

Newspaper Analysis and Summary – 27th and 28th September 2015

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Tesla impresses PM with battery tech

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Tesla Motors campus here on Sunday and showed keen interest in some of its path-breaking inventions, particularly in the renewable energy sector which can have multiple applications in remote rural areas.

After touring the iconic American automotive company's campus, Mr. Modi tweeted how he was impressed by the Powerwall technology of Tesla Motors which helps store electricity in a battery for long term.

"Enjoyed discussion on how battery technology can help farmers," Modi said after his hour-long visit to Tesla campus wherein he was given a tour by its CEO Elon Musk.

Mr. Musk said that he had a "great discussion" with Mr. Modi about solar and batteries empowering rural communities. "For India, the main takeaway was the technology behind long-term storage battery, which can have multiple applications," said Vikas Swarup, External Affairs Ministry spokesman.

"The Prime Minister was very keen to see how we could utilise the battery — the Powerwall concept — to leapfrog development in India," he added.

"The solar-operated battery can allow clean energy to reach out to the unserved parts of India where you have nothing right now and by using solar powered and long term battery could provide immediate access to energy," Mr. Swarup said.

During the meeting, Mr. Musk gave a presentation to Mr. Modi on the revolutionary technologies being developed by Tesla. "We were delighted to host Prime Minister Modi at the Tesla Factory," Mr. Musk said. Mr. Modi also interacted with Indians working at Tesla and posed for a group picture with them.

Astronomy observatory all set for take off

Astrosat, the country's first astronomy observatory to study distant celestial objects, will be launched on Monday morning. A 50-hour countdown began at 8 a.m. on Saturday at the launch port in Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

The Indian Space Research Organisation said the launch vehicle, PSLV-C30, was being readied with propellants ahead of the launch, slated for 10 a.m. at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre.

Six tiny satellites of three foreign customers, weighing 118 kg, are being put in space on the same flight. Significantly, for the first time, the PSLV launcher has a U.S. customer using it to put four small satellites in space. The other customers are from Canada and Indonesia.

The vehicle has, to date, lifted 45 small and mid-sized foreign satellites for a fee.

The 1,513-kg Astrosat, estimated to have cost around Rs. 180 crore, carries five instruments and is among the few Indian scientific satellites. Most of ISRO's spacecraft are planned for specific applications such as communication, Earth observation and more recently, navigation.

Moving in a near Equatorial orbit 650 km above Earth, Astrosat will study black holes, scan the distant universe, star birth regions beyond our galaxy, binary and neutron stars over at least five years.

It will simultaneously observe the sky in multiple light bands or wavelengths of ultraviolet, optical, low and high energy X-ray. For the light-lift workhorse PSLV vehicle, this will be the 31st flight with 30 successes in its belt. The C-30 will be flown in the extended XL version.

Astrosat will study black holes, scan the distant universe, star birth regions beyond our galaxy

ENVIRONMENT

‘Promote green credit’

Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar on Sunday emphasised the need to promote green credit, instead of carbon credit, so that polluters do not get away with paying for carbon emissions.

Addressing the Second Meeting of the Business Dialogue for COP-21 under the U.N. Framework Convention for Climate Change here, he said: “The world must incentivise green growth activities as ‘Green Credit’ instead of Carbon Credit Mechanism, which provides a way out for the Emitter to get rid of the blame of pollution by paying for the emissions.”

The Minister stressed India’s proposed debate on lifestyle issues — where developed countries were urged to check unsustainable consumption practices — ‘climate justice’— focussing on the environmental rights of the people in developing and underdeveloped nations — and the green credit mechanism, ahead of the Modi-Obama meet on Monday, where climate change is likely to be a key subject of discussion.

The demand-supply mismatch and low ambition for emission reduction expressed by developed countries led to the slowdown of the well-established CDM market, the Minister said.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Ministry plans independent panel to decide MPs’ salary

The Parliamentary Affairs Ministry is all set to create an independent Emoluments Commission that will be empowered to recommend salaries and allowances for MPs. The Ministry hopes this will help to check the growing criticism – including in the media — of MPs deciding their own emoluments.

The proposal for an independent three-member commission is on the Ministry’s agenda for the two-day All India Whips Conference scheduled to be held in Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh from September 29-30.

The conference will be chaired by Parliamentary Affairs Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu.

The Chief Whips and Whips of various parties in Parliament/Assemblies will discuss a plan to establish inter-party forums in the legislatures for better coordination to facilitate effective functioning of legislative bodies. The utility and shortcomings of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) in operation over the last 32 years will also be discussed, it is learnt.

“The setting up of an independent Emoluments Commission for recommending the salaries and allowances of the Members of Parliament will not only put to rest the public outcry and media criticism over MPs themselves deciding their salaries, but also provide an appropriate opportunity to take into consideration the huge responsibilities and the important roles they play in our representative democracy,” say the Agenda Notes for the conference.

The commission is expected to ensure that recommendations on Parliamentary salaries “are reached in a fair, transparent and equitable way.”

“Once there is consensus on setting up of the commission, the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954, will be suitably amended.”

Centre dilutes Gujarat anti-terror Bill

The Centre has prevailed over the Gujarat government's suggestion to let the State Home Secretary be the final authority on phone-tapping requests, by making it clear that the State cannot have 'absolute powers' and such decisions and clearances will only be processed by the Union Home Secretary.

Presently, a State Home Secretary is permitted to authorise interception of phone calls as its office has been delegated to do so by the Union Home Secretary. This delegation of power from the Centre to the State is reviewed from time to time and can be revoked too, explained a senior Home Ministry official. The Home Ministry, which recently gave the green signal to the contentious Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GCTOC) Bill, 2015, watered down this clause of the State government, in the final version of the Bill sent to the President of India for his assent. Once the President has signed the Bill, it becomes a law.

The other sticking point in the Bill — admissibility of evidence collected through confessions made before an SP rank investigating officer, in a court of law— has been accepted by the Centre as such provisions also exist in the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) of 1999.

The Bill, passed by the Gujarat Assembly in March this year, has been rejected by the UPA government thrice earlier. The Bill was first sent for the Centre's approval in 2003 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

On August 25, Home Minister Rajnath Singh reviewed all the pending State legislation and asked officials to fast-track their clearance.

Centre forms expert committee to review civil services exam pattern

An expert committee has been formed by the government to examine various issues related to age relaxation, eligibility, syllabus and pattern of the civil services examination to select IAS and IPS officers.

"The committee will look into all aspects of civil services examination," Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday.

Based on the report of the committee, further changes in the civil services exam pattern would be considered with the primary objective of providing a level playing field to aspirants from diverse streams like mathematics, engineering, medicine and humanities, he said. Till such time as the recommendations of the committee were received and the government subsequently took a decision, the General Studies Paper-II (also known as CSAT) in the preliminary examination would remain a qualifying paper, with the minimum qualifying marks fixed at 33 per cent.

Path-breaking

Meanwhile, the government's decision taken last year to exclude the English portion, accounting for 22 marks in the General Studies Paper-II, from tabulation continued to remain in force, he told PTI here.

The panel has been formed as a follow-up to a decision taken by the government in May this year, said Mr. Singh, Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.

The panel would be headed by the former Chhattisgarh cadre IAS officer B.S. Baswan and consist of leading academicians, technocrats and senior bureaucrats, officials said.

