forms. As masked terrorists filled the streets of Srinagar, **inflammatory** speeches were made at the mosques and walls were defaced with posters promoting a strict Islamic way of life. 1990 indeed was a landmark year as the militant outfit Hizb-ul Mujahideen issued an ultimatum for the Pandits to vacate Kashmir or face dire consequences. As editors Siddhartha Gigoo and Varad Sharma aptly summarise in their prefatory observation of A Long Dream of Home: The Persecution, Exodus and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits: “Suspicion, betrayal and mistrust divided the Muslims and the Pandits. Both the communities stood divided on religious and ideological lines. Militants kidnapped and killed several ordinary and **prominent** Kashmiri Pandits. This created so much panic and fear among the Pandit families that they started leaving their homes in Kashmir. Some, who didn’t want to leave, sent their children away and lingered on in their homes for some time, hoping that the turmoil would end.

Some of the Pandits managed to carry a few belongings while most left empty-handed in terror, unable to pack even their necessary household possessions. The security forces including the police were unable to provide protection to the minority community. The authorities in the state and the Centre made no effort to prevent the atrocities committed against the Pandits. Targeted kidnappings and killings, rapes and massacres of Pandits who lingered on became a routine affair. The massacre of Pandits by militants in Sangrampora, Budgamin March 1997, Gool in June 1997, Wandhama near Ganderbal in January 1998 and Nadimarg, Pulwama in March 2003, made it clear that Pandits were not safe in their own land.”

This atmosphere of suspicion also found an echo in verse written in exile. Poet Lalita Pandit immaculately captures this mood of suspicion and betrayal in her poem Anantnag where nature, (the apple trees) mourns at the exodus of its inhabitants. The poem concludes with an eerie picture, a haunted spectacle of uninhabited relics where fear looms large and past visitors are no longer welcome.

### Magical Vocabulary from “The Statesman”

1. **Splendour (noun)** □□□□□□ /□□□□□□□□: Magnificent and splendid appearance; grandeur.

**Synonyms:** Magnificence, sumptuousness, grandeur, impressiveness, resplendence, opulence.

**Example:** A modern bank building has enveloped the Palace Hotel, ornate in nineteenth-century **splendour** .

**2. Memoir (noun)** □□□□□□ / □□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□□□ □□□: A historical account or biography written from personal knowledge or special sources.

**Synonyms:** Autobiography, life story, memories, recollections, reminiscences, journal, diary.

**Example:** Someone who writes a literary **memoir** , for example, is by necessity examining issues of self and identity.

**3. Mayhem (noun)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□: A state of violent disorder or riotous confusion; havoc.

**Synonyms:** Chaos, disorder, havoc, bedlam, pandemonium, tumult, uproar, turmoil, commotion.

**Example:** They have issues boiling away inside and their only outlet is to cause **mayhem** in the streets.

**4. Rapturous (adjective)** □□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ : Characterized by, feeling, or expressing great pleasure or enthusiasm.

**Synonyms:** Ecstatic, joyful, elated, euphoric, enraptured, on cloud nine, in seventh heaven, transported, enchanted.

**Example:** Sakuu was greeted with rapturous applause.

**5. Prolonged (adjective)** □□□□□□□□□□ : Continuing for a long time or longer than usual; lengthy.

**Synonyms:** Extended, drawn-out, protracted, lengthy.

**Example:** It is possible that prices could mark time for a **prolonged** period while earnings catch up.

**6. Ethnic (adjective)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□ □□□□□: Of or relating to a population subgroup (within a larger or dominant national or cultural group) with a common national or cultural tradition.

**Synonyms:** Racial, race-related, ethnological, cultural, national, tribal, ancestral, traditional.

**Example:** He is now exploring **ethnic** music from around the world.

**7. Asserted (verb)** □□ □□□ □□ □□□ / □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ : State a fact or belief confidently and forcefully.

**Synonyms:** Declare, maintain, contend, argue, state, claim, propound, proclaim, announce, pronounce.

**Example:** The company **asserts** that the cuts will not affect development

**8. Subjugation (noun)** □□□ / □□□□□□: To bring under control, especially by military force; conquer.

**Synonyms:** Captivity, mansuetude, subservience, suppression, repression, pacification, subdual.

**Example:** The urgency of the mating season is **subjugated**, for the moment, to the demands of self-preservation.

**9. Tyranny (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□□□: Cruel and oppressive government or rule.

**Synonyms:** Despotism, absolute power, autocracy, dictatorship, totalitarianism, Fascism, oppression.

**Example:** It is still at that stage and of course is a communist **tyranny** still.

**10. Humiliation (noun)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□□: The action of humiliating someone or the state of being humiliated.

**Synonyms:** Embarrassment, mortification, shame, indignity, ignominy, disgrace, discomfiture, dishonour.

**Example:** They suffered the **humiliation** of losing in the opening round.

**11. Oppression (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□: Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control.

**Synonyms:** Persecution, abuse, maltreatment, ill-treatment, tyranny, despotism, repression, suppression.

**Example:** The politicians used their opportunity to inflict mass poverty, **oppression** and murder.

**12. Interdicted (verb)** □□□□□□□□ □□□□□ : Intercept and prevent the movement of (a prohibited commodity or person).

**Synonyms:** Prohibit, forbid, ban, veto, proscribe, embargo, disallow, debar, outlaw, stop, suppress.

**Example:** He is under pressure to eradicate the crop, not **interdict** the trade.

**13. Gruesome (adjective)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□ / □□□□□ : Causing horror and repugnance; frightful and shocking.

**Synonyms:** Grisly, ghastly, frightful, horrid, horrifying, hideous, horrible, horrendous, grim, awful, dire.

**Example:** One of the employees went to check on the missing worker and discovered the **gruesome** murder scene.

**14. Inflammatory (adjective)** □□□□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : (especially of speech or writing) arousing or intended to arouse angry or violent feelings.

**Synonyms:** Provocative, incendiary, inflaming, inciting, agitating, stirring, rousing, provoking, fomenting.

**Example:** Some journalists have attacked the **inflammatory** speeches of some imams.

**15. Prominent (adjective)** □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : Projecting outward or upward from a line or surface; protuberant.

