

**The Indian EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# I am Saldon I am Shifah



STANZIN SALDON

I choose to be both. It saddens me that my marriage and spiritual choice are misused to stoke fear and hatred

MY NAME IS Stanzin Saldon. I also call myself Shifah. I was born in a Buddhist family in 1987 in Leh. I had joined Government Medical College, Jammu, but decided to change my field after four years of training because I was interested in social work. Subsequently, I did my Bachelors in Social Work and have been working for four years now.

My personal decision to marry a Muslim man is being used to fuel communal tension across Ladakh. The Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) wrongly claimed that the love of my life and my husband, Syed Murtaza Agah, has "lured" me to accept Islam. The LBA also gave an ultimatum to the entire Muslim community in Ladakh to "return" me or "leave" the region. In fact, the LBA issued this threat in a letter addressed to J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti on September 7.

While communal passions were fuelled against the entire Muslim community, which had nothing to do with my personal decision, no one wanted to check the facts. Nobody asked me my view as if I don't matter in this game of misogyny played in my name. I have also watched with a lot of anguish and pain how the media has been selectively highlighting the issue through the prism of their own bias, without caring for my opinion.

Because the choices that I have made are used to mischievously target my lawfully wedded husband and the entire Muslim community, I have decided to stand up and speak for myself. The LBA's statement is not only false and concocted, it is a brazen attempt to suppress and threaten a woman who has shown the courage to follow her heart.

I will be 30 years old soon. I am an independent and educated woman and I have made all my choices regarding my life by my own free will — a right granted and guaranteed to every citizen of this country by the Constitution of India. The Constitution gives

me a right as an adult individual to choose my life partner. I have married Syed Murtaza Agah because I love him. There is absolutely no other reason. The accusation that I have been "lured" or "coerced" by anybody is an insult to my ability to think for myself. The Ladakh Buddhist Association and random strangers are trying to objectify me by demanding my return as if I am their property and not a human being. I object to this in the strongest possible terms. No one owns me and I give no one the right to decide on my behalf.

I decided to become a Muslim five years ago and it wasn't because I disliked the religion I was born into. It was an outcome of my spiritual quest and interest in different religious philosophies that I decided to become a Muslim. This happened long before I met Murtaza and fell in love with him. On April 22, 2016, I filed an affidavit before a court in Karnataka, where I was staying, to formally become a Muslim.

By spiritual quest I mean a desperate desire to seek answers from all available wisdom and knowledge given to humanity by many great personalities, who explored their path themselves and encouraged the entire humanity to do the same. I respect everyone's faith and beliefs and expect the same for me. Nobody needs to celebrate my choices or disparage them. It is my choice for myself only.

I would also reaffirm that love and companionship are the only reason for the marital bond between Murtaza and me. Spiritual choice is a very personal matter and should not be mixed with my marriage. All this time and even earlier when I had to face similar stressful situations, my beloved husband is the person who has always been there with his love and respect for me. We feel lucky that we have decided to spend the remaining part of our lives together. Moreover, being responsible citizens of the largest democracy, we have completed all legal for-

malities and I will not tolerate the communal and bigoted demand from anybody seeking to annul our bond. I abhor the politics that is being played on my decision.

I am pained to see my personal details and documents being shared without asking my permission on social media, where random strangers question and berate my decision. I was agast to see my decision to marry a Muslim man from Kargil (which, in fact, is part of Ladakh) being shown as a "theft of a girl" and a reason for the "dying culture of Ladakh". Our culture and ethos (in fact, all cultures on earth) in Ladakh haven't dropped down from the sky, where love and individual choices have no scope. That's the worst possible way for us to look at ourselves. The portrayal of a woman as a mere baby-making machine to save the community was another despicable reason given to question my life choices. There have also been malicious statements that I have been kept away from my family, which are irresponsible and insensitive.

In these difficult times, when my personal decisions regarding my life are being used for divisive political purposes by the self-styled custodians of Ladakh, I will request the people of my motherland in Leh and Kargil to defeat these divisive forces by maintaining peace and harmony. It hurts me immensely to see my personal matters like marriage and spiritual choice being misused to create an atmosphere of fear and hatred. It is shameful to demand that I should be returned, because nobody has taken me or stolen me. I am here and I have made my choices out of my free will.

I am Saldon and also Shifah. I choose to be both and will always be a daughter of my family and Ladakh. I took my decisions out of love and I request everyone who claims to care about me and my well-being to not get consumed by hatred and fear.

The writer is a social worker based in Ladakh

## BANKING ON MERGER

Urgency on bank consolidation is welcome. But it must not distract from the bad loans mess, or problems of governance

IN THE THIRD week of August, the government had announced a new framework to oversee proposals for merger of state-run banks. That initiative aimed at consolidation has now been taken forward. The finance ministry has recently written to banks to consider mergers and to discuss such proposals at the board level, reflecting a sense of urgency. It may well have to do with the balance sheets of the majority of the almost three dozen banks owned by the government, of which at least half a dozen are under Prompt Corrective Action or PCR initiated by the banking regulator, which implies severe restrictions on lending. The RBI's Financial Stability Report, released a few months ago, warned of a further deterioration of bad loans from 9.6 per cent of total assets at the end of March 2017 to possibly 10.2 per cent of total loans if economic conditions do not improve this fiscal.

The health check for PSU banks is, of course, far worse. The gross bad loan ratio could top 14 per cent by March 2018 and the capital adequacy level of many banks could fall below 9 per cent in a severe macro economic scenario, according to the Stability Report. Clearly, the requirements of capital will be substantial over the next couple of years, with growing stress on account of bad loans and the need to meet the globally mandated norms on capital adequacy by March 2019. It is against this backdrop that the proposal for consolidation is now being weighed after it was mooted as early as 1991-92 by the Narasimhan Committee which suggested three large banks with a global presence, eight or 10 national banks and several local or regional banks. The question now is whether mergers among state-owned banks would be driven more because of expediency and less due to synergies.

A strong view is that such mergers should not only be voluntary but also be between strong entities rather than involving a weak bank merging with a stronger lender. That's because any effort at consolidation would call for time and effort on the part of the bank managements. Such an attempt is certainly worthwhile if the broader aim is to improve standards of governance and to create an environment where state-owned banks, like their private peers, raise capital from the public market instead of allocating government resources, which should be directed for meeting socio-economic objectives. What's worrying is that the current attempt of mergers, even if voluntary, runs the risk of distracting bankers from their primary task of resolving the bad loan mess. The moot point is whether consolidation would address one of the key issues plaguing these banks — governance. And whether this has anything to do with government ownership or control.

## THE UNLEVEL FIELD

With the government precariously poised, disqualification of 18 AIADMK MLAs by Tamil Nadu Speaker raises questions

THE DECISION OF the Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Assembly, P. Dhanapal, to disqualify 18 "rebel" AIADMK MLAs on Monday raises serious questions of propriety. It comes at a precarious moment — the Madras High Court is set to decide if Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy should take a floor test to prove his majority in the assembly later this week. The demand for a floor test was triggered after these MLAs, who support Sasikala Natarajan and T.T.V. Dinakaran, claimed that they had lost faith in Palaniswamy's leadership. Their removal from the assembly renders the floor test a formality, if the court orders it: After the expulsions, Palaniswamy needs 107 MLAs to prove his majority while he commands the loyalty of 112.