Mr. Singh recalled that soon after the Narendra Modi government took over on May 26, 2014, it was confronted with the demands from across the country for revisiting the pattern and syllabus of the civil services examination.

It was being alleged that the present syllabus and pattern tended to benefit students from mathematics and engineering backgrounds, he said.

The decision to revise the civil services exam pattern was path-breaking and was aimed at achieving the basic objective of ensuring that the best and the most deserving got the

opportunity to become a part of the administrative set up of rapidly developing 21st century India.

The civil services examination is conducted annually in three stages — preliminary, main and interview.

Rajnath Singh: India will defeat terrorism

Terrorism is a challenge, but the country will conquer it, Home Minister Rajnath Singh asserted on Sunday, even as he dismissed fears about the Islamic State (IS) terror outfit spreading its reach to India.

Talking to journalists on the sidelines of an event, he referred to the apprehension that the dreaded IS terror outfit was expanding in several States. “Do not worry about it, there is nothing like that.”

The Minister did not comment on party MP R.K. Singh’s allegation that the party was giving ticket to candidates with criminal antecedents in Bihar.

Gender ratio

Earlier, in his speech at the event, Mr. Singh said the Modi government was making efforts to address social concerns and claimed that it was the first time in the country’s history that any government at the Centre was doing so.

“Generally, the work of any government is related to economic and strategic issues. But for the first time, a government has come at the Centre which is fulfilling social concerns as well,” he said. With the government having taken up the ‘ *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* ’ drive, the goal was now to balance the gender ratio.

“It is an irony that gender ratio is not balanced in India. In all countries that are considered prosperous, gender ratio is balanced. A country and society where gender ratio is unbalanced can never prosper,” he said.

Google to connect railway stations

Google’s Chennai-born CEO Sundar Pichai announced that he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi would unveil an important announcement regarding bringing connectivity, likely broadband via hotspots, to all railway stations in India, on Sunday.

Outlining examples of his company’s engagement with India’s ongoing digital transformation for economic development, Microsoft head Satya Nadella said the planned opening up of cloud services operating out of Indian data centres would be a “key milestone” in the context of both “Digital India” and “Make in India”.

Microsoft to open windows to villages

Intending to become a partner in the ambitious “Digital India” programme, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said his company would take low-cost broadband technology to some five lakh villages across the country.

At a dinner hosted in the honour of visiting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Nadella said that Microsoft wanted to make things and make things happen.

In his remarks, Mr. Nadella said Microsoft’s plan was to partner with the Indian government to bring in low-cost broadband connectivity to 5,00,000 villages in India.

“We believe that low-cost broadband connectivity coupled with the scale of cloud computing intelligence that can be harnessed from data can help drive creativity, efficiency and productivity across governments and businesses of all sizes,” the first Indian-American Microsoft CEO said.

This in turn, he argued, would drive more affordable products and services and access to opportunity to all of India.

To that end, next week Microsoft would announce availability of its cloud services operating

out of India's data centres.

"This is a big milestone. A key part of both 'Make in India' and 'Digital India', bringing world-class infrastructure into India, respecting India's digital security, sovereignty and privacy is a key milestone for us," Mr. Nadella said.

India could "leapfrog" in the technology infrastructure space to drive the next level of productivity, efficiency and creativity for Indian government, businesses and consumers, he said.

"Narendra Modi's vision is absolutely right and I think he is pushing the right agenda," he added.

Citing an example, Mr. Nadella said Microsoft was working with the Andhra Pradesh government to take the enrolment data of schools and using machine learning to understand which students and schools have higher drop out rates.

Asked if he was worried about the regulatory hassles that often trouble multinational firms, Mr. Nadella said the company had been present in India for over 20 years.

MHA, JIC chief differ on Myanmar border security

After the Naga peace framework agreement, the Union Home Ministry does not seem to be on the same page as Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) chief R.N. Ravi on the handling of security along the porous Myanmar border.

Mr. Ravi has submitted a report to the Ministry in which he has suggested that the Assam Rifles, which is currently posted along the Myanmar border, be replaced by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

The Home Ministry has red-flagged the suggestion saying replacing the entire Assam Rifles force from the border could have serious "financial and security-related implications."

The final decision will, however, be taken by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh is a member of the committee.

India and Myanmar share an unfenced border of 1,643 km adjoining Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km) and Mizoram (510 km) and permit a 'free movement' regime up to 16 km across the border.

The need to reassess the security along the border was realised when militants belonging to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) killed 18 Army jawans in Chandel district of Manipur in June this year.

Though a committee headed by Mr. Ravi had already been constituted by the Home Ministry, the Manipur incident was a wake-up call for the government.

The Assam Rifles functions under the Defence Ministry, but its administrative control is with the Ministry of Home Affairs.

During the UPA government's term, the MHA had pushed for the deployment of the BSF along the Myanmar border, but that decision never came about.

Sources said the ITBP has proposed raising 30 new battalions, in case it is deployed there.

The Assam Rifles (AR), which already has 25,000 men deployed there, said they would need only a few thousand more men to plug the gaps along the border.

As PM visits Silicon Valley, techies want govt. to think digital

Technology start-ups in India are reiterating their long-standing demand for a fundamental rethink of how the government looks at their sector.

On the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Silicon Valley, the world's Internet innovation hub where he is likely to make a pitch for India's digital future, technology start-ups in India are reiterating their long-standing demand for a fundamental rethink of how the government looks at their sector.

Indian start-ups have been voicing their views on excessive red tape in investment processes. A group of Indian entrepreneurs even told Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley during his visit to Silicon Valley in July about how young ventures were shifting out of India as a result. Ravi Kiran, co-founder, VentureNursery, a start-up accelerator, told *The Hindu*: "The start-up ecosystem is not properly understood by the government."

Techies want innovation, fewer regulatory hassles

Techies cite the low ranking of India in the Global Innovation Index while speaking about the state of innovation in the country in the context of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Silicon Valley.

Ravi Kiran, co-founder, VentureNursery, a start-up accelerator pointed out that India came 81st (behind Trinidad and Tobago) out of 141 countries in the latest Global Innovation Index, a leading benchmarking tool for anyone seeking insight into the state of innovation. "At the moment, the government does not distinguish between a start-up and an SME [small and medium enterprise]. There are so many Indians working in Google. Why are they not setting up their own Google here?" His list of to-dos for the government includes changing the intellectual property and innovation scenario, and tapping into the new wave of tech entrepreneurship to create large global software product companies (India is known for IT services companies, not product ones). "Without focussing on fundamentals such as these, this trip becomes only symbolic," he said.

Sudarsan Ravi, founder and CEO, Ripplehire, which is into "social recruiting", said: "The Valley is a very progressive ecosystem. They already believe in the India growth story; so it is not about the sales pitch. It would help if the government's focus is on removing the regulatory hassles so the believers in India can take action and contribute investments to the country."

One regulatory intervention that Indian tech entrepreneurs seek is the abolition of the capital gains tax that would "allow successful Valley-based entrepreneurs to invest early in Indian start-ups and help them build global businesses." The idea is they would bring with them their highly valued expertise, knowhow and informed risk-taking ability, ingredients that are in short supply to this first generation of product companies in India.