**Synonyms:** Important, well-known, leading, eminent, distinguished, notable, noteworthy, noted, illustrious.

**Example:** The health minister has been particularly **prominent** in the media in this regard.

## 10. Mission Possible: A New India

On 15 February this year, Isro placed 104 satellites into orbit using only a single launch of one vehicle, PSLV-C37. The video of the event, available easily enough on the net, shows the



familiar zoom of a rocket entering space, and then little flicks chase one another into the deep distance until the mission is completed. Only three satellites were Indian; 96 were commissioned by two American companies, Planet Labs and Spire Global.

The acceleration in space, impressive as it is, might be less spectacular than the change taking place on the ground. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has initiated a transformation towards a new India in which historic burdens such as poverty and corruption have been eliminated, and **inheritance** ills like communalism and casteism are only bad memory. His mission has a calendar; the deadline is 2022, when India celebrates its 75th year of independence.

Transformative change needs radical thinking. The economic empowerment of women is being used as a principal cure for poverty. Under Mudra, the PM's signature project for those at the base of the economic pyramid, loans worth Rs 3,55,590 crore have been **disbursed**. Remarkably, 78% of those taking these loans are women.

The PM's housing plan, for the **impoverished**, is an equally big story in gender **emancipation**. A woman can take this home loan as sole owner; but a man needs a woman as co-owner unless he is a widower or bachelor. This is a fundamental shift in the balance of power within a family. Over 25 million women who thought that a gas cylinder was a privilege of the middle class or rich, are now in smokeless kitchens. Swachh Bharat is a means to dignity and better health for women. The list is long.

The objective is to lift about 400 million out of harsh poverty in five years by ensuring that the first fruits and largest share of economic growth go to those who need it most. In a complementary initiative, the PM is using India's proven capability in high-quality, low-cost technology to create efficient, sustainable and corruption-free delivery systems for direct benefits to the poor on an **unprecedented** scale.

Jan Dhan was an essential first step. In 2015, within three months, banks opened 300 million accounts for those who had never crossed the doors of a bank before. Critics **sneered** that these were "cashless". Unsurprisingly, they had missed the point: banks were now serving those without money, rather than those with.

Use of technology for transparency has also become mandatory in the bidding process for government contracts. In a country where, particularly during the long decade between 2004 and 2014, contracts became synonymous with corruption, the change is a virtual revolution, leaving sections of the old political-industrial complex frustrated, angry and desperate to restore the previous order.



New India is being fashioned from embers of the old. Sceptics who cannot **fathom** why Narendra Modi has become the most popular PM in memory need look no further than his comprehensive assault on poverty and corruption.

It surely cannot be anyone's case that through some **twirl** of a magic wand, India should suddenly become free of all ills. Among our difficult legacies is the politics of Hindu-Muslim differences, a tragedy that has **simmered** and often bubbled into conflict. One long-standing dispute has been over the cow, held sacred in Hinduism. Mahatma Gandhi urged an end to cow slaughter; and the lead architect of our Constitution, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, included this as a guiding **tenet** of our Constitution. Beef was banned in most states by Congress governments.

Of late, cow vigilantes have attacked Muslims and Dalits on suspicion of eating or transporting beef. Two incidents attracted wide, and understandable, media coverage: of Pehlu Khan in Rajasthan and Junaid in Haryana.

No government can prevent crime. A government's bona fides are tested by what it does in pursuit of the criminal. In Rajasthan, seven suspects have been charged with murder. The state's chief minister Vasundhara Raje has dismissed as malicious the allegation that her administration was biased and argued the same in this newspaper, in an opened piece headlined 'Mob violence is unacceptable'. Comparisons are not an answer, but she pointed out that murders and mob violence took a higher tally in Rajasthan in 2012, when Congress was in power. In Haryana, five were arrested but the main suspect escaped. Police traced him to Sakri, in Maharashtra, where he thought he had found safety in obscurity. He has now confessed to stabbing Junaid.

On 29 June, PM Modi expressed his **anguish** during the **centenary(the hundredth anniversary of a significant event; a centennial- □□□□□□□)** event of Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat, wondering how much pain Gandhi himself would have felt. Gandhi had offered to die for the cow, but never advocated violence in its name. Finance minister Arun Jaitley has described the incidents as barbaric.

Both voters and politicians are increasingly dismissive of the motivated and fraying narrative of extended guilt. Nitish Kumar, for instance, refused to buy this false propaganda of Congress, whose only electoral **crutch(□□□□□□)** now is the alleged insecurity of minorities.

In 2013, there was an assassination attempt on Narendra Modi during a rally in Patna. At that critical, volatile moment, he said that Hindus and Muslims had a choice: they could

either fight each other, or they could unite to fight the true enemy, poverty. **Fraternity** and prosperity of all Indians is the only **creed** of Narendra Modi.

### Magical Vocabulary from “The Times of India”

**1. Inheritance (noun)** □□□□□□ : Something passed down from your parents to you, or the act of receiving something passed down from your parents.

**Synonyms:** Legacy, bequest, endowment, bestowal, provision, birthright, heritage, patrimony, devise.

**Example:** They won equality in custody and **inheritance** rights for mothers.

**2. Disburse (verb)** □□□□□□ □□□□/ □□□□ □□□□ : To pay out, as from a fund.

**Synonyms:** Pay out, spend, expend, dole out, dish out, hand out, part with, donate, give.

**Example:** The funds are disbursed through banks to the farmers’s accounts.

**3. Emancipation (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□/ □□□□□□ : The fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions; liberation.

**Synonyms:** Discharge, Freeing, Liberation, Liberating, Setting Free, Freedom, Liberty.

**Example:** Religion is meant for the **emancipation** of living beings.

**4. Impoverished (adjective)** □□□□□□ □□ □□□□/ □□□□□□□□ □□□□/ □□□□ : Make (a person or area) poor.

**Synonyms:** Weakened, exhausted, drained, sapped, depleted, spent, barren, unproductive, unfertile.

**Example:** They discourage investment and **impoverish** their people.

**5. Unprecedented (adjective)** □□□□□□□□□□/□□□□□□□□ : Never done or known before.

**Synonyms:** Unheard of, unknown, new, novel, groundbreaking, revolutionary, pioneering.

**Example:** We put together an **unprecedented** ground operation, but it was matched by the zealots on the right.

**6. Sneered (verb)** □□□□□□ □□□□ : Smile or speak in a contemptuous or mocking manner.

**Synonyms:** Scoff at, scorn, disdain, mock, jeer at, insult, slight, slur.

**Example:** He positively **sneered** at me when I announced I was going to take guitar lessons.

**7. Fathom (verb)** □□□□ □□□□/ □□□□ □□ □□ □□□□ : Understand (a difficult problem or an enigmatic person) after much thought.