The speaker's office has disqualified the legislators under the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly (Disqualification on Ground of Defection) Rules, 1986. The official faction of the AIADMK had complained to the speaker last month that the rebel MLAs were indulging in "anti-party activities". Does this complaint, however, call for their expulsion from the assembly? There is no instance yet of a violation of the whip. The anti-party activities cited by the AIADMK chief whip are apparently limited to the dissidents making a submission to the governor that they are withdrawing support to Palaniswamy as chief minister and speaking to the media. Clearly, the complaint by the official faction of the AIADMK to the speaker was aimed at preempting the rebels from voting against the government in the event of a no-confidence motion. Ironically, the official faction of the AIADMK had filed a similar complaint against former chief minister O. Panneerselvam and the MLAs in his camp when he rebelled against the party leadership, which then included the current rebels, after his removal from the CM's post some months ago. The speaker did not act on it since the then dissidents had not voted against the party in the House on any matter. The then dissidents have since returned to the official faction and the churn in the party has produced another set of rebels. The speaker could have followed his own precedent and refrained from intervening in what has so far remained an inner-party feud. In a similar case in 2011, the Supreme Court had set aside the Karnataka Assembly Speaker's decision to disqualify 16 MLAs, who had withdrawn their support to the government, ahead of a no-confidence motion.

It is, indeed, the prerogative of the speaker to decide on the status of legislators. However, the decision must — and must be seen to — uphold constitutional values and principles of natural justice.

## SINDHU'S TRIUMPH

Through her titanic battles, she's taking fans on a dizzy ride of the highest quality badminton

THREE WEEKS AFTER losing a one-for-the-ages game in the World Championships final to Nozomi Okuhara, P.V. Sindhu squared the ledger in the title clash of the Korean Open Super Series. It proved not only her prowess with the badminton racquet, but also her strength of mind that she could come out at the right end of another titanic struggle. In going 4-4 in her career, head-to-head, she ensured the World Championship result didn't turn into a bugbear for her.

But there is more to Sindhu's triumph in Seoul than just pure skill and fighting spirit. At the highest level, a player has to keep learning from setbacks to get better. From compelling Okuhara to play on her terms of pace and power, to resisting the urge to manically go hard at the second set and instead conserving her energies for the decider, Sindhu proved to be a quick learner.

The 22-year-old's consistency in the big events is one of her biggest improvements of late. She won a medal at her first Olympics, soaked in home pressure to win the India Open title at Delhi, bagged her third World Championships podium at Glasgow and showed the ability to settle scores at Seoul. She won two of them and lost the other two by the slenderest of margins. It shows that she will be there or thereabouts when the biggest titles in badminton will be decided. She is already known for her dominance over Chinese shuttlers. But in not allowing any opponent to become a consistent source of trouble, Sindhu is ensuring that she's fighting for every big honour. Through her titanic battles, she's taking Indians and global fans on a dizzy ride of the highest quality badminton — just look at the ecstatic images of spectators, in Rio, Glasgow, Seoul. While leading the golden age of Indian badminton, Sindhu is also proud participant of some of the most iconic face-offs of international badminton's women's singles.



MEERAN CHADHA BORWANKAR

WOMEN NOW HAVE a voice in the police. They are carrying out all types of duties — regulating traffic, managing control rooms, PCR vans, conducting night rounds, checking at *nakabandi* points and, above all, investigating serious crimes and supervising large *bandobasts*. They have come to symbolise a changing India that believes in empowered girls and women. Their uniform has inspired many more to join the police department leading to a powerful community within the service.

Women managing prisons and correctional administration are unsung heroes. Their number is gradually increasing. From being wardens to jailers and deputies, women handle sensitive duties from managing prison gates, barracks, peripheral and internal security to sending inmates to courts and attending to judicial duties regarding prisoners.

Many states like Maharashtra now have 33 per cent reservation for women in prison administration: Their increased number means that they are assigned duties in male prisons too. Most of the 1,400 prisons in the country have a separate women's section with around 18,000 prisoners, according to the NCRB. There are 18 jails exclusively for women. Most prison superintendents are apprehensive of having women staff. The assimilation of women officers in the male prison administration is a challenge that is yet to be surmounted.

The nature of prison duties, hours of their shifts, are such that most of the staff stays near the prison. They form a community of their own. Many are second generation prison staff and steeped in a culture that has

## AT THE PRISON GATES

Issues of uniformed women in jail administration require urgent attention

The presence of women in prison administration requires the officers and staff of prisons are brought in sync with the culture of gender equality, respect and cooperation. Women come with their own strengths — teamwork, participative management, communication skills etc. They also herald a shift in favour of a correctional administration instead of the traditional punitive mindset. The re-orientation of prison administration has thus become imperative.

developed over time. It is definitely a male-dominated culture that broadly believes that prisons are places for the punishment for criminals and that the latter pose a risk to society. The security of prisons and counting of prisoners is their main occupation.

The presence of women in prison administration requires that officers and staff of prisons are in sync with the culture of gender equality, respect and cooperation. Women come with their own strengths — teamwork, participative management, communication skills etc. They also herald a shift in favour of a correctional administration instead of the traditional punitive mindset. The re-orientation of prison administration has thus become imperative.

The Supreme Court has flagged this issue and that of training prison staff. It has tasked the Bureau of Police Research and Development to revise the existing syllabi for the training of prison officers/staff — a highly ignored area. After basic training during induction, there is hardly any in-service training. Training at regular intervals, linking it with promotions and updating technical knowledge deserve the attention of all state governments, since police and prisons are state subjects.

Last year, the Bureau established a micro-mission to deal with issues of prisons and correctional administration. Besides updating syllabi of basic training for prison administrators, there is a strong need for their reorientation towards correctional administration. Prison officers and staff need to veer towards an attitude of reformation and rehabilitation. The focus should shift from

punitive to correctional.

Prisons in most metros and district headquarters are over crowded. Mumbai's Arthur road Central prison is a classic example. The adverse effects on the hygiene and health of prisoners and the staff on duty can be imagined. Tuberculosis and skin diseases are rampant. The security risks are enormous. In this situation, relieving even one staff member for in-service training appears to be a luxury. Thus, besides regular training, filling around 34 per cent vacancies in prisons needs immediate attention.

Women officers and around 4,400 staff working in these conditions have the extra burden of traditional family responsibilities. Their problems have not been studied or attended to.

What kind of challenges are uniformed women facing in prisons? What is their work satisfaction? What kind of duties can be allotted to them in the male prisons? Is their uniform gender-friendly? Are their working hours reasonable and conducive to a healthy family life? Discussions about possible solutions and engaging with them on continuous basis can help women in prison administration reach their potential. They can be equipped with professional expertise to ensure that incidents like the custodial death of Manjula Shete in Mumbai's Byculla prison do not occur.

While prison administration as a whole needs attention, the issues of uniformed women in prison administration require a thorough review and follow-up action.