Ranjit Nair, CEO, Germin8, a social media intelligence firm, said: "The other hope, of course, is that they imbibe some of that Silicon Valley culture that makes entrepreneurs there feel empowered and uplifted. There is a sense of urgency in the Valley in terms of both decision-making and execution. The Indian tech community's big hope from this trip is that the government's gap between talk and action, in terms of time, is reduced." He said: "This time, the reaction is quite mixed. Unlike his last trip, Mr. Modi is not being treated like a rock star. Instead, the tech community is taking a wait-and-watch outlook to his trip." A high number of positive mentions among U.S. users has to do with themes relating to governance reforms and the 'Make In India' campaign, while an overwhelming 55 per cent of the negative mentions has to do with Facebook's internet.org effort, displaying concerns about Net neutrality and the future of a fair and accessible Internet in India.

India to announce climate commitments on Gandhi Jayanti

India will announce on October 2 its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) in the lead up to the Paris climate summit in December, the government indicated on Friday, hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the U.N. General Assembly that the country's development goals and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) were the same.

"October 2 is the birth anniversary of a great Indian and a great world leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who passionately believed in sustainable development. That would be an appropriate day to announce India's INDCs," Vikas Swarup, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson, said. October 1 is the deadline for declaring the INDCs, and India will miss it by a day. The INDCs of countries will form the basis for climate negotiations at the Conference of Parties (CoP) 21 under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris in December.

The U.S. administration has said that climate change would be on the agenda of President Barack Obama's meeting with Mr. Modi on Monday. After a two-day tour of the Silicon Valley in the west coast of the U.S., the Prime Minister will travel back to New York for the meeting.

Mr. Modi said in his U.N. speech that the negotiations would have to be based on the idea of "climate justice" rather than climate action. He elaborated on the climate-friendly initiatives planned for the next seven years, in which 175 GW of renewable energy would be produced and rivers and cities cleaned.

Climate justice

Explaining the concept of climate justice, Mr. Swarup said: "It is a question of equity. When you talk about emissions, then you need to talk about per capita emissions. India's per capita emission is still 1.7 and America's is 16 or 17."

"Historic responsibility of climate change has to be understood. It is very clear which are the countries that are responsible for the state that we are in today," Mr. Swarup said, adding that the Indian position was not new or different from that of other developing countries.

In fact, what Mr. Swarup has articulated is only the reiteration of a long-held official stand of the Indian government. Most recently, during a meeting of 13 Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs) in New Delhi, Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar had asserted that demanding climate action from developing countries should not involve any blame game and all LMDCs unanimously demanded that developed nations ought to take the lead and provide climate finance to developing countries to enable them to make the necessary transition to a low-carbon economy.

DU Sanskrit meet pushes back period of Vedas to 6000 BC

The Vedas date back to 6000 BC, Sanskrit scholars brainstorming on the dates of the ancient texts at a conclave organised by Delhi University's Sanskrit department said on Saturday. This amounts to the Vedas getting older by 4500 years compared to what we thought.

"The time of the Vedas cannot be asserted before 6000 BC and thus Vedic civilisation is proved more ancient than the Indus Valley civilisation," department head Ramesh Bhardwaj said in his keynote address, claiming that a correlation of archaeological, literary and astronomical evidence suggested so.

The innocuous sounding claim has deep political implications.

Influential Indian and European historians have for over a century seen the Vedas as dating back to 1500 BC, while the date of the Harappan civilisation is located around 2500 to 1800 BC. This had made the view that Vedic Aryans were early migrants to India commonplace.

Add to it a 19th century view of Indologists that Vedic Sanskrit had similarities with ancient European languages and early Persian — and that Tamil was distinct from Sanskrit.

These theories had spawned movements as varied as Jyotirao Phule's anti-Brahmin movement in western India and the Dravidian movement in south India, which believed that

there was an Aryan invasion in ancient times. Many saw the Vedic culture as superimposed over pre-Aryan cultures, while others talked of a migration sans invasion.

The present claim of these Sanskrit scholars makes the Vedas coincide with and even pre-date the Harappan civilisation, thus making the ancestors of today's Hindus indigenous to India.

Many scholars have seen such assertions as crucial to the Sangh Parivar, which, they argue, sees Hindus as original inhabitants of India, and Islam and Christianity as later entrants. Significantly, the Sangh Parivar uses the term Vanavasi (forest dwellers) rather than Adivasi (original inhabitants) for India's tribes.

"The Sanskrit department people aren't experts in comparative linguistics. They are also not environmental historians to study the flora and fauna of the Vedas," historian D.N. Jha told *The Hindu*. "Astronomical evidence is dubious. And I would like to ask why the department waited till 2015 for this finding? The most plausible date of the Vedas till now is 1500 BC."

Scholars from Delhi, Varanasi and Gorakhpur apart, archaeologists K.N. Dikshit and B.R. Mani attended the meet.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

G4 leaders seek time-bound U.N. reforms


After the Group of Four Summit, taking place after a decade, was hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, they issue a joint statement.

In a show of solidarity and as a message to the world community, leaders of Brazil, Germany, India and Japan on Saturday called for urgent reforms of the United Nations "in a fixed time frame", expressing disappointment that no substantial progress had been made in the past decade on the issue.

The Group of Four, or G4, Summit, taking place after a decade, was hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In the morning, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe travelled to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where Mr. Modi is staying. Japan, Germany, India and Brazil are the third, fourth, seventh and eighth biggest economies, respectively. In terms of population, India is the second biggest, Brazil fifth, Japan 10th and Germany 16th biggest in the world.

"The leaders emphasised that the G4 countries are legitimate candidates for permanent membership in an expanded and reformed [Security] Council and supported one another's candidature. They pledged to work together with all member-states and to accelerate outreach towards achieving an early and meaningful reform of the Security Council," said a joint statement issued by the leaders after the meeting.

TOP DEMANDS	JOINT AGENDA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ More representative, legitimate, effective Security Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Fulfil purposes and principles of the UN Charter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Global responsibilities with regard to maintaining peace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Make efforts to secure concrete outcomes at UNGA

 **Our institutions reflect the wisdom of the century we have left behind. This is especially true of the UNSC**

— NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister

"... the leaders noted with concern that no substantial progress had been made since the 2005 World Summit where all the Heads of State and Government had unanimously supported the 'early reform' of the Security Council as an essential element of the overall effort to reform the United Nations."

Modi boots up ‘Digital India’ with high-profile Silicon Valley show

The heads of top tech firms in Silicon Valley took note of Modi-U.S. 2.0, the Silicon Valley saga, and supplied a bounty of investment and development plans. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not only at his oratorical best during a “Digital India” dinner but also appeared to strike a chord with the community here, building on the same diaspora ties as he did one year ago at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

In response to his “Digital India” road show here, the commitments made include a \$150-million investment by Qualcomm into a fund for Indian start-ups, an ambitious project to let Google users be able to type in 10 Indian languages, Microsoft’s promise to open up cloud computing services out of Indian data centres and critical proposals from Tesla and Apple for long-term solutions in solar energy and the app economy.

Leading the list of strategic policy announcements, Qualcomm boss Paul Jacobs emphasised his company’s support for the “Digital India” and “Make in India” agenda by establishing a \$150-million India-specific Venture Fund formed exclusively to fuel innovation and foster promising Indian start-ups that were contributing to the mobile and the “Internet of everything” ecosystem.

Google’s Chennai-born CEO Sundar Pichai was not to be outdone as he promised that next month the Internet search giant would announce a new approach to Indian language typing.