**Synonyms:** Understand, Comprehend, Grasp, Catch, Perceive.

**Example:** I just couldn't **fathom** why he would want to do such a thing.

**8. Twirl (verb)** □□□□/□□□□□□□□ : Something that is twisted or coiled./ Spin quickly and lightly around, especially repeatedly.

**Synonyms:** Pirouette, spin, whirl, turn, twist, rotation, revolution, gyration, twizzle.

**Example:** The more you practice, the more complicated moves you'll be able to do, like turns and **twirls**.

**9. Simmer (verb)** □□□□ □□ □□□□/ □□□□ □□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□ : Show or feel barely suppressed anger or other strong emotion.

**Synonyms:** Be furious, be enraged, be angry, be incensed, be infuriated, seethe, fume, brim, smolder.

**Example:** She gave him time to **simmer** down after their argument.

**10. Tenet (noun)** □□□□□□□□/□□□□□□□ □□□□ : A principle or belief, especially one of the main principles of a religion or philosophy.

**Synonyms:** Principle, belief, doctrine, precept, creed, credo, article of faith, axiom, dogma.

**Example:** The best way to combat inflation is to stick to the basic **tenets** of sound investing.

**11. Anguish (noun)** □□□□□□□□/□□□□□ : Extreme suffering or grief/ the state of being in pain.

**Synonyms:** Agony, pain, torment, torture, suffering, distress, angst, misery, sorrow, grief, heartache.

**Example:** I was in **anguish** , feeling the pain of my neighbours who had lost relatives.

**12. Fraternity (noun)** □□□□□□□□/ □□□□□□□ : A group of people sharing a common profession or interests.



**Synonyms:** Brotherhood, fellowship, kinship, friendship, (mutual) support, solidarity, community, union.

**Example:** Our dire need is harmony, **fraternity** and solidarity among the people.

**13. Creed (noun)** □□□□□□□□/□□/ □□□□□□ □□□ : A set of beliefs or aims which guide someone's actions.

**Synonyms:** Faith, religion, religious belief, religious persuasion, church, denomination, tenet.

**Example:** This chosen nation myth has been the oldest and most continuous creed in china civil religion.

## 11. Rouhani's challenge

Hassan Rouhani has formally begun his second term as Iran's President in especially challenging circumstances. Conservatives at home are pushing for a hard-line agenda, Sunni states in the Gulf are **consolidating** a regional alliance against Shia-majority Iran, and the U.S. is turning up the heat on the country's missile programme. Mr. Rouhani, who won the election on a moderate platform, had drawn hope during his campaign that he would build on the momentum his first term had generated and initiate social reform. It was never going to be easy, given the resolve of the clerical establishment to push back any major attempt to change the status quo. In Iran's complex, multipolar political system, the President runs the government with a popular mandate but the security establishment reports directly to the Supreme Leader, who can override the government on critical issues. What Mohammad Khatami tried and failed and what Mr. Rouhani tested during his first term was to gradually push pragmatic policies, overcoming the conservative opposition. Mr. Rouhani's decision to go ahead with the nuclear deal despite concerns from the establishment was an example of his successful brinkmanship. The expectation was that in his second term, Mr. Rouhani would expand the reform agenda into domestic politics. The reformists have many demands.

However, one of the first decisions Mr. Rouhani has taken in the new term raises questions about his resolve to initiate meaningful reforms. On Tuesday, he nominated an all-men cabinet, which needs to be approved by Parliament. The chances of women nominees getting through the parliamentary process were high this time given that reformists and moderates make up a majority in the Majlis. Still, Mr. Rouhani preferred not to take the risk of **antagonising** conservatives. To be sure, these are hard times for a moderate President in

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Iran. The nuclear deal, the signature achievement of Mr. Rouhani's first term, is under attack, with U.S. President Donald Trump threatening to cancel its certification. With the U.S. imposing more sanctions on Iran over the missile programme and joining hands with its regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia, conservative sections find their hard-line views **vindicated** and would like Tehran to **reciprocate** in the same tenor. Mr. Rouhani may therefore have preferred to avoid a clash within the system over his cabinet nominations. It is not clear to what extent he may sacrifice the reformist agenda under pressure from **hardliners**. His supporters will hope that he will **come around** to simultaneously pursuing a pragmatic reformist agenda at home and a realistic foreign policy that doesn't **succumb** to external **provocations**. Only then would Hassan Rouhani **live up to** the expectations of the millions of Iranians who re-elected him.

### Magical Vocabulary from "The Hindu Editorial"

**1. Succumb (verb)** □□□ □□□□□□ / □□□ □□□□□ : Fail to resist (pressure, temptation, or some other negative force).

**Synonyms** - Yield, give in/way, submit, surrender, capitulate.

**Antonyms**- Endure, conquer, survive, overcome.

**Example** - Young people who feel good about themselves are less likely to **succumb** to negative pressure.

**2. Provocation (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□ □□ □□□□ : Action or speech that makes someone annoyed or angry, especially deliberately.

**Synonyms** - Goad, prodding, egging on, incitement, pressure, annoyance, irritation, nettling, harassment.

**Antonyms** - appeasement, prevention, repression

**Example** - This study has validated the inhalation **provocation** test for the diagnosis of chronic BFL.

**3. Reciprocate (verb)** □□□□□□ □□□□ / □□□□□□ □□□-□□□ □□□□ : Respond to (a gesture or action) by making a corresponding one.

**Synonyms** - Requite, return, give back, match, equal.

**Antonyms** - deny, refuse, disagree

**Example** - Perhaps I was expected to **reciprocate** with some remark of my own.

**4. Vindicate (verb)** □□□□□ □□ □□□□ / □□□□□□ □□□□ : To clear of accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt with supporting arguments or proof

**Synonyms** - Acquit, clear, absolve, exonerate, discharge, liberate, exculpate, justify,

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confirm, support.