The writer is director general, Bureau of Police Research and Development



## SEPTEMBER 19, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

### BHUTTO'S ARREST

IT WOULD TAKE a miracle now for Pakistan's former strongman, deposed prime minister Z.A. Bhutto, to be able to run in next month's general elections. By arresting him for the second time in two weeks and putting him on trial before a special military tribunal, the martial law authorities have shattered his hopes of being returned to office in the October 18 elections, or of appealing to the electorate to save him from his fortunes. In a communique issued to explain why he had arrested Bhutto only three days after a Lahore court had let him out of prison on bail citing insufficient evidence to justify his detention, the martial law administrator, Zia ul Haq, said

massive evidence had been gathered against Bhutto. The criminal and political accusations against Bhutto are sufficiently varied and vague that almost certainly if one of them does not bring him down, another will. For the first time, Zia stated that convicted candidates would be banned from the polls. Up to now, even if he was in prison, a politician could run for office. Bhutto risks the death penalty if convicted by the high court in Lahore of complicity in attempts to assassinate political opponents.

### CBI DENIAL

THE CBI DENIED that it has instituted any inquiry against Kanti Desai, son of the prime

minister, Suresh Kumar, son of the defence minister, or Kamla Bahuguna, wife of the petroleum minister. A statement issued by the CBI said that a report appearing in some newspapers alleging an inquiry was "totally false and baseless".

### DALIT PANTHERS

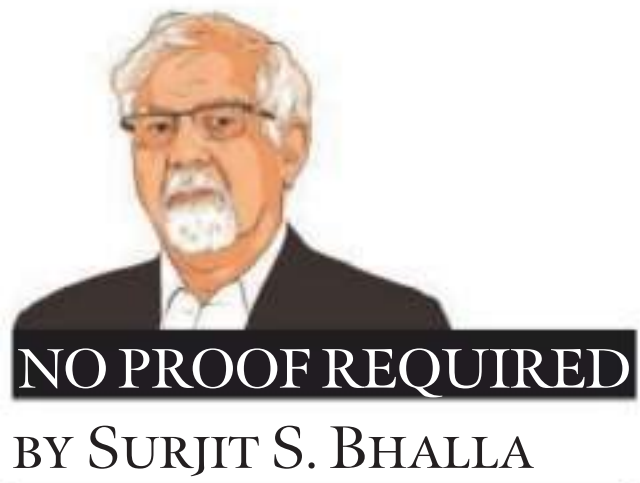
A GROUP OF young Dalit Panthers stormed the Jati Toro Sammelan in Delhi when Home Minister Charan Singh was addressing the participants. In a bid to disrupt the speech, the Panthers stormed the dias and raised slogans against Singh. Several participants of the sammelan, sympathetic to the Dalit Panthers stance, joined the slogan-raisers.



# 15 THE IDEAS PAGE

## It's interest rates, stupid

Inflation is down by 700 bp since 2013, and policy rates have declined by 200bp – and you are still wondering why GDP growth is slow?



**NO PROOF REQUIRED**  
BY SURJIT S. BHALLA

THE GDP GROWTH number for the latest quarter (2017Q2) was bad, very bad. It came in at a year-on-year growth of 5.7 per cent. Just to provide a perspective – the low growth reported was the eighth worst quarter since 2011, and the 14th worst quarter since the start of the high growth period in 2003/04. You want more evidence on the lowness of this growth number? The average GDP growth for the two years prior to the election of Narendra Modi election in May 2014 was 6.4 per cent; even if for the rest of this fiscal year GDP growth averages an unlikely 6.5 per cent each quarter, the fiscal year numbers will not match the UPA average for their bad years. Yes, that is how bad GDP growth is today.

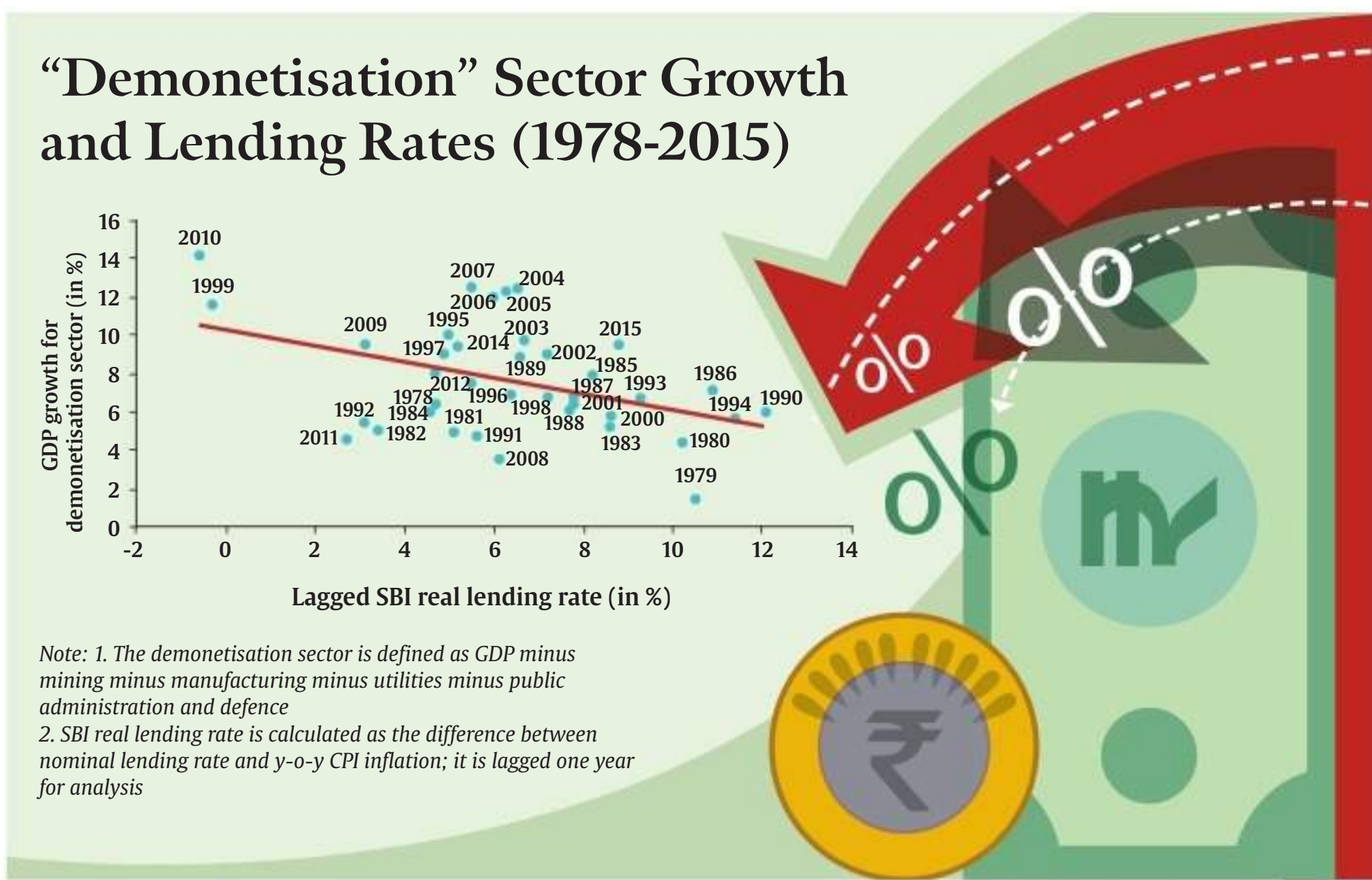
It is imperative that the political and economic policymakers in the Modi government get down to identifying the cause of this downturn. National elections are just 18 months away, and does the BJP actually believe that a growth rate below the UPA's worst years will not dent its popularity?