Mr. Pichai said, “Android is today available in many Indic languages but we know that to push digital literacy forward it is really important for people to be able to type in Indian languages. So next month, we will make it possible for people to type in 10 Indic languages in India, including the Prime Minister’s mother tongue, Gujarati.”

Mr. Modi had earlier quipped: “The most fundamental debate for our youth now is the choice between Android, iOS or Windows.”

India investors’ heaven, says PM

Projecting India as a “heaven” for investors, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that his government was working on deregulation and ensuring “ease of doing business” as he aimed to convert the country’s economy from 8 trillion dollars to 20 trillion dollars.

At a Townhall Q&A at the Facebook Headquarters here, along with its CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, Mr. Modi spoke about efforts to revive the faith among foreign investors, saying reforms were taking place speedily and the government had managed to “restore the lost confidence” during the last 15 months as he appeared to take a dig at the previous UPA dispensation. He said his government was laying thrust on three sectors — agriculture, services and manufacturing — along with building the physical and digital infrastructure simultaneously.

During the 45-minute session, he spoke in detail about the benefits of social media, particularly how it had been useful to him to connect with the people within the country and abroad, and how it could help take corrective steps if some government steps went wrong.

Turns emotional

He became emotional while answering a question from Mr. Zuckerberg on his over 90-year-old mother as he highlighted how she had raised him by washing utensils of others and working as a labourer.

‘Online abuse of women, a major worry

The United Nations Broadband Commission has found that 73 per cent of women reported facing violence online. The report ‘Cyberviolence against women and girls: A world-wide wake up call’ launched recently at the U.N. headquarters flags the challenges thrown up by the new digital era in which the increased use of the Internet and mobile gadgets has unleashed new forms of violence such as stalking, trolling and abuse of women online.

UNDP Administrator Helen Clark said given the thrust on promoting Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by 193 world leaders here on Friday, there is need to address gender-based violence in all its forms, including cyberviolence.

“Goal 5 of the SDGs which calls for achieving gender equality must be seen together with Goal 16, which calls for promoting peace, access to justice, and strengthening institutions to address violence. We cannot hope to achieve gender equality without addressing gender-based violence in all its possible forms,” she said.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngucka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, said technology actively promoted gender inequality by excluding women who cannot access ICTs in the first place and, if they do, by promoting women’s violence online. She expressed concern over sex trafficking and child pornography being increasingly promoted online. Referring to the stalking and abuse of U.N. Women ambassador and actor Emma Watson online, Ms. Mlambo-Ngucka said the mental stress women subjected to such abuse underwent was no less in degree than physical violence at home.

“Stalkers and abusers online take advantage of anonymity and are also encouraged by the viral nature of the online medium which provides instant fame,” she observed.

India left out of meeting on Afghanistan

A meeting on Afghanistan, co-chaired by the United States and China on Saturday with Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Turkey, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Australia, Kazakhstan, and Norway kept India out, but India made light of it saying it was an “informal meeting.” European Union high representative for foreign affairs and security policy also participated in the meeting.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended the meeting. Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani said the meeting demonstrated “the renewed spirit of partnership that has emerged between these two countries, whose commitment to Afghanistan is greatly valued and appreciated.” Mr. Rabbani said he and President Ghani “took all necessary measures to ensure that our relationship with one country would not overshadow our relationship with the others.” Mr. Kerry welcomed China’s engagement in Afghanistan, stating that as a near neighbour, it can greatly contribute to the stabilisation efforts.

An Indian diplomat told *The Hindu* that the meeting was an informal mechanism and exclusion from it did not matter to India. “We are part of the U.N. initiatives on Afghanistan,” he pointed out.

The reducing diplomatic space after the Ghani government took charge remains a matter of concern for India.

Modi feels the pulse of Silicon Valley, connects with tech CEOs

It was a full-throttle Modi speech: arcing through carefully crafted allegory, then deliberately slowing through serious turns of argument before gracefully finishing on a note of optimism and thunderous applause from a full house.

There were zingers aplenty, though many evoked, in a lighter vein, a sense of gradual progress rising from the very grassroots of India, and one that was increasingly engaging with all platforms of social media and digital technology.

“The status that now matters is not whether you are awake or asleep, but whether you are online or offline,” he quipped. In humour-cloaked praise of the tech companies whose bosses were on the stage, Mr. Modi said, “Google today has made teachers less awe-inspiring and grandparents more idle. Twitter has turned everyone into a reporter. The traffic lights that need to work the best are on Cisco routers.”

Mr. Modi said: “California is one of the last places in the world to see the sun set, but it is here that new ideas see the first light of the day.”

But the message of Mr. Modi’s pitch to the gathering of tech elites on Saturday evening was his promise to take India up to the next stage of its development, a vision that he intended to achieve through policy campaigns such as “Digital India” and “Make in India.”

“As our economy and our lives get more wired, we are also giving the highest importance to data privacy and security, intellectual property rights and cyber security,” the Prime Minister explained, adding that his administration hoped to transform governance and make it “more transparent, accountable, accessible and participative.”

Mirroring some of the views expressed by the tech CEOs, Mr. Modi said his government was seeking to expand the availability of public Wi-Fi hotspots.

“For example, we want to ensure that free Wi-Fi is not only there in airport lounges, but also on our railway platforms. Teaming up with Google, we will cover 500 railway stations in a short time,” he said.

India would also seek to provide broadband connection to all schools and villages, Mr. Modi said. “Building I-ways are as important as highways.”

Placing the entire digital campaign in context, Mr. Modi said it was born out of conviction that it was possible to rapidly transform the lives of people on the margins and “touch the lives of the weakest, farthest and the poorest citizen of India as also change the way our nation will live and work.”

Sri Lanka to build 65,000 homes for war-hit families

The Sri Lankan government has decided to take up the construction of 65,000 houses “on a priority basis” for Eelam War-hit families in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

This is inclusive of the total requirement of 1,37,529 houses to be built in the two provinces. However, the total figure is over and above 46,000 houses being constructed under a programme funded by the Indian government.

After a meeting between Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New York a few days ago, spokesperson of the Indian government’s External Affairs Ministry Vikas Swarup was quoted as saying that “we expect 46,000 houses to be completed by early next year.” As per the Sri Lankan government’s plan, reputed national and international companies will be invited to send proposals that will be scrutinised by a committee.

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, which submitted its report to the government in November 2011, recommended that the government address “on an urgent basis” the housing needs of those internally displaced persons, who were returning to their places of origin. It had also called for accessing “all possible sources of assistance” from institutions and individuals, national and international, for the purpose.

As many as 13,459 families, accounting for 44,934 persons, were yet to be resettled as on April 30.

UN goals to end poverty in 15 years adopted

World leaders on Friday pledged to end extreme poverty within 15 years, adopting an ambitious set of UN goals to be backed up by trillions of dollars in development spending.

Pope Francis welcomed the new global agenda as an “important sign of hope” in his speech to the UN General Assembly and urged leaders to deliver on their promise to transform the world by 2030.

Making his first address to the United Nations, the pontiff sounded a note of warning, saying pledges were worthless without the determination to follow through.

“Solemn commitments, however, are not enough, even though they are a necessary step toward solutions,” the Pope said as he urged leaders to take “concrete steps and immediate measures” to protect the environment and end exclusion.

Billed as the most comprehensive anti-poverty plan ever, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets were adopted at the start of a summit that capped three years of tough negotiations.