**Antonyms**- condemn, incriminate

**Example** - Somesh can **vindicate** his claim to this property by showing us the original deed.

**5. Antagonize (verb)** □□□□ □□□□ / □□□□ □□□□ : Cause (someone) to become hostile.

**Synonyms** - Arouse hostility in, alienate, anger, annoy, provoke, vex, irritate, rub the wrong way, aggravate.

**Antonyms** - agree, mollify, appease, pacify

**Example** - Why go out of the way to offend and **antagonize** religious people?

**6. Consolidate (verb)** □□□□□, □□□□□, □□□□□□ □□□□ : Make (something) physically stronger or more solid.

**Synonyms** -: Strengthen, secure, stabilize, reinforce, fortify, enhance, improve.

**Antonyms** - separate, disperse, divide

**Example** - Leaders hate to be thwarted; it is in the nature of power to **consolidate** itself.

**7. Hardline (adjective)** □□□□□□□□ : An uncompromising adherence to something.

**Synonyms** - Uncompromising, strict, extreme, tough, diehard, immoderate, inflexible, intransigent, firm.

**Antonyms** - compromising, flexible, changing

**Example** - The RBI has **hardline** rules regarding fulfilment of KYC.

**8. Daunting (adjective)** □□□□ / □□□□□ □□□□ : Seeming difficult to deal with in anticipation; intimidating.

**Synonyms** - Intimidating, formidable, disconcerting, unnerving, unsettling, dismaying, discouraging.

**Antonyms** - approachable, easy, convenient

**Example** - Going to university is a **daunting** prospect for many of us currently studying at A-level.

**9. Come around (phrasal verb)** □□□□□ □□□ / □□□□□□ / □□□ □□□□ : Recover consciousness, be converted to another person's opinion, To visit someone or a particular area.

**Synonyms** - recover, revive, wake up.

**Antonyms** - faint, go under

**Example** -When he **came round** he was in the office.

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**10. Live up to (phrasal verb)** □□□□□□ □□□□ /□□ □□□□□□ : To conduct one's life in a particular manner.

**Synonyms** – Fulfil, satisfy, fulfil, achieve.

**Antonyms** - disappoint, avoid, denounce

**Example** - If someone or something **lives up to** what they were expected to be, they are as good as they were expected to be.

## 12. Redrawing the arc of influence

**Indian diplomacy needs to display higher levels of sophistication for New Delhi to play a global role.**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's schedule of foreign visits has been extremely impressive, and he has managed to inject a degree of dynamism into a system accustomed to a more leisurely pace. Estimating outcomes from these visits is, however, more difficult.

Taking the two most recent visits, for example, one can easily see the contrast in outcomes. The U.S. visit was a carefully calibrated one producing few surprises, despite the U.S. President having a reputation of being highly unpredictable. For his part, the Prime Minister charted a time-tested course, concentrating mainly on counter-terrorism and the defence security partnership, avoiding contentious trade-related issues. The naming of the Hizbul Mujahedeen chief as a "specially designated global terrorist" and a "new consultation mechanism on domestic and international terrorist designations listing proposals" were the high points of the counter-terrorism agenda. **Reiteration** of India's position as a major defence partner and confirmation of the sale of the Guardian Unmanned Aerial System to India, reflected the deepening security and defence cooperation.

In concrete terms, not much else took place during the visit, despite an oblique reference in the joint statement to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and reiteration of support for "freedom of navigation" in the Indo-Pacific. What was most obvious was the U.S. tilt towards transactional rather than strategic aspects.

### **A clear de-hyphenation**

In the case of Israel, this being the first ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister to that country, the **euphoria** of the standalone visit, de-hyphenating Israel from Palestine, was understandable. It also produced better dividends, including elevation of the India-Israel

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relationship to the level of a 'strategic partnership'. Israel achieved a major **propaganda** scoop by getting the Indian Prime Minister to visit the memorial of Theodor Herzl, founding father of the Zionist movement.

The main focus of the visit was on defence cooperation, joint development of defence products and transfer of technology. Most of the agreements signed related to transfer of technology and innovative technology-related items and India expects to benefit substantially, considering that Israeli export rules are far more flexible than those of the U.S.

Both countries also expressed a strong commitment to **combat** terror. The reality, however, is that when the two countries speak of terrorism, they speak of very different things. Iran and Hezbollah are the main targets for Israel, which has little interest in the Afghan Taliban or Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba. For India, it is the latter that matters.

The euphoria of the visit cannot, however, conceal China's importance for Israel. China is a far bigger investor and trading partner of Israel than India. On this occasion, India and Israel decided to set up a \$40 million Innovation Fund to allow Indian and Israeli enterprises to develop innovative technologies and products for commercial applications, but it is clearly dwarfed by the Israel-China comprehensive innovation partnership which has an outlay of \$300 million. India and Israel also have differences over China's BRI: Israel is eager to participate in it, unlike India, and possibly views this as an opportunity to develop a project parallel to the Suez Canal.

### **It's the neighbours**

Two countries where India's diplomacy, despite the **impetus** given to it, is currently facing heavy odds are China and Pakistan. China in Asia is already exercising some of the political and economic leverages that the U.S. previously possessed. China has a significant presence in East and Southeast Asia, is steadily enlarging its presence in South Asia, and is also beginning to expand into West Asia. For instance, China's influence in Iran today appears to be at an all-time high, whereas India's influence seems to be diminishing.

India has, however, refused to be **inveigled** by China's blandishments, including the BRI. Nor has it flinched from standing up to Chinese 'bullying', as in the recent instance of the Doklam plateau in Bhutan. Few other countries in Asia are, however, willing or in a position to tangle with China. A divided ASEAN again has provided China with an opportunity to demonstrate its economic and military muscle. Most countries in the region also demonstrate a desire to join China-based initiatives. Even in South Asia, despite India's

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commanding presence, China has been successful in winning quite a few friends among India's neighbours such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

In the case of Pakistan, the **implosion** of the state arising from its internal stresses and problems, together with the virtual standoff between India and Pakistan (involving a total cessation of talks or any kind of worthwhile contacts), has enabled the Pakistani Deep State to further entrench itself. India has been left with few options and this is leading to a diplomatic gridlock which does not augur well for India.

As Pakistan becomes still more deeply mired in problems, its dependence on China is growing. This is contributing to a strategic imbalance in the South Asian region. It is a moot point whether India and Indian diplomacy can do something to rectify matters in this context, but for the present it confronts Indian diplomacy with one more serious dilemma.