Prior to the 2017Q2 number, the favourite refrain of the Modi detractors or Congress supporters (same set of individuals) was that the high GDP growth rate in 2014/15 and 2015/16 (7.5 and 8 per cent, respectively) was caused by political manipulation of the figures by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO). The critics were too politically correct to say so openly but they clearly implied that the CSO was fudging the growth figures at the behest of the BJP government. Now that the GDP numbers conform to their political priors, there is not a squeak from all these statistical doubters; these critics-without-base should either come out with their latest updates on GDP growth in India or at least apologise to the CSO for doubting their integrity and expertise.

The media and economic experts have noted the phenomenon of low growth and have offered two explanations. The most common, near universal explanation, is the equivalent of the butler did it. In other words, the closest, most proximate (and coincidentally most popular with the anti-Modi crowd) cause of the growth slowdown is demonetisation.

Besides convenience, this explanation has some theory to back it up: If for a cash-dependent economy, you remove its lifeline (over 86 per cent of cash was demonetised on November 8, 2016) then obviously you will get a crash in output. As the "experts" point out with glee, a 2 per cent decline in GDP growth was exactly what was predicted by them to be the consequence of demonetisation. Growth has shown a big decline, and the world economy is booming, so India is in low growth mode because of demonetisation.

The second most popular explanation centres around the appreciation of the RBI's nominal 36-country real effective exchange rate (REER). Some noted economists are behind this logic, hence, this hypothesis deserves serious examination. For the moment, let it be noted that for the first eight months of this year, exports (in US dollar terms) are up 12.1 per cent, while the REER has appreciated by 4.8 per cent. For the last six years, and excluding the bad trade year of 2015 (export and import growth were – 15 per cent and – 12 per cent, respectively), both export



**“Demonetisation” Sector Growth and Lending Rates (1978-2015)**

Note: 1. The demonetisation sector is defined as GDP minus mining minus manufacturing minus utilities minus public administration and defence  
2. SBI real lending rate is calculated as the difference between nominal lending rate and y-o-y CPI inflation; it is lagged one year for analysis

growth and REER appreciation in 2017 are the highest observed. Between 2012 and 2016, export growth had averaged 0.3 per cent, and REER an average depreciation of 1.6 per cent.

For the moment, the export explanation for the growth slowdown is perhaps even less meaningful than demonetisation. So what does explain the downturn? Bad weather or bad karma? Maybe the latter. One fact noted by some objective experts is that the growth slowdown preceded demonetisation. After hitting a peak of 9.1 per cent in 2016Q1, quarterly GDP growth registered 7.9 and 7.5 per cent in the subsequent quarters, that is, at the time of demonetisation, GDP growth was already down to 7.5 per cent, a full 1.6 per cent below the peak reached just two quarters earlier.

If one has to explain the growth slowdown without recourse to conspiracy theories about data manipulation (we can't really do that now because growth is lower, much lower, than what the so-called data manipulators would like) one has to begin to answer the following two questions: What determines growth, and which of these determinants was flashing a red signal before demonetisation.

In most countries (strike that and replace with all countries except a unique country called India) the above question has the same answer – look at interest rates, stupid. No matter what country you go to, central bank and government officials have the same answer and the same policy: If you want to increase demand (up the GDP growth rate), decrease interest rates; if you want to decrease demand, increase interest rates. Why Indian macro-experts almost never offer this policy is a question I can't answer – a psychiatrist might do much better.

That interest rates do matter in India, and matter a lot, can be shown as follows. We look at only those sectors most susceptible or sensitive to interest rate policy. Agriculture can be ruled out, as it is most influenced by the weather; public utilities, public administration and defence should be excluded from the analysis, as these sectors are more susceptible to the whims and decisions of bureaucrats rather than the babus residing in Mumbai.

Which leaves us with manufacturing, mining, services (excluding public administration) and construction. Both mining and manufacturing (M&M) are problematic for any analysis because these two sectors have been plagued with high corruption, and even

higher bad balance sheets (NPAs or non-performing assets). It is likely that resolution of the NPA problem will significantly improve investments and growth, but the resolution will need a different instrument than lowering interest rates. If one takes only the interest rate sensitive sectors (services – public administration + construction) then one can estimate interest sensitivity of output growth. This sector can also be thought of as the demonetisation sector. Agriculture and government expenditures bias GDP growth upwards, balance sheet considerations bias GDP growth downwards. These sectors are ignored in our calculations. The chart shows the relationship between the growth in the interest-sensitive (demonetisation) sector and lagged real SBI lending rates. Data are presented for fiscal years from 1978 to 2015. Note the strong central negative relationship for close to 40 years. Each 100 bp increase in the one-year lagged real lending rate decreases growth by 40 bp. Between 2012 and 2014, the one-year lagged real lending rate averaged around 5 per cent; the corresponding values for 2015 and 2016, 8.8 and 9.7 per cent. So annual growth in the fiscal year 2017/18 is expected to be around 2 percentage points lower than that observed in 2015. Average growth in the demonetisation sector in 2015-16 was 9 per cent – hence, 7 per cent is the expected growth for this sector in 2017/18. We have only two observations since demonetisation – 2017Q1 and 2017Q2; sector growth rate in these two quarters was 6.5 and 7.9 per cent respectively, or an average of 7.2 per cent. We don't want to push the analysis too far in the direction that only interest rates matter – there is the weather, animal spirits, momentum, confidence, and a host of other vaguely important factors. However, no matter what explanation you come up with, you will have to circle back to interest rates – the evidence is that strong. But go ahead, disregard the evidence. You are in good company with the experts at the RBI (and MPC). They must know better, otherwise why else will they keep real interest rates at world-beating levels?

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## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Whether the US and South Korea are willing to fulfill their roles in the peaceful resolution of this nuclear crisis will decide the future of the Korean Peninsula.”  
— GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

## From naysayer to leader

As old ideological divisions break down at the UN, Delhi must take the lead in promoting practical solutions to international challenges



**RAJA MANDALA**  
BY C. RAJA MOHAN

AS US President Donald Trump appears before the United Nations General Assembly this week for the first time and outlines his controversial worldview, the Indian delegation led by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj has an opportunity to build on the new pragmatism in Delhi's multilateral diplomacy. The NDA government has over the last three years begun to chip away at the ideological posturing that has long been the hallmark of India's UN diplomacy. Advancing this transition to realpolitik at the UN should be Swaraj's main political objective in New York.