Their goals aim to end poverty at a cost of between \$3.5 and \$5 trillion per year until 2030.

BUSINESS/ECONOMY

How start-up economy hums

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been in the Bay Area, representatives of the venture capital community here are engaging with him on a range of proposed economic reforms that could make it vastly easier to invest in start-up firms and thus boost the level of entrepreneurship and technology innovation in India.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Venkatesh Shukla, president of The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE) Silicon Valley network group, said that Mr. Modi’s trip to Silicon Valley was very significant for several reasons, including the fact that “this is the first time in independent India that a government has recognised that start-ups are the way to generate employment and jobs.”

The government cannot keep handing out jobs, he said, and big companies tend to grow too slowly to generate enough jobs, so the recognition of the role of start-up firms, and “raising this into the national consciousness as a national priority” was important.

Mr. Shukla said the tech community’s hope was that during Mr. Modi’s two-day visit to the Bay Area involving interactions with innovators, he would come away with a clear sense of how the start-up economy works in the U.S., and “what needs to be done differently in India, in terms of the laws there.”

Black money issue

One example of the issues arising from the existing laws relates to black money, and the fact that it is possible to simply invest that black money abroad and then bring it back to India as a participatory note investment and also avoid capital gains in that process.

“It is in the nation’s interest not to have that hot money but to have sticky money, which is related to start-ups and the expertise that they bring.”

To this end if it were a national priority to promote start-ups then the government should endeavour to make it easier to invest in such companies, for example, by making it possible for them to issue discounted stock options to their employees.

Further, he said, all start-ups wanted the same thing, including an ecosystem where it is easy to raise money, to hire and attract employees, to not be burdened with high taxes, and in the case of a successful exit from the business the firm should be able to take the money out.

A rate cut will add to the misery

With the credit policy statement barely a day away, it might be just right to remind policymakers of the travails of senior citizens in entirety. The expectation is that the Reserve Bank of India will lower the repo rate at least by 0.25 percentage points. Banks are expected to follow suit and lower their commercial rates both on deposits and loans.

Many of the points raised in the following paragraphs are not new but they need to be articulated more vigorously than ever before. The point has been made several times before that senior citizens as a class lack the lobbying power which corporates, chambers of commerce and others have. Moreover, senior citizens are not a homogenous category. For instance, the term includes pensioners and non-pensioners alike.

That is why the categorisation — made by among others the RBI Governor — between savers (the silent majority) and the borrowers (the vociferous minority) is particularly apt. Especially in today's context when practically everyone in the establishment is breathing down the governor's neck to effect a rate cut, a principled stand in favour of savers is to be particularly commended,

We have taken the liberty like many others to view senior citizens and savers as interchangeable expressions. This definitely is not the case always but nevertheless gives enough room to make an analysis.

In the following paragraphs S. Gopalakrishnan, a senior citizen who has held very high positions in public sector banking including the position of Ombudsman, looks at the travails of senior citizens not just in the context of falling deposit interest rates.

Woes of senior citizens

With the ever increasing cost of all consumer items, including medicines, the senior citizens are struggling with their meagre pensions. But the tragedy is that even the pension is treated as salary and taxed like salary. Even the dearness allowance on basic pension, which is given to compensate the ever increasing cost of consumer durables, is taxed by including it in the gross income.

Strangely, dividends received by millionaires, even if it is Rs.500 crore, is tax-free. The argument here is that the companies pay the tax. Does it mean that if the employer decides to pay the taxes on pension, the poor pension receiver will be spared of the tax burden?

From the assessment year 2015-16 even if a senior citizen pays Rs.1.50 lakh under Sec 80cc of the IT act if the total interest from bank deposits exceed Rs.3 lakh, banks will deduct TDS (tax deducted at source) and the assessee has to file the return and claim refund.

Senior citizens are taxed if their taxable income exceeds Rs.3 lakh. Banks are also deducting tax at source (TDS) if the total interest from bank deposits exceed Rs.3 lakh and the assessee has to file the return and claim refund.

Only if the senior citizen reaches the age of 80 he is spared of taxes up to Rs.5 lakh. But the Government can consider taxing senior citizens of over 70 years beyond Rs.4 lakh.

One rank one pension

Only central government employees are lucky to get one rank one pension benefit as their pension is automatically revised. Unfortunately this is not applicable to other public sector undertakings including the RBI.

The corporates and even the government are of the view that the Reserve Bank of India should announce a reduction in lending rate. However, the household savings are coming down steeply since independence.

This is because successive governments are bothered about the cost of borrowing and not the incentive for saving.

With the increase in cost, the savers (mostly senior citizens) are left high and dry. Rightly the interest should be able to cover inflation. But the reality seems to be otherwise.

All consumers including senior citizens are required to pay cost of goods plus excise duty and

VAT on the consumer goods purchased by them out of the taxed come (gross income minus income tax) thereby paying multiple taxes.

It is hoped that the monetary policy review will have a para or two on the saving class and how at the broadest level households need be provided with the right incentives.

India Inc.'s foreign borrowing up 48%

India Inc raised over \$750.76 million from overseas markets in August 2015, up about 48 per cent from a year ago, says RBI data.

During the same month in 2014, the Indian firms had raised \$507.40 million from markets abroad.

However, the amount borrowed by Indian firms from overseas markets in August this year was much lower than over \$2.14 billion, raised in previous month.

The borrowings, in a combination of automatic and approval routes, were done by way of external commercial borrowings (ECBs).

For a total of 55 borrowers, four of them raised the money from approval route, while rest by way of automatic route.

From approval route, Air India raised \$300 million for its working capital needs, Thai Summit Autoparts India \$7.15 million for import of capital goods) and UL India Pvt. \$1.9 million for new project.

Among major borrowers in automatic category, Hospira Healthcare India raised \$100 million for general corporate purpose, Essar Oil \$93.75 million for modernisation, Sun Pharmaceutical \$50 million for refinancing of earlier ECB and DCM Shriram \$26.92 million for refinancing of earlier ECB.

Markets expect RBI to cut interest rates

With the government clamouring for a rate cut a majority of market participants expect a policy rate (Repo) cut of 25 basis points by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) at its forthcoming monetary policy on Tuesday.

“Our expectation is that there is likely to be a rate cut of 25 basis points,” said Vinay Khattar, Senior Vice President & Head of Research, Edelweiss Financial Services. Several officials including Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and the Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian have been pitching for a rate cut. They have cited low inflation, and control on the fiscal deficit as factors favouring a rate cut while pointing to the aggressive steps taken by Chinese monetary authorities to respond to a growth slowdown. The repo rate is the rate at which banks borrow funds from the central bank.

“It is widely expected that RBI Governor would reduce policy rates by about 25 basis points in the forthcoming policy,” said Aashish Somaiyaa, CEO, Motilal Oswal Asset Management Company.

Inflation has slowed and is significantly below the RBI mandated trajectory and with the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and Consumer Price Index (CPI), both remaining at the threshold levels, there is a strong case for the RBI to cut rates, according to the market participants. “In addition, the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) number has become soft and it appears that monetary easing would be required for industrial production to pick up,” he added.

Still, various uncertainties including deficient monsoons, a weakening Chinese economy and the likelihood of a rate increase by the U.S. Federal Reserve could lead the central bank to take a cautious stance while deciding on interest rates.