Notwithstanding India's efforts, the diplomatic scene vis-à-vis Russia also could be better. Russia is undergoing a strategic resurgence of sorts, sustained in good measure by the close relations recently established with China. Buoyed by developments in the Ukraine and Crimea, and the uncertainties surrounding U.S. commitment to NATO, the new Russia-China 'strategic congruence' is certain to impact Asia. The problem for India and Indian diplomacy is that at this time India-Russia relations appear less robust than at any time in the past half century.

India's 'Act East and Look West' policies have given a new dimension to Indian diplomacy in both East and West Asia. In both regions, however, but especially in West Asia, Indian diplomacy still lacks the nimbleness required to deal with fast-changing situations. In West Asia, despite its long time presence in the region, a 9-million strong diaspora, and the region being its principal source of oil, India is not a major player today. Both Russia and China have overtaken India in the affairs of the region. This is particularly true of Iran where the Russia-China-Iran relationship has greatly blossomed, almost marginalising India's influence.

### **Fadeout in West Asia**

India's absence from, and its inability to play a role in, West Asia, even as the region confronts a split down the line between the Arab and the non-Arab world is unfortunate. More so, there is the possibility of a series of **confrontations** between an increasingly powerful Shiite Iran and a weakening Saudi Arabia. The most recent challenge is the one posed by Qatar to the existing order in the West Asian region. The fallout of all this will impact India adversely and Indian diplomacy's inability to make its presence felt will matter.



An additional concern for India would be that growing uncertainties in the region could further fuel radical Islamist terror in the region.

The 'Act East' policy has produced better results. Closer relations with countries in East and South East Asia, especially Japan and Vietnam, are a positive development. However, in the Asia-Pacific, India has to contend with an increasingly assertive China. There is little evidence to show that India's diplomatic manoeuvres individually, or with allies like Japan, have succeeded in keeping the Chinese juggernaut at bay — or for that matter provide an alternative to China in the Asia-Pacific.

India's diplomatic establishment is all too aware of the political history and economics of the Asian region. Under Prime Minister Modi, diplomatic styles have changed but it would seem that the substance has altered little. His recent visit to Israel was, no doubt, a resounding success, but Israel was already one of the very few countries which had shown a complete understanding of India's defence and security needs, even ignoring the sanctions imposed on India by some countries. Israel's supply of critical defence items during the Kargil conflict (of 1999) is an excellent example.

What Indian diplomacy currently needs to do is to find a way to steer amid an assertive China, a hostile Pakistan, an uncertain South Asian and West Asian neighbourhood, and an unstable world. The strategic and security implications of these, individually and severally, need to be carefully validated and pursued. Indian diplomacy may possibly need to display still higher levels of **sophistication** to overcome the odds.

### Magical Vocabulary from "The Hindu Editorial"

**1. Reiteration (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□ / □□□ □□□□: The act of repeating over and again (or an instance thereof)

**Synonyms** - Reiterate, redouble, repetition, revisal, revision.

**Example** - The information they have is a **reiteration** of yesterday's television.

**2. Euphoria (noun)** □□□□□□ / □□□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□□□: A feeling or state of intense excitement and happiness.

**Synonyms** - Elation, happiness, joy, delight, glee, excitement, exhilaration, jubilation, exultation, ecstasy

**Example** - The **euphoria** of success will fuel your desire to continue training

**3. Propaganda (verb)** □□□□□□ □□□□□□ / □□□□□□□: Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.

**Synonyms** - Information, promotion, advertising, publicity, spin, disinformation, counter-

information, agitprop.

**Example** - The media and the government started a fierce **propaganda** campaign to change this opinion.

**4. Combat (verb)** □□□□□□□□ □□□□ / □□□□□ □□□□ : Take action to reduce, destroy, or prevent (something undesirable).

**Synonyms** - Fight, battle, tackle, attack, counter, resist, withstand, impede, block, thwart, inhibit, stop, halt.

**Example** - He emphasised that the Government was doing all it could to **combat** corruption.

**5. Impetus (verb)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□: The force or energy with which a body moves.

**Synonyms** - Motivation, stimulus, incitement, incentive, inducement, inspiration, encouragement, boost.

**Example** - The power of the Western media in lending **impetus** to a popular cause is palpable.

**6. Inveigle (verb)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ □□□□: Persuade (someone) to do something by means of deception or flattery.

**Synonyms** -: Entice, tempt, lure, seduce, beguile, wheedle, cajole, coax, persuade,

**Example** - She **inveigles** herself into their lives and seduces or enraptures each of them before vanishing.

**7. Implosion (adjective)** □□□□□□□□: A sudden inward collapse./The initial occluded phase of a stop consonant.

**Synonyms** - Collapse, occlusion, closure.

**Example** - That was a perfectly timed, non-resistive, forty-seven-story implosion if I've.

**8. Confrontations (noun)** □□□□□□ / □□□□□-□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ : A hostile or argumentative meeting or situation between opposing parties.

**Synonyms** - Conflict, clash, fight, battle, encounter, faceoff, engagement, skirmish, hostilities.

**Example** - The logic of events will lead them to a **confrontation** with the West.

**9. Sophistication (phrasal verb)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□: The quality of being sophisticated.

**Synonyms** - Worldliness, experience, urbanity, culture, civilization, polish, refinement, elegance.

**Example** - The technological sophistication of their products

## 13. Where We Top: Hope, Optimism

Mr India and Mrs Bharat go before a judge. After hearing Mr India's testimony, the judge says, "It seems you are right." But after Mrs Bharat presents her case, the judge says, "It

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seems you are right too." The court steno chronicling the case pipes up, "Judge, how can both be right?" Judge: "Hmmm...you are right too."

India speaks in many voices. India is also seen from many angles through many prisms and many eyes, making it hard to assess objectively. Famously it is said, "Whatever you can rightly say about India, the opposite is also true."

Many see India at 70 as a **stupendous** success. The very survival of a young nation born of an old civilisation, derided by the racist-imperialist Winston Churchill as "a geographical term... no more a united nation than the Equator," is accomplishment enough for most Indians and Indophiles. Some see India as being more united than, the United Kingdom. That it has stuck steadfastly to its founding ideals and civilizational underpinnings and has thrived as a plural democracy in the face of many odds, occasional **aberration** aside, is cause for celebration. The rest is bonus.