The EAM should not let the inevitable bickering with Islamabad on Kashmir overwhelm its pursuit of many other political objectives at the UN. The international context of Kashmir has largely evolved in favour of India since the 1990s, when Delhi was at the receiving end of much criticism. The rise of India has encouraged the US and its European allies to put commercial and geopolitical imperatives above proclaimed concerns on human rights and non-proliferation.

More broadly, the era of knee-jerk interventionism that followed the end of Cold War may be winding down, thanks to the declining political support in the West for meddling in other people's affairs. If contesting the interventionist orientation of American foreign policy has long been considered politically suicidal in the United States, Trump reveled in whipping up nationalism in the name of "America First" and pitting it against the internationalism of the foreign policy establishment. While this played well during the campaign, the question over the last few months has been how much of the campaign rhetoric the president might retain and which parts he might discard. In a preview of Trump's speech, which is expected to articulate the administration's multilateral thinking, his aides pointed to four broad themes that the president will highlight – peace, prosperity, sovereignty and accountability.

Peace and security have always been at the top of American presidents' outreach to the United Nations. Washington has also long insisted on "accountability" and "efficiency" in the UN functioning and threatened to choke funding if the world body did not reform itself. The new element in Trump's speech is the emphasis on "sovereignty". After the Cold War, both liberals and conservatives in America pooh poohed the notion of sovereignty. Both believed that American power could be deployed for good around the world – whether it was the promotion of democracy or preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

If sovereignty of other states had to be

violated in pursuit of these objectives, then so be it. The eastern powers, China and Russia as well as the rising nations in the South, demurred against the diminution of state sovereignty. Trump has, however, complicated the east-west and north-south divisions by injecting sovereignty – especially American sovereignty – into the discourse. During his election campaign, Trump criticised multilateral alliances like NATO as "obsolete". He dismissed the United Nations as a "talk shop". Trump also attacked the multilateral trading system as "unfair" to the United States. He walked out of the negotiations on Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris accord on mitigating climate change.

During the last eight months, Trump, who made "globalism" a term of political abuse in America, has had to moderate some of his positions. Under pressure from the foreign policy establishment, Trump reaffirmed the importance of NATO and other alliances. Rejecting criticism that he is an "isolationist", Trump has used force in the Middle East, extended American military presence in Afghanistan, and threatened to bomb North Korea. There has also been unconfirmed speculation that Trump might reconsider his rejection of the Paris accord.

Consistency has certainly not been the hallmark of Trump's articulation of US interests. But there is no question that he has blurred the traditional lines of debate on intervention and sovereignty. This can't but be welcome for Delhi, which has long cautioned against undermining state sovereignty.

As old ideological divisions break down at the UN, Delhi must now take the lead in promoting practical solutions to international challenges. It must also remember that multilateralism is not an end in itself, but a means to pursue India's national interests. India's thinking on global issues has in recent years moved away from defensiveness to claims of leadership. Nothing illustrates this better than India's policy on climate change under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. From being the naysayer, India played a key role in generating consensus in the Paris talks on climate change at the end of 2015. When Trump turned the US policy on climate change upside down, Modi reaffirmed India's support for the Paris accord and promised to work with other leading powers.

The NDA government has also mobilised multilateral pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting cross-border terrorism but has run into resistance from China, Islamabad's ally. Beijing has reminded Delhi that multilateralism can't really be separated from great power politics.

Finding common ground on specific issues with the US, China, Japan, Europe and Russia in smaller plurilateral fora has indeed become an important part of India's multilateral diplomacy. That is why the trilateral engagement with the top diplomats of US and Japan on the one hand and the BRICS foreign ministers on the other have become important fixtures on Sushma Swaraj's calendar in New York.

*The writer is director, Carnegie India, Delhi and contributing editor on foreign affairs for The Indian Express*

## In defence of the bureaucrat

Civilian officialdom acts as a check and balance in the ministry of defence



SUDHANSU MOHANTY

I MUST confess upfront that I was somewhat amused to read Arun Prakash's article, 'Agenda for the Raksha Mantri' (IE, September 13). As a retired IDAS officer, a former controller general of defence accounts (CGDA) and a former financial adviser, defence services (FADS), in the MoD who demitted office last year, let me put things in perspective.

Democracy functions through the principle of separation of powers and a system of checks and balances to uphold the rule of law. In India, the executive, legislature, judiciary and the fourth estate (media) operate within legitimate bounds to perform such roles. The role of financial officers is putatively adversarial (not my words but that of eminent commentators) but their functions are necessary to ensure due diligence of the taxpayers' money. But despite a robust mechanism to checkmate unholy impulses, the country has witnessed several scams – most notably the AgustaWestland helicopter scam in which the former Chief of the Air Force, S.P. Tyagi, was jailed and charge-sheeted. There are middlemen galore in the MoD; doubtless they function with the connivance of insiders.

Prakash is right that most bureaucrats in the MoD lack expertise and domain knowledge; this shortcoming, no doubt, needs to be addressed. Bureaucrats with no idea of the vast defence ecosystem must have their first stint at the deputy secretary/director level – not as joint secretary, where the high work pressure leaves little time to learn. Training at the Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College too will help.

But Prakash's vision appears blinkered when he talks about the IDAS officers functioning as "Integrated Financial Advisers (IFAs)" in the MoD. Their role, as per the finance ministry's order of June 1, 2006, goes much beyond assisting in "budgetary planning" and in "expediting financial decision-making". They examine issues from a financial perspective in order to ensure value for money and improve the quality of expenditure. Their role is akin to that performed by a chief financial officer in a corporate structure. They are responsible for ensuring fiscal prudence and sound financial management. The IFAs are crucial for the successful planning and implementation of various schemes/projects and are responsible for en-

suring budgetary integrity. I concede many IFAs fail to comprehend their role well and tend to act as merely auditors. But it isn't wise to deride the role of the financial advisers and throw the baby with the bathwater. The need to place the right IFAs through a transparent system can't be over-emphasised.

The role of the MoD's finance division does not involve "lying in ambush as auditors" and "waiting for someone to make a mistake before pouncing". Audit – including internal audit – is a distinct responsibility that the IDAS officers and the defence accounts department discharge as an aid to defence management. This is always done ex-post. While it's essential for bureaucrats to understand the defence ecosystem, it's equally imperative for the services to acquaint themselves with the civilian bureaucracy's ecosystem and appreciate government orders.

Prakash is also wrong in saying that there is "an acute lack of military expertise in the MoD and an absence of collegiate consultation between civilians and service HQ". From my experience, I can say that at every stage, including budget-making and delegation of financial powers, there are discussions and

dialogues galore. This is apart from the structured collegiate decision-making in the contract negotiating committee for procurement of capital and revenue items. The responsibility for delay, when that happens, should hence be shared by all – not the MoD alone.

But this is not just about differing perceptions between the civil and defence bureaucracies. The MoD has, in the recent past, pointed out several cases of glaring abuse of personal entitlements (leave travel concessions/official tours, disability pensions) by senior service officers. In such cases, the services headquarters has not exactly measured up to the impeccable standards it pretends to have set. Over time, these cases have become sore points in the relation between the MoD and the service headquarters.