Dr. Arun Singh, senior Economist, Dun & Bradstreet India, said, “Weak demand along with low inflation has provided more room to the RBI to further cut the policy rate in the upcoming policy.” According to him, the factors which currently pose challenges to the

growth dynamics are high non-performing and restructured loans, increase in corporate leverage, weak corporate sales, poor export demand and uncertainty over the timing of the Federal Reserve's anticipated rate increase.

While announcing a status quo in rates, in the last bi-monthly policy on August 4, RBI Governor Dr. Raghuram Rajan said, "We held the policy rate at 7.25 per cent as we await data on whether recent increases in inflation, including in non-food items, are temporary, and whether the monsoon will continue to be near-normal. We note the recent fall in oil prices, which will be beneficial for India."

He also said, "as we await greater transmission of our frontloaded past actions, we will monitor developments for emerging room for more accommodation."

The RBI had cut rates from a peak of 8 per cent to 7.25 per cent in three tranches in this calendar year – January 15, March 4 and June 2. While the last rate cut was implemented in the current fiscal year's second bi-monthly policy, the earlier two cuts were announced outside the policy. The RBI, the Governor has reminded several times, can take monetary actions any time it wants.

However, non-transmission of earlier rate reductions to customers by banks continues to be a issue of concern for the RBI. Cost of credit for most of the banks for earlier deposits continues to remain high, though the marginal deposits are being priced at lower rates. But Mr. Khattar said that the RBI is likely to put pressure on banks by further cutting policy rates. "So the banks will be forced to transmit the rates at some point in the near future," he said.

Moreover, many corporates have shifted to the commercial paper (CP) market to raise short-term funds instead of raising funds through bank credit. "Now despite easier policy norms for CPs, our sense is that the demand for bank credit would pick up as and when economic traction begins," Mr. Khattar added. In the last two policies, it was noted by the RBI that India needs to see more clarity on the U.S. Fed funds rate. "As we know, U.S. Fed has continued with the pause citing concerns on China's economic performance and resultant impact on the global economy," said Mr. Somaiyaa.

This gives a window of opportunity to the RBI to provide whatever impetus can be provided to growth in the domestic economy, said Mr. Somaiyaa, adding, "The window arises out of the U.S. Fed's continued concern on global growth and maintenance of accommodative stance."

Forward Markets Commission to merge with SEBI today

In the first ever merger of two regulators, over 60-year-old FMC (Forward Markets Commission) will merge on Monday with the younger but much bigger capital markets watchdog the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to create a unified regulatory body.

SEBI was set up in 1988 as a non-statutory body for regulating the securities markets, while it became an autonomous body in 1992 with fully independent powers.

FMC, on the other hand, has been regulating commodities markets since 1953, but lack of powers has led to wild fluctuations and alleged irregularities remaining untamed in this market segment.

The commodities market has been known to be more prone to speculative activities compared to the better-regulated stock market, while illegal activities like 'dabba trading' have also been more frequent in this segment.

Besides, the high-profile NSEL scam has rocked this market in the recent past and the subsequent regulatory and government interventions in this case eventually led to the government announcing FMC's merger with SEBI.

Taking forward the announcement made by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his budget speech earlier this year, FMC would be merged with SEBI with effect from Monday.

The merger would be consummated here on Monday at a function attended by Mr. Jaitley himself, along with SEBI Chairman U.K. Sinha and other top officials from the government and the regulatory bodies.

This is the first major case of two regulators being merged, against the relatively more frequent practice world wide of creating new regulatory authorities, including by carving out new bodies from the existing entities.

FMC's merger with the market regulator was aimed at streamlining the regulations and curb wild speculations in commodities market, while facilitating further growth of the market.

At present, there are three national and six regional bourses for commodity futures in the country.

DoP seek Cabinet nod to set up Payments Bank

The Department of Posts (DoP) is expected to seek Cabinet nod within two months for raising Rs.292 crore from public investment board to set-up Payments Bank, for which it has already got the RBI approval.

"We expect the fund to be cleared in two months," an official source told PTI.

Payments bank licence will allow companies to collect deposits (initially up to Rs.1 lakh per individual), offer Internet banking, facilitate money transfers and sell insurance and mutual funds.

Besides, they can issue ATM or debit cards, but not credit cards. The Department expects revenue of over Rs.550 crore from PBI in first 5 years. The postal department had earlier tried for Rs.632 crore fund approval from government for full fledged banking services but it was not cleared by PIB.

Government has in-principle agreed to the entry of Postal Department in banking service through payments bank route.

"The DoP expects to roll out Payment Bank services by March 2017. There are no major infrastructure issue with the department. Only there is need to set up a data centre and disaster recovery centre which will be done soon," the official said.

Consultants

The Postal department computerised about 25,000 of its departmental post offices but rural post offices will be provided handheld devices for digitalising records.

The Department is in final stages of appointing a consultant that will guide it in setting up payment banks.

The Payments Bank entity is proposed to have its own employees and IT infrastructure.

Kharif crop sowing crosses 1,026 lakh hectares

The total area sown under kharif crops as on September 24, 2015, registered a marginal increase of 1.18 per cent at 1,026.23 lakh hectares against 1,014.24 lakh hectare in the same period in the previous year. Going through the latest figures furnished by the Ministry of Agriculture, total area under pulses accounted for a significant increase of 11.41 per cent. While areas sown under coarse cereals and oilseeds recorded a rise of 2.65 per cent and 3.49 per cent respectively, cotton saw a big fall of 8.39 per cent, followed by jute & mesta (4.06 per cent). There was a marginal increase in area under sugarcane at 0.21 per cent.

With sowing operations for kharif season nearly coming to an end, the area under rice, the main kharif crop, remained almost flat at 374.09 hectares against 373.86 lakh hectares. Pulses covered 113.45 lakh hectares against 101.83 lakh hectares.

Under this moong dal accounted for a significant rise of 20.49 per cent in acreage at 25.56 lakh hectares against 21.28 lakh hectares. The area under arhar rose by 4.06 per cent stood at 37.64 lakh hectares (36.17 lakh hectares) and urad by 9.52 per cent at 27.83 lakh hectares (25.41 lakh hectares).

Sugarcane covered marginal rise of 48.84 lakh hectares (48.74 lakh hectares). The area under cotton stood at 115.20 lakh hectares against 125.75 lakh hectares in the previous year. The details of the area covered so far and that covered during last year this time are given in the table.

Advance estimates

The recently released first advance estimates of production of major kharif crops for 2015-16 by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare revealed that total production of kharif foodgrains at 124.05 million tonnes a rise of 3.78 million tonnes over the previous year advance estimates of 120.27 million tonnes.

However, compared to the fourth advance estimates of 2014-15, which placed kharif production at 126.31 million tonnes, there is a decline of 2.26 million tonnes (1.8 per cent).

Indian urbanisation ‘messy’, reforms needed: World Bank

Terming India’s urbanisation as “messy and hidden”, a World Bank report called for initiatives at the policy and institutional level to tap the economic potential it offers.

“Although they have made progress, India and other South Asian countries can make better utilisation of opportunities that urbanisation provides them to transform their economies to join the ranks of richer nations,” it said in a report titled ‘Leveraging Urbanisation in South Asia’.

The World Bank said there has been difficulty in dealing with pressures that increased urban populations put on basic services, infrastructure, land, housing and environment, fostering “messy and hidden” urbanisation.