Others see abject failure. A nation of immense promise at its birth, helmed by progressive visionaries, has muddled along in fits and starts wracked by **internecine** warfare involving regions, religion, caste, and class. From "functioning anarchy" it appears to have descended into anarchic functioning; a small affluent society has no eyes or ears for the large **effluent (Not developed)** society. A country that has landed spacecraft on Moon and Mars cannot overcome its dismal infant mortality rates, its **abysmal** social practices, its **infantile** politics.

For these among other reasons, India is alternately admired and **scorned** venerated and derided outside India.

Hot Borders: At a moment when its borders are overheated, it is evident that one of India's biggest failures in the global and regional domain has been its inability to arrive at settled boundaries with contentious neighbours two in particular. Of course, it takes two to tango. No country can make peace or concessions unilaterally. But for a country of its size (and self-importance) India has been singularly lacking in sustained energy and focus to resolve an issue that would have allowed it to adequately **parlay** influence beyond its neighbourhood.

The result has been a country hamstrung in its attempted tryst with destiny, locked instead in seemingly petty neighbourhood squabbles. Compared to the immense skill with which it navigated the Cold War, where it managed not to antagonise or aggravate the United States excessively despite its non-aligned alignment with the former Soviet Union, New Delhi's regional policy has been **lackadaisical** an approach bordering more on hope (that somehow the problems will disappear) than on purposeful urgency.

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Second Failure: Some half century later, its two main borders still unsettled, India appears to have ceded its natural sphere of influence stretching from the Gulf and Africa to southeast Asia, to China. Our history textbooks are heavily centred on north to northwest India, all but ignoring peninsular ties around the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal. Our singular obsession with Pakistan and its provocations has simply allowed China to get around us and get a lock on many countries where India has deeper roots.

Our biggest **fiascos** though have been domestic; our global slip-ups pale in comparison to the self-injury we have brought on ourselves with our inability to address basic issues relating to healthcare and sanitation, education and employment, infrastructure and development, all areas that countries (such as South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia) with even lower metrics than India at the cusp of its Independence have improved dramatically to race ahead in the global economic sweepstakes. We are still playing catch-up.

There is in India a tendency to take comfort in small, sectoral successes: the fact that life expectancy and literacy have improved significantly since Independence; that agricultural production has increased so much that we are self-sufficient in foodgrains; that we have had signal successes in our nuclear and space programmes; that we are finally getting a decent communications and highway network. There is both self-gratification and self-glorification over all these admirable feats.

But as we are reminded every single day, our success is spotty and random. Our increased (low quality) life expectancy is weighted down by our grim infant mortality metrics, lower than that of sub-Saharan Africa, reflected in the unspeakable tragedy in Gorakhpur. With some of most **fecund** and **arable** lands and riverine systems in the world, we remain a low-yield agricultural society despite becoming self-sufficient in food, our messy market mechanisms making a meal of farm incomes. Our annual roadkill stats more than 150,000 lives lost would qualify as a genocide. Our cities and towns speak for themselves grim, dirty, and chaotic with not one qualifying to be worthy of a Top Ten tourist destination.

Where we top: Hope, optimism, and where both fail, a sense of resigned acceptance. Karma.

So how and what do we score for India given its **dodgy** record both on the domestic and global front? A 30/100 or a 70/100? A 100/100 we certainly aren't (unless you are one of those delusional hyperpatriots working up a lather on social media), so a 50/100? It's your call.

Purely subjectively, i'd go with 35100 (pass marks in Indian systems), with the reasonable prospects of nailing a first class, if not a distinction, if we act with urgency and purpose in the thirty years to our centennial. Happy Independence Day.

## Magical Vocabulary from "The Times of India"

**1. Stupendous (adjective)** □□□ □□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ : Very amazing, astonishing or overwhelming.

**Synonyms:** Amazing, astounding, astonishing, extraordinary, remarkable, phenomenal, staggering.

**Example:** The report finds that the cost of these disparities is **stupendous** .

**2. Aberration (noun)** □□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□ : A departure from what is normal, usual, or expected, typically one that is unwelcome.

**Synonyms:** Anomaly, deviation, departure from the norm, divergence, abnormality, irregularity, variation.

**Example:** He understood mathematically why a spherical mirror produces **aberration** .

**3. Internecine (adjective)** □□□□□□-□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□ : Destructive to both sides in a conflict.

**Synonyms:** Deadly, Fierce, Destructive, Ruinous, Pernicious.

**Example:** He was one **internecine** battle, and he became cruel to her because of it.

**4. Abysmal (adjective)** □□□-□□□□ / □□□□ □□□□ : Extremely bad; appalling.

**Synonyms:** Very bad, dreadful, awful, terrible, frightful, atrocious, disgraceful, deplorable, shameful.

**Example:** The airline schedules are **abysmal**, and getting worse.

**5. Scorn (verb)** □□□□□□□□ □□□□/□□□□□ □□□□ : The state of being despised or dishonoured.

**Synonyms:** Deride, Mock, Disdain, Disparage, Scoff, despise, disdain, contemn.

**Example:** I was routinely ridiculed and **scorned** by conservatives and liberals alike.

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**6. Parlay (verb)** □□□□ □□ □□□□□/ □□□□□ □□□□: Turn an initial stake or winnings from a previous bet into (a greater amount) by gambling.

**Synonyms:** Metamorphose, Construct, Renew.

**Example:** All that most of them can hope for is to **parlay** their film work into lucrative nude dancing careers or Internet fan sites.

**7. Lackadaisical (adjective)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□□/ □□□□□□ □□□□ : Lacking enthusiasm and determination; carelessly lazy.

**Synonyms:** lethargic, apathetic, listless, sluggish, spiritless, passionless, careless, lazy, lax, unenthusiastic.

**Example:** He still is too inconsistent and too **lackadaisical** .

**8. Fiasco (noun)** □□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ : A thing that is a complete failure, especially in a ludicrous or humiliating way.

**Synonyms:** Failure, disaster, catastrophe, debacle, shambles, farce, mess, wreck, flop, washout.

**Example:** The recent **fiasco** over parking charges has demonstrated their arrogance and incompetence.

**8. Fecund (adjective)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : Producing or capable of producing an abundance of offspring or new growth; fertile.