In a mature democracy, the MoD and the service headquarters should not be pointing fingers at each other. They should work together under the direction and superintendence of the political leadership, the people's representatives.

*The writer retired as financial advisor (defence services) in the ministry of defence*

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### MATURE INDIA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Three isn't a crowd' (IE, September 16). Though India and Japan have border conflicts with China, it would be immature to say that the deepening relationship between these two Asian giants is due to the Chinese factor. Indian leadership has always been restrained and matured; it has advocated a multi-polar world. The way India tried to resolve the Doklam issue shows that it is genuinely interested in maintaining a healthy relationship with its neighbours

**Bablu Kumar Gupta, Lucknow**

### UNFAIR TO RYANS

THE RECENT MURDER of a seven-year old child at Ryan International School, Gurugram, has stirred the conscience of the nation. The media is on an overdrive in the quest for the arrest of the owners of the school Ryan Pinto, his wife and their son. It would be unfair to lose track of the commendable work done by the Ryans – they have set up more than 135 institutions. Nearly 30,000 students pass out of these schools every year. While it is their duty to cooperate with complete honesty in the investigations, the insulting manner in which mud has been slung at them by the media is unfair. Soon after the Ryan horror, a nine-year old girl in a government school in Gurugram was allegedly raped on the premises by her teacher. Should the police not reach the doors of the minister of education?

**Raj Mohindra, via email**

### LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to [editpage@expressindia.com](mailto:editpage@expressindia.com) or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

### QUALITY MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A higher opportunity' (IE, September 15). Before speaking of India as a "global hub for higher education" we must improve the quality of education imparted in the country. Students prefer to study in government colleges. This shows that private schools have improved but private colleges are not up to the mark.

**Kamlesh Kumar, Kolkata**



# 16 EXPLAINED

## The Maya Kodnani Files: the cases against her, where they stand now

BJP president Amit Shah on Monday appeared as a defence witness in the Naroda Gam case, one of two in which former Gujarat minister Maya Kodnani is accused. What is this case, and what is its current status? What is the other case, the one in which 97 Muslims were killed in Naroda Patiya? SATISH JHA recalls.

**Naroda Gam Case**  
**ACCUSED:** 86  
**DEAD DURING PENDENCY OF TRIAL:** 4  
**WENT ON TRIAL:** 82  
**KODNANI ARRESTED IN** 2009  
**CURRENT STATUS:** All accused are on bail

ACCORDING TO the Special Investigation Team (SIT), the prosecuting agency, a mob of about 1,500 individuals had gathered at Baghol, Naroda Gam, around 9 am on February 28, 2002, to enforce a *bandh* called by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to protest the attack on *kar sevaks* travelling by Sabarmati Express at Godhra the day before.

Maya Kodnani and VHP leader Jaideep Patel arrived on the scene in their vehicles between 9 am and 9.30 am from different directions, the agency said. Both of them allegedly proceeded to give hate speeches to incite the already agitated mob, which then went on the rampage, attacking and setting fire to properties around them. They targeted a nearby mosque, and burnt a tea stall, the SIT has alleged. One person was allegedly set on fire near Bank of Baroda Street, and another five were burnt at Chandubhai ki Chaali.

In all, 11 persons were killed in rioting. The Supreme Court-appointed SIT took over the case from local police, and achieved a major breakthrough with the arrests of Kodnani, Patel and others in 2009.

Kodnani, who was also the local MLA at the time, was charged with leading the mob and of instigating them to avenge the killing of *kar sevaks* in the train at Godhra. The SIT's chargesheet named 14 eyewitnesses who claimed to have seen her at the spot, inciting rioters and telling them to kill Muslims. One of the witnesses testified to having seen her sitting with the then Naroda police inspector.

**Naroda Patiya Case**  
**ACCUSED:** 61  
**CONVICTED:** 32, INCLUDING KODNANI  
**CURRENT STATUS:** Hearing on convicts' appeals concluded last month, judgment is awaited

THE MUSLIM locality of Naroda Patiya is less than 2 km from Naroda Gam. On February 28, 2002, it became the site of one of the worst massacres of the Gujarat riots — 97 Muslims were killed by mobs. Kodnani was accused of reaching the spot where a large



Maya Kodnani and VHP leader Jaideep Patel are taken to court in 2009. Express Archive/Harsh Shah

mob had assembled, and of inflaming the situation. Eleven eyewitnesses claimed to have seen her getting off her car, surrounded by the mob. She allegedly addressed them and incited them to kill Muslims.

In 2012, a designated special court found Kodnani guilty. The court held that she was among the "principal conspirators" of the riots, and while there is no evidence of her having been part of the unlawful assembly, her role as the "kingpin" of the conspiracy was proved beyond doubt. The judgment said: "Accused 37 (Kodnani) has been proved to be the kingpin of the entire communal riot and one of the

principal conspirators who has actively instigated the rioters and has abetted them to form unlawful assembly to execute the conspiracy hatched under her leadership with other co-conspirators."

In July 2014, a division Bench of the Gujarat High Court led by then Acting Chief Justice V M Sahai granted Kodnani bail on the ground that she was suffering from "intestinal tuberculosis with IBS [irritable bowel syndrome] and gastro reflux disease and with severe weight loss".

The order granting her bail underscored the fact that the designated court had acquitted

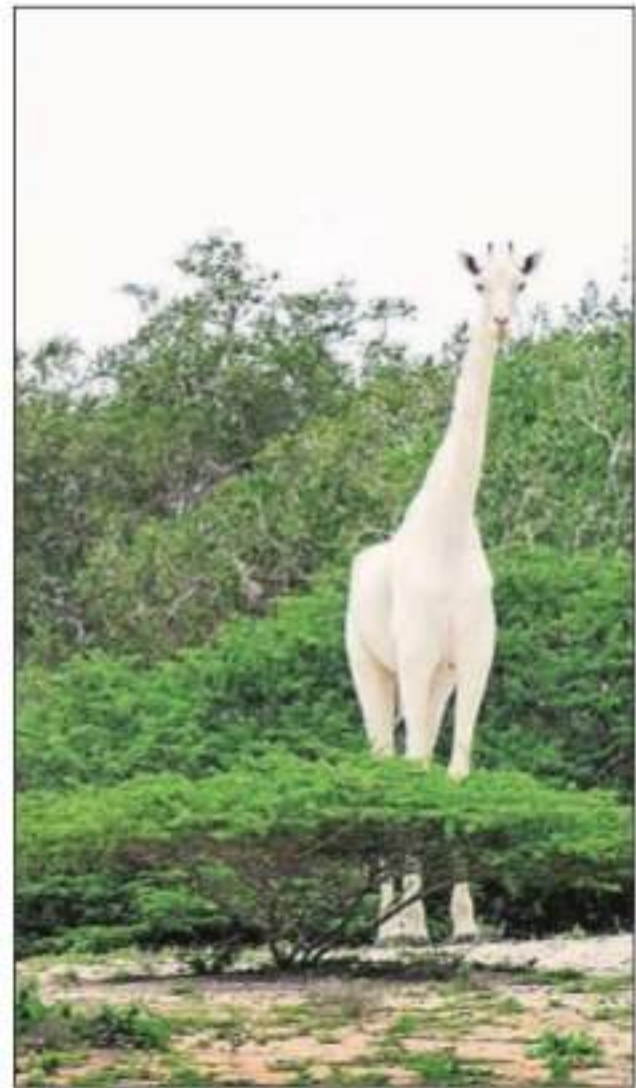
her "as being a member of unlawful assembly and convicted her for hatching conspiracy with thousands of people who were members of a mob".