This, in turn, has helped constrain the region’s full realisation of the prosperity and livability benefits of urbanisation, it said, adding that at the institutional level, there would be benefits from improvements in ways in which towns and cities are governed and financed.

Reforms in spotlight

The report put reforms in the spotlight, saying these are required to address three fundamental deficits in empowerment of local governing bodies, resources and accountability.

“Inter-governmental fiscal relations must be improved to address empowerment; practical ways must be identified to increase the resources available to local governments to allow them to perform their mandated functions and mechanisms must be strengthened to hold local governments accountable for their actions,” the report highlighted.

To tackle messy urbanisation and bring about lasting improvements in both prosperity and livability, policies are also required to improve the ways in which cities are connected and planned, working of land and housing markets, and cities’ resilience to natural disasters and the effect of climate change.

Sustainable growth

“If managed well, urbanisation can lead to sustainable growth by increasing productivity, allowing innovation and new ideas to emerge,” said World Bank MD and COO Mulyani Indrawati, who is on a three-day visit to India.

The report said urbanisation has been relatively slow in India.

What is deflation and is it bad?

With Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian first cautioning about impending deflation, and then in an interview to The Hindu clarifying that he meant deflation in a limited price-related context, it is a good time to explain the various contours of the rise and fall of prices.

What is inflation?

Inflation is simply a measure of the extent of increase in prices. If potatoes cost Rs.100 per kg in August 2014, and if they cost Rs.110 per kg in August 2015, then inflation in the price of potatoes was 10 per cent.

When this happens across prices of all commodities for a relatively sustained period of time, then one can say the economy is experiencing inflation. Looking at consumer prices, India is still undergoing inflation. That is, prices are still increasing. For example, in August 2015, overall consumer prices were 3.7 per cent higher than they were in August 2014.

So, then what does it mean when the government says inflation is coming down?

All that means is that the rate of increase of prices is slowing. Going back to the example of potatoes, if they were Rs.110 per kg in August, then went to Rs.120 per kg in September, Rs.125 in October and Rs.127 in November, one can see that although the price is still going up, the rate of increase is decelerating.

Is there a technical term for such a phenomenon?

The U.S. Federal Reserve often uses the term ‘disinflation’ to refer to a period where the rate of inflation has been slowing on a sustained basis.

So, looking at the Consumer Price Index, India is currently technically going through a phase of disinflation. The rate of inflation as measured by the CPI was 10.7 per cent in August 2013, which came down to 3.7 per cent over the course of two years.

So, then, what is deflation and why is there so much controversy and confusion around the term?

Deflation is simply the opposite of inflation. That is, prices fall from one period to the next. The confusion comes from the fact that deflation has historically generally been accompanied by significant economic contraction. But that is not the case in India.

Real GDP growth, the final figure that the government presents to you, is calculated by looking at how the value of the total production of the economy has changed compared to the previous year, and then reducing the effect of inflation/deflation from this. If the rate of growth of the economy and prices are both falling, then that is not a good place to be in — as it is usually accompanied by rising unemployment, lower demand, falling corporate earnings, reduced investments, etc.

This gets exacerbated when people begin to expect prolonged deflation. If they expect that prices will be lower in the future, then people and companies both defer their investments and expenditure waiting for those lower prices. This postponement of expenditure hurts the economy. But slowing inflation coupled with about 7 per cent GDP growth and a pickup in domestic demand — as India is experiencing now — is not a bad thing in itself. Following an extended period of double-digit inflation, this cooling off of prices may just be a correction.

Fun fact

There is such a thing as hyperinflation, when the rate of increase of prices is beyond anything seen in normal circumstances. As one website succinctly defines it, “Hyperinflation is a situation where the price increases are so out of control that the concept of inflation is meaningless.”

One famous example of hyperinflation was when French and Belgian troops invaded the industrial regions of the Weimar Republic (of World War I fame) to ensure the payment of war reparations.

The Weimar Republic's currency, the Mark, was at 320 Marks per dollar in the first half of 1922. By November 1923, the exchange rate was at 4,210,500,000 Marks per dollar.

Mending gender gap could add 60 % to India's GDP by 2025: McKinsey

India's gross domestic product (GDP) could see a jump of about 60 per cent by 2025 if the gender inequality issue in society is resolved and more women are allowed to join the workforce, says a McKinsey report.

According to a new report by McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), closing or even narrowing the global gender gap in work would not only be equitable in the broadest sense but could have far more economic impact than previously estimated.

In a full-potential scenario in which women play an identical role in labour markets as men, India is likely to witness the highest potential boost at 60 per cent, the report titled 'The Power of Parity' said.

"Economic development enables countries to close gender gaps, but progress on four indicators in particular — education level, financial and digital inclusion, legal protection, and unpaid care work — could help to accelerate progress," said Anu Madgavkar, an MGI senior fellow based in Mumbai.

According to the analysis of 95 countries, female workers currently generate about 37 per cent of the world's GDP, considerably lower than their 50 per cent share of the global working-age population suggests is possible.

In case of India, the share of regional GDP generated by women is only 17 per cent.

The report analysed 15 gender equality indicators for 95 countries home to 93 per cent of the world's women and 97 per cent of the world's GDP.

Globally, the report said "if all countries were to match the progress toward gender parity of the country in their region with the most rapid improvement on gender inequality, as much as USD 12 trillion could be added to annual global GDP growth in 2025".

In case of a "full-potential scenario" in which women play an identical role in labour markets as men, as much as USD 28 trillion, or 26 per cent, could be added to global annual GDP in 2025. "This report shows how much the global economy stands to gain from accelerating momentum toward gender parity," McKinsey Global Institute director Jonathan Woetzel said adding that "but capturing the economic benefits will mean addressing gender inequality in society as well as attitudes".

According to McKinsey, the gap in labour force participation partly reflects the unequal sharing of household responsibilities between men and women. Around 75 per cent of the world's unpaid work is undertaken by women, including the vital tasks that keep households functioning such as child care, caring for the elderly, cooking and cleaning.

"Using conservative assumptions, MGI estimates that this unpaid work could be valued at USD 10 trillion per year, an amount roughly equivalent to 13 per cent of global GDP," the report said.

The report analysed 15 gender equality indicators for 95 countries home to 93 per cent of the world's women and 97 per cent of the world's GDP.

EDITORIALS

Hemmed in by the safety net

The U.S. Federal Reserve decided not to raise the policy rate at its meeting on September 17. The decision provides just the right trigger for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to announce a steep cut in its own policy rate, say, of 50 basis points. However, we should not be surprised if the RBI does not oblige. The problem is not the economic conditions on the ground. It is the RBI's present approach to tackling inflation.

Any rise in the U.S. interest rate at this point would have added to the exodus of funds from emerging markets and caused their currencies to fall further. Emerging markets would have had to respond with a sharp rise in their own interest rates. Had the Fed had opted for a rate hike, the RBI would have found it impossible to cut the policy rate in the near term. The Fed's decision undoubtedly removes a significant impediment to a rate cut.

The Fed's policy stance is not the only factor governing the RBI's decision. In his last policy statement, the RBI governor had mentioned three other factors: the persistence of inflationary pressures, the progress of the monsoon and transmission of the interest rate cuts already effected by the RBI. Where do we stand in relation to these? The inflation rate came in at 3.7 per cent in August. The monsoon deficit is of the order of 15 per cent, with nearly two-thirds of the country receiving normal or excessive rains. Banks may not have passed on all of the 75 basis point reduction effected by the RBI but they have passed on 25-50 basis points.