**Synonyms:** Fertile, fruitful, productive, high-yielding, rich, lush, flourishing, thriving.

**Example:** A smart shopkeeper will seek fecund deals to enhance his wealth.

**9. Arable (adjective)** □□□□-□□□□□ : (of land) used or suitable for growing crops.

**Synonyms:** Farmable, Cultivable, Tillable, Fertile, Productive.

**Example:** This area of the nation had once been an incredibly rich source of **arable** land.

**10. Dodgy (adjective)** □□□□ / □□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□ : Unsound, unstable, and unreliable.

**Synonyms:** Cunning, guileful, sly, tricky, wily, knavish, slick, tricky, crafty.



**Example:** If some business at the margin gets turned away because it is slightly **dodgy**, then so be it.

## 14. Cause for caution, not gloom

The much debated Economic Survey II presents a mixed picture of the Indian economy. It highlights some obvious strengths but “optimism about the medium-term is moderated by a gathering anxiety about near term deflationary **impulses**”. How valid is this?

This year’s Economic Survey is innovative in more ways than one. This is the first time that a second volume is being presented containing a “backward looking review” and “historical data tables”, and it subsumes the mid-term economic analysis usually presented in December. Some key chapters included in this volume on agriculture, industry, infrastructure should normally have come in Volume I itself. These were displaced by the dominance of more preferred themes like Universal Basic Income, and “India on the Move”. Over the years both the presentation and the format of the Economic Survey have undergone fundamental changes. For most of us, the Economic Survey was a document presented on the eve of the Annual Financial Statement. It was, by and large, an analytical underpinning and **precursor** of the Budget. There was a meaningful connection between the Economic Survey and the Budget proposals.

For some time, this relationship has ceased. The Economic Surveys have come to increasingly reflect the **predilections** and preferences of its authors, raising the question whether Economic Surveys are designed to trigger intellectual debate and become incubators of **nascent** ideas. However, seeking a congruence and connect between the prognosis and prescriptions for the economy with the budgetary proposals would not be inappropriate. That said, this Economic Survey has transparency and **candour**. The Preface has a disclaimer to say that the update in the State of the Economy chapter in this volume “can be attributed to the CEA, with the Economic Division taking the lead for other chapters”. This can lead to contradictions and asymmetry between the different segments of the report.

### Rate of growth

Leaving aside these issues, what are some key conclusions?

One, on the growth rate, while adhering to the forecast in Volume 1 for real GDP growth of 6.75%-7.5% this year, it suggests that the balance of risk has shifted to the downward side of the range. In plain language, this means a sub-7% rate of growth.

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Just one day prior to the Economic Survey, the Finance Minister presented to Parliament the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework statement in pursuance of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003. This was “essentially a vertical expansion of the aggregates of expenditure in the fiscal framework presented with the Annual Financial Statement to provide closer integration between Budget and FRBM Statements”.

In this statement, some of the subsequent developments both on the revenue and expenditure side like the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Seventh Pay Commission have also been factored. This framework assumes that nominal GDP growth for the current (2017-18) and subsequent two years would be 11.75%, 12.3% and 12.3%, respectively. Assuming inflation to be in the acceptable range of about 4%, the expected growth would be 7% plus.

No doubt, the savings and investment ratio has declined in recent years. To sustain the projected rates of growth, the savings-investment ratio would need to be increased, which is **contingent** on continuation of structural reforms, reducing public dissaving through privatisations such as Air India and other measures to boost savings to earlier high figures in the mid-thirties. The demand boost inevitably comes from domestic consumption which accounted for about 96% of GDP growth in FY 2017. This is likely to continue.

The projections also implicitly accept the fiscal deficit of 3.2% in the current year and 3% for the subsequent two years.

### **Inflation targets**

Two, on inflation, the Economic Survey seeks to demonstrate that for sustained 14 quarters the actual inflation (WPI-CPI) has undershot the projections made by the Reserve Bank (RBI). It argues that India has moved to a low inflation trajectory, given supply-side elasticity in agriculture and long-term softening of global oil prices due to alternatives such as shale and increasing competitiveness of renewable fuels, particularly solar. It concludes that in the Indian context real neutral interest rates **hover** around 1.25-1.75% and that the present rate is about 25-75 basis points above the neutral rate. In short, a deeper cut in the interest rates would be warranted, given that current inflation at 1.5% is running well below the 4% target.

On monetary policy, the central bankers have all over made calculations (based on conservative assumptions) and undershot inflation targets. It is equally ironic that the data in the last two days suggest that both the consumer price index (CPI) and the whole-sale price index (WPI) have risen quickly in July primarily led by food inflation and the housing



index reflecting the 7th Pay Commission recommendations, and so did the core index. Analysts now expect the underlying inflation to rest at the 4% ballpark figure, which also happens to be the RBI target.

It is said that in politics a week is too long a time. This could be equally said in economics, for events in the last one week have questioned the inflationary projections made in the Survey. At any rate, monetary policy cannot be on a roller-coaster ride. **Prudence** would prompt adherence to the analysis of the Monetary Policy Committee and judgment on interest rate calibration. Besides, multiplier benefits from low interest rate regimes are contingent on deeper structural reforms.

Three, regarding the exchange rate, real effective interest rates have appreciated significantly. The RBI has the unenviable challenge of managing significant inward capital flows with exchange rates which do not penalise domestic industry through a premium on cheaper imports. However, export competitiveness needs interventions which go beyond dependence on the exchange rate by way of improved logistics, infrastructure and altering the mix of commodities and destinations to meet new demand preferences.

Four, fiscal tightening by States due to Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), farm loan waivers, declining profitability of some key sectors like power and telecom, the shadow of unresolved twin balance sheet problems and transitional issues of the GST are contributory to deflationary pressures. Normally understood, farm loan waivers, by reducing the indebtedness of farmers, enhance their income with a positive impact on consumption and demand. The **constriction** of capital expenditure for adherence to fiscal limits is somewhat mitigated by past experience. The quantum of actual farm loan waivers inevitably turns out to be somewhat smaller than the initial estimate; but more importantly, their impact on State finances is spread over a typical three-year cycle.