The Naroda Patiya judgment is under challenge in the Gujarat High Court, where Kodnani's lawyers have argued that there is not enough evidence against her. The 11 witnesses who have testified against her allegedly contradict each other about her presence at the scene of the offence, as also about the role she played. A division Bench headed by Justice Harsha Devani has reserved its judgment. The judgment will have direct bearing on the Naroda Gam case, in which Kodnani is facing identical charges.

### SIMPLY PUT

### LEUCISM: A GENETIC CONDITION

## In Kenya, mother giraffe and calf, both ghostly white



IN JUNE, a villager herding animals in Kenya's Garissa county near the Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy came across a sight he had never seen before: a ghostly creature with a long neck, grazing in the distance. It turned out to be a female reticulated giraffe — tall, majestic and preternaturally white — accompanied by a smaller apparition: a pale baby giraffe.

The villager ran to tell rangers, and conservationists hurried to the site. They captured what is believed to be the first known video footage of white giraffes, said Abdullahi H Ali, who founded Hirola and has been working to conserve the critically endangered hirola antelope in the eastern part of the country. They also found a normal colour reticulated giraffe with the mother and calf.

The white giraffes displayed characteristics of a genetic condition known as leucism, which inhibits pigmentation in skin cells, Ali said. The condition occurs across the animal kingdom. Birds, lions, fish, peacocks, penguins, eagles, hippos, moose and snakes have all displayed the trait.

Leucism is not albinism, however: animals with albinism produce no melanin throughout their entire bodies. Those with leucism



(Left) The mother giraffe in Kenya Hirola Conservation Programme; (Above) a white moose in Sweden in July, and a male white peacock at the Delhi Zoo. Reuters



may have darker pigment in their soft tissue, and their eyes retain a normal colour. The eyes of animals with albinism are usually red.

The baby giraffe, Hirola said, was not totally white, but its tinges of colour seemed to be "fading away, leaving the baby white as it approaches adulthood". It was unclear if, under the hot African sun, the giraffes' skin was vulnerable to damage, Ali said.

Ali said only two earlier sightings of the white giraffes have been reported in recent years: in April 2016 in Garissa county; and in

Tarangire National Park in Tanzania in January 2016.

Besides having pale skin because of leucism or albinism, animals can have a third condition, called isabellinism, that leaves them looking greyish-yellow; but they can still produce pigment. Scientists have quibbled over the exact differences in the conditions, but leucism and isabellinism are sometimes used interchangeably.

YONETTE JOSEPH, THE NEW YORK TIMES

## In page from Indian history, zero's oldest living ancestor reveals its age

'We now know that it was mathematicians in India in 200-400 CE who planted the seed of the idea that'd become so fundamental to modern world'

KABIR FIRAQUE  
 NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 18

LAST WEEK, the University of Oxford's Bodleian Libraries announced that carbon-dating of an ancient Indian document, called the Bakhshali Manuscript, has established that it is "the world's oldest recorded origin of the zero symbol that we use today".

The announcement needs to be read in the context of what is already known about how the concept of zero developed in India. The manuscript, parts of which are now dated to the 3rd or 4th century AD, cannot claim to contain the earliest use of zero, a fact stressed by an Oxford professor himself.

But it does lay claim to being the oldest surviving document that expresses zero, the placeholder, in a form that would later evolve into the modern symbol for zero, the number.

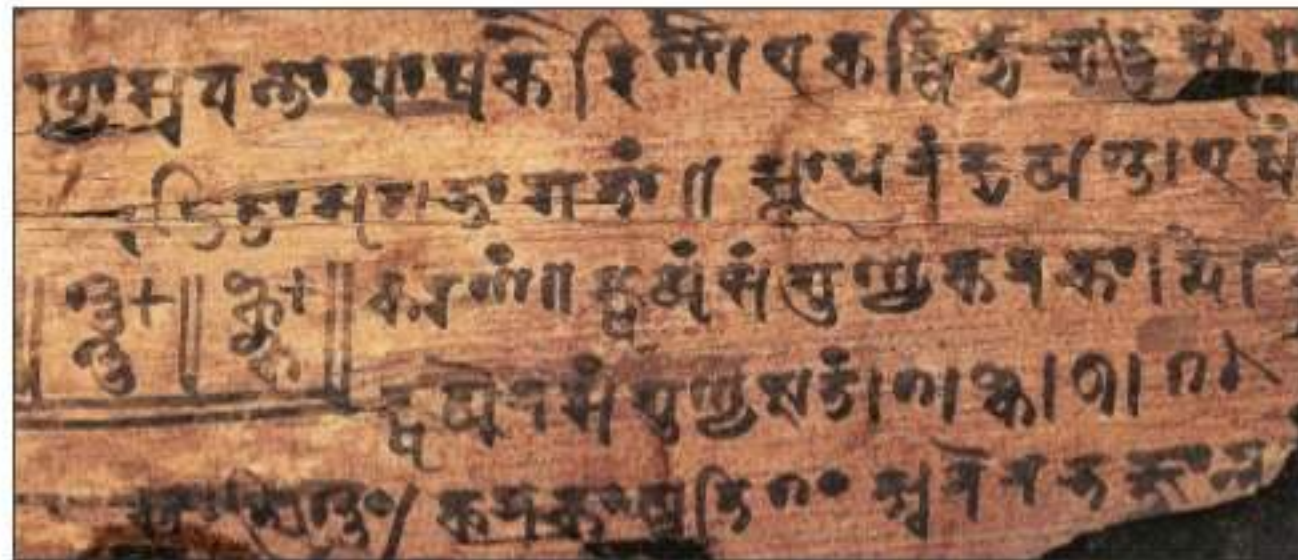
For the latter concept, the credit remains with Brahmagupta, who wrote of zero as a number in *Brahmasphutasiddhanta* (c. 628), a few centuries after the Bakhshali Manuscript.

### The manuscript

Consisting of 70 fragile leaves of birch bark, the manuscript was found buried in a field in Bakhshali village near Peshawar in 1881. From the farmer who unearthed it, it was acquired by a scholar, who presented it to the Bodleian Library in 1902.

The manuscript contains hundreds of zeros — each of which is represented by a dot and serves as a placeholder, meaning it denotes 10s, 100s or 1,000s. That in itself is not a first: other ancient civilisations too used symbols to denote zero as a placeholder, including the Babylonians 5,000 years ago, millennia before the Bakhshali Manuscript.

"But why it is so exciting is that this zero



Folio 16v (228-343 AD) of the Bakhshali Manuscript shows the use of the dot as a placeholder in the bottom line. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

used in India, represented by a dot, is the seed from which the concept of zero as a number in its own right emerged some centuries later, something many regard as one of the great moments in the history of mathematics," writes Marcus du Sautoy, Oxford professor of mathematics, in a discussion released with the research statement.