Equally, UDAY is designed to clean up the balance sheets of electricity boards in the short run and is expected to improve management of electricity boards. Appropriate action on tariff fixation, regular billing cycles, monitoring timely collection by distribution companies is an integral part of the UDAY package. This would also benefit States' finances. In a complex federal polity, States in financial distress may need hand-holding. Cooperative federalism entails **amelioration** of the **transient** financial distress experienced by States. While these issues would need to be **holistically** (□□□□ □□ □□) addressed by the 15th Finance Commission, their recommendations are two years away. Short-term State-specific measures would need to be innovatively conceived. The recent initiatives to improve the fertilizer mix through extensive soil-testing along with the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

will prove beneficial to stabilise farm incomes. Nonetheless, the prescriptions contained in the chapter on agriculture by way of extending assured irrigation benefits, better market linkages for producers to prolong the shelf life of **perishable (likely to decay or go bad quickly- □□□ □□□□ □□□□□ / □□□□ □□□□ □□□□)** commodities, improving the sale of commodities deserve priority action.

### Rekindling investment

The Economic Survey II cautions policymakers of a possible deflationary cycle. Faster resolution of the twin balance sheets is critical to rekindling private investment. Equally, accelerating the pace of agricultural reforms, targeted capital expenditure, improving ease of doing business and the multiple infrastructure initiatives, particularly in roads and power, are integral to any **coherent** action. Similarly, stressed sectors like telecom and power need speedier resolution.

Macroeconomic stability has been a hard-won battle. The centrepiece lies in continued fiscal **rectitude** and inflation targeting. No doubt, macroeconomic stability must also spur growth and the two objectives need constant recalibration. It has been famously said, “the basic prescription of preventing deflation is not to get into it in the first place.” These **lurking (hidden)** dangers and the cautionary note of the Economic Survey II are a valuable contribution.

## Magical Vocabulary from “The Hindu”

**1. Impulses (noun)** □□□□□ / □□□□□□□ : A sudden strong and unreflective urge or desire to act.

**Synonyms:** Urge, instinct, drive, compulsion, itch, whim, desire, fancy, notion, inclination, temptation.

**Example:** I felt an **impulse** on the racket as a force reflected off the strings.

**2. Precursor (noun)** □□□□□□□□ / □□□ □□□□□□□□ : A person or thing that comes before another of the same kind; a forerunner.

**Synonyms:** Forerunner, predecessor, forefather, father, antecedent, ancestor, forebear.

**Example:** Technology behind the whole machine is the **precursor** to missing the mark.

**3. Predilection (noun)** □□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ : A preference or special liking for something; a bias in favor of something.



**Synonyms:** Liking, fondness, preference, partiality, taste, penchant, weakness, soft spot, fancy, inclination.

**Example:** She has clearly expressed that she has no interest in this, so I've kept my **predilection** to myself.

**4. Nascent (adjective)** □□□□□ / □□□□□ □□□□ □□□ / □□□□□ □□□□ : (especially of a process or organization) just coming into existence and beginning to display signs of future potential.

**Synonyms:** Just beginning, budding, developing, growing, embryonic, incipient, young, fledgling, evolving.

**Example:** The best of the past, not the **nascent** future, was his main concern.

**5. Candour (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : The quality of being open and honest in expression; frankness.

**Synonyms:** Frankness, openness, honesty, candidness, truthfulness, sincerity, forthrightness, directness.

**Example:** Only an entirely new generation can bring honesty and **candour** to this matter.

**6. Contingent (adjective)** □□□□□□ : Happening by or subject to chance or accident; unpredictable.

**Synonyms:** Uncertain, Dependent, Conditional, Subject To, Based On, Determined By, random.

**Example:** The use of the discount coupon is **contingent** upon a customer purchasing at least fifty dollars worth of groceries.

**7. Hover (verb)** □□ □□□ □□□□□ : Remain poised uncertainly in one place or between two states.

**Synonyms:** Flutter, Suspended, Hang, Levitate, Oscillate, Vibrate, Vacillate.

**Example:** Overhead 10 helicopters **hovered** , cameramen and photographers ready to shoot the action.

**8. Prudence (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□ : Careful or wise in handling practical matters; exercising good judgment or common sense.

**Synonyms:** Wisdom, judgment, good judgment, common sense, sense, sagacity, shrewdness, advisability.

**Example:** We need to exercise **prudence** in such important matters.

**9. Constriction (noun)** □□□□□□□□/□□□□□□ : The action of making something narrower by pressure or of becoming narrower; tightening.

**Synonyms:** Tightness, pressure, compression, contraction, cramp, obstruction, blockage, impediment, stricture, stenosis.

**Example:** Asthma is a **constriction** of the airways.

**10. Amelioration (noun)** □□□□□□ / □□□□□□ : The act of making something better; improvement.

**Synonyms:** Betterment, Melioration, Improvement, Amendment, Bettering, Enhancement, Refinement.

**Example:** You can **ameliorate** your english by reading daily editorial with vocabulary from [letsstudytogether.co](http://letsstudytogether.co).

**11. Transient (adjective)** □□□□□□□□/ □□□□□□ : Remaining in a place only a brief time.

**Synonyms:** Transitory, temporary, short-lived, short-term, ephemeral, impermanent, brief, short, momentary.

**Example:** The group has been calling for temporary halting site facilities for **transient** traders.

**12. Coherent (adjective)** □□□□□□□□□□□□□□/ □□□□□□ : (of an argument, theory, or policy) logical and consistent.

**Synonyms:** Logical, reasoned, reasonable, rational, sound, cogent, consistent, consilient, clear.

**Example:** If we can't construct **coherent** policies to combat crime effectively, let's just pay it protection money.

**13. Rectitude (noun)** □□□□□□□□□□ / □□□□□□□□□□□□ : Morally correct behavior or thinking; righteousness.

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**Synonyms:** Righteousness, goodness, virtue, morality, honor, honorableness, integrity, principle, probity .

**Example:** We also stand for fiscal **rectitude** and law and order.

**14. Lurk (verb)** □□□ □□ □□□□□ / □□□ □□□ □□□□□ : (of a person or animal) be or remain hidden so as to wait in ambush for someone or something.

**Synonyms:** Ambuscade, lie in wait, waylay, scupper, bushwhack, ambush.

**Example:** They always **lurk** behind me, waiting with their jaws open, licking their lips.

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