"In other words, it was the dot that we see in the Bakhshali Manuscript that went on to become the symbol that was first used for zero as a number in its own right."

The manuscript's interest to mathematicians extends beyond the zeros. In *The Penguin Book of Curious and Interesting Puzzles*, teacher-author David Wells describes a puzzle

### SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

It's not you. It's your falling victim to your own mythology.  
**NEIN. (@NEINQUARTERLY)**, Twitter *nom de plume* of Eric Jarosinski, American Germanist and author, 166,000 followers. Typically posts linguistic, political and philosophical aphorisms, and writes a column in the leading German weekly *Die Zeit*. His first book, *Nein. A Manifesto*, was released in 2015.

## For GST, restaurants are integrated units; 18% applies for both AC, non-AC sections

### Ask the EXPRESS

YOUR QUESTIONS ON GST ANSWERED

**A restaurant that I visit frequently has airconditioned seating on the first floor and no ACs on the ground floor. They charge 18% GST on both floors, as well as on takeaways. Is this in order?**  
**J KUMAR, PUNE**

The restaurant has to be treated as an integrated unit. If there is airconditioning on the first floor, even if there is no AC on the ground floor, the restaurant has to be treated in its entirety and 18% GST would be charged on food takeaways from both the floors.

### BUILDERS' UNSOLD INVENTORY

**Are builders/developers who have unsold inventory in the form of Work in Progress and/or Finished Stock as on June 30, 2017, eligible to claim input tax credit in respect of:**

- (1) Excise duty on the above where inputs (materials) are supported with invoices from up to one year before the appointed date of GST and,
- (2) VAT on inputs (materials). The entity was under composition scheme enjoying payment of lumpsum VAT on advance money received from prospective buyers of units in the project.

**D K PATEL, RAJKOT**

- (1) The excise duty on raw materials can transition as CGST credit on inputs to be used for payment of CGST on the works contract in which these materials will be utilised.
- (2) The entity operating under the composition scheme will not be eligible to carry over the input credit.

### SMALL FOOD BUSINESS

**My wife has just opened a small cafeteria where she has a live kitchen counter breakfast and brunch. As a 10-day-old startup, registration under GST is not yet required — however, should any GST be charged to the customer? At what rate? Also, several food review, ordering and delivery portals/web sites are now insisting on GST registration for any business that wants to list with them. The cost of GST registration, and filing of invoices and returns using services of professional CAs is likely to be substantial — so how are small businesses expected to make up?**  
**AMANA FOODS, PUNE**

Small restaurants like your wife's cafeteria are eligible for GST exemption for up to an annual turnover of Rs 20 lakh. Once you cross this turnover, the three key business processes of registration, payment of duty and submission of return will have to be done online through the GSTN portal. There are a number of agencies who run programmes to help small businesses complete these processes.

### RENTING TO INSTITUTES

**Under the earlier regime, there was no service tax on renting of immovable property to an educational institute. In the GST regime, no exemption is specified for rental income chargeable from an educational institute, including those affiliated to NSDC and providing vocational courses under the Skill India Mission. However, such institutions are exempt from charging GST from their students. In such a situation, the GST on**



### V S KRISHNAN

Advisor, Tax Policy Group, EY India, and former Member (Service Tax & GST), Central Board of Excise & Customs

Krishnan is answering questions from the readers of *The Indian Express* on GST. A selection of questions and answers is being published in these columns.

**rent would be a cost for such institutions, as there would be no GST on output service to set off against. There have been multiple statements in the media from the government/officers that the regime/exemptions under GST would be the same as under the erstwhile service tax regime. In that case, will GST be chargeable on rentals of immovable property to educational institutes approved by NSDC?**

**NAKUL KHANDELWAL, NEW DELHI**

The taxable event in the GST is 'supply', and therefore, the taxability in the GST regime cannot be compared with the earlier service tax dispensation. The government has provided GST exemptions through an omnibus notification, which provides exemption for a number of Skill India Mission programmes run by government organisations.

### REGISTERED AS AN NGO

**I have a small business of arranging competitive examinations in schools for a Delhi-based all-India competitive examinations institute, which is registered as an NGO. I have been asked to register for GST, even though my annual turnover is about half the minimum Rs 20 lakh floor. But the Delhi institute is worth crores of rupees. (1) Should I, too, register for GST, because our parent institute does big business and is required to register? (2) Should I be charging students for the GST that I may have to pay?**  
**DINESH SHAH**

Renting of immovable property is a supply of service and, therefore, taxable under GST, unless otherwise exempt. The fact that you are an NGO does not dilute your tax liability. For the purpose of reckoning the turnover, all institutes that have the same PAN number, representing the same legal entity, would have to be computed together to determine the GST liability.

### ENTERTAINMENT TAX

**Haryana has approved a Bill to levy entertainment tax. Aren't entertainment services like movie tickets already covered by GST in the 28% slab?**  
**PRASHANT SHARMA, SUNDER NAGAR, MANDI**

Under the GST scheme, local bodies can separately levy entertainment tax, provided the state passes a separate legislation. While this would, indeed, amount to burdening the entertainment sector, it is for the states to take a call on whether this double burden is in their interest.

zle from the manuscript: "Twenty men, women and children earn twenty coins between them. Each man earns 3 coins, each woman 1½ coins and each child ½ coin. How many men, women and children are there?"

It is the earliest puzzle of its kind — Chinese mathematician Sun Tsuan-Ching's version, called the 'One Hundred Fowls' problem, came in the 4th century.

### Multiple ages

In fact, the Bakhshali Manuscript contains material from different periods. "It is actually composed of material from at least three dates, with some pages dating from as early as the 3rd to 4th century and others dating from the 8th and 10th centuries," writes David Howell, head of heritage science at the Bodleian Libraries.

Folio 16, which contains dots representing zeros, dates from 224-383 AD, according to the radiocarbon-dating results. That makes the manuscript at least five centuries older than previously thought, the Bodleian Libraries says in a statement, referring to an earlier study by Japanese scholar Dr Hayashi Takao that had placed it between the 8th

and 12th centuries.

Two periods cited by the researchers put the manuscript's age in context. It predates not only Brahmagupta's 7th-century *magnum opus* but also a 9th-century inscription in Gwalior's Chaturbhuj Temple, so far thought to be the earliest recorded use of zero as a placeholder in India. Although Brahmagupta's work was older than the inscription, "as far as we understand, there is no surviving document from 628, only copies. Therefore, the Gwalior temple was the oldest surviving example of the use of the symbol for zero", Bodleian's press manager Rosie Burke told *The Indian Express* in reply to a question.

The Jain text *Lokavibhaga*, believed to have been written in 458, was, until now, thought to contain the earliest known mention of zero as a numeral. No copies of the Prakrit original are, however, available, and even its date is derived from a later Sanskrit translation. But the Bakhshali Manuscript predates the *Lokavibhaga*. "We now know", writes Professor du Sautoy, "that it was mathematicians in India in 200-400 CE who planted the seed of the idea that would become so fundamental to the modern world".