So, do we conclude that we have the necessary conditions in place for a rate cut of 50 basis points? Not really, if we happen to be sitting in the RBI. In a speech to bankers last August, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan outlined the RBI's approach to rate setting: "[I]n deciding policy today, we need to predict how inflation will look approximately a year ahead. Today's inflation therefore, matters only in informing us about future inflation. However, today's inflation measured on a year on year basis may be low because there was an unexpected price spurt last year — the so-called base effect. So we need to take out base effects before we even assess the information from current inflation, something many observers fail to do.

"Also, there may be many sources of uncertainty that cloud the future inflationary picture and disconnect it from current inflation — the strength and distribution of the monsoon, the extent and persistence of low commodity prices, the effect of external disturbances on the exchange rate, etc. In practice, we use models to project how all this might play out on inflation, and we overlay the models with assessments, to arrive at a policy decision."

It's hard to tell what decision would flow from the above approach. The low inflation rate in August was indeed on account of the base effect. Once the base effect wears out, CPI inflation would be of the order of 5-5.5 per cent. These numbers are close to the RBI's target of 6 per cent for January 2016. As for the effect of the monsoon on agriculture output and the trajectory of commodity prices in the future, these can be interpreted in ways that favour or do not favour a rate cut.

Risk averse

This is where the newly devised monetary policy framework comes in. Under the framework for inflation targeting, the RBI is accountable if the inflation rate ends up above the target. In this framework, there are no incentives for the RBI governor to take the slightest risk with the policy rate. Even if the RBI's models were to indicate that the inflation rate was likely to stay below 6 per cent, it would be natural for any governor to err on the side of caution.

In the speech cited above, the RBI governor made the point that "there is no long-run trade-off between growth and inflation". This follows from the well-known Phillips curve in economics. The curve tells us that once the economy reaches its output potential, we cannot produce more growth by generating inflation. It also tells us that, as long as the economy is below its output potential, it is indeed possible to get more growth through higher inflation. Make no mistake: a central bank that does not allow the economy to expand to its output

potential is imposing sizeable costs on the economy.

Is the Indian economy below its output potential today? RBI deputy governor Urjit Patel estimates the growth potential today at 8-8.5 per cent. Current projections of growth are around 7.5 per cent. It would seem that a cut in the policy rate would be in order to close the 'output gap'.

Not so fast. Enter the second element in the RBI's approach to inflation, namely, "threshold inflation". Going by this relatively recent addition to the Phillips curve, even in the short-run, inflation can deliver higher output only as long as the inflation rate is within a certain threshold. The Urjit Patel committee on monetary policy (January 2014) settled for CPI inflation of 6 per cent by January 2016 as the inflation threshold for India.

In the past, we have had other targets for inflation, for instance, a target of 5 per cent WPI, which would translate into CPI inflation of 7-8 per cent. The higher thresholds did not come in the way of high growth in particular periods. The conceptual basis for "threshold inflation" is rather weak.

A third element in the RBI's approach is the belief that a cut in the rate will not make much of a difference to investment. Investment, the RBI believes, is being deterred today more by unfavourable business conditions than by the cost of capital.

This is not entirely true. Demand for credit is constrained not just by unfavourable business conditions but by high leverage at many companies. Investment — and production — are also being constrained by the supply of credit. Banks are unwilling to lend given that their own capital position is constrained.

A rate cut would reduce leverage and enable firms to access more debt and, in some cases, more equity as well. It would boost capital at banks thanks to capital gains on banks' substantial holdings of government securities. This would stimulate the supply of credit.

The case for a rate cut of at least 50 basis points is thus compelling. Not cutting interest rates stands in the way of ' *achhe din*' for the Indian economy. The RBI governor has said the central bank is not a 'cheerleader' for the economy. Fair enough. But it should be careful not to be a wet blanket either.

In a class of their own

It was on a Saturday, I read a mildly angry email regarding an assignment from a business honours student at the University of Texas at Austin.

"I really wish your instructions could be clearer," he said. "I can't really see the point sitting in front of a computer for hours trying to figure it out."

I met this student on campus that afternoon. After helping him with the assignment, we engaged in casual talk. I explained my teaching philosophy that my goal is to train students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers and not just to follow instructions.

The next day the student wrote, "Yesterday, you taught me a very good life lesson, maybe more valuable than anything else I will learn." He then requested a meeting to speak something very personal and to discuss the reason for his first email.

What transpired after his frank talk left me dumbstruck, numb, and feeling really good!

He confessed that his original email was triggered by his own biases and prejudices growing up. He came from a small town in East Texas with ties to white supremacist groups of the past. He explained that growing up, all of his friends had been white. He went to church and social functions that were entirely white. His interactions with non-whites particularly those with foreign origins were few and far between. He was used to hearing racist language, including frequent use of the "N" word. There was a deep institutional racism. He carried those prejudices with him, but coming to The University of Texas (UT) at Austin had been a culture shock. He was now in a highly diversified campus — students, staff, and faculty alike.

He said that when he saw me in class speaking with an accent, he was skeptical that I — as a non-white — could be in a position of “authority” over him. He was not used to it and not ready to accept that authority. Growing up, he subconsciously assumed that only whites will succeed and others were not smart. He expected that only white professors would be teaching in a prestigious honours program at the University. He rationalised his thoughts that in his high school all students and teachers in advanced classes were white. My reputation as a “Distinguished Teaching Professor” with a large number of teaching awards was not enough to gain his trust. Simply, I didn’t meet his primary criterion for success and competency: skin colour.

Our interactions made him think deep and honestly of his conscious and subconscious views of non-whites. He questioned his beliefs of being better by virtue of his race. He realised that his elite Business Honours Program, which enrolls the top one to two per cent of graduating high school seniors, had a large number of non-white students. While Asians comprise only a meagre three per cent of the Texas population, they make up nearly half of all business honours students at UT. He recognized that some of the brightest students in his classes were not white, and despite my appearance and accent, he was inspired by my passion for teaching. This is the single most important experience of my teaching career. It is profound because it reinforces the power of cultural diversity. It provides not only an exposure to, and awareness of, different ethnic and racial groups but also the chance to socialise with them.

Exposure to cultural diversity allows us to deconstruct misconceptions and stereotypes and break down barriers. If not for this experience, he would have likely continued to seek things that reinforced his beliefs, and the cycle of disrespect for other cultures and intolerance would have continued.

He has since graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. I spoke to him again and he strongly feels that he is a better person for studying in a diverse environment. His education transformed him so much that he was attracted to public policy issues. He was selected to a highly coveted fellowship programme where he worked with members of Congress. While he could have joined a leading investment bank given his stellar record in the honours programme, he became deeply committed to Kindergarten to 12-grade teaching, particularly to the underprivileged and minority children. He now teaches at a school that is 97 per cent Hispanic and is hoping to join a Ph.D. programme.

This is the “rich” educational experience offered to all students in a culturally diverse environment. Often a race-conscious admission process focuses on fair representation of population profiles in the student body. More recent court verdicts focus on race-conscious holistic admission process that enhances overall student learning experience. However, often missing in the discussions are the benefits not only for under-represented groups, but also to the mainstream population as well.

My experience above strikes a powerful resemblance to my discussion with many Indian-origin friends who are angry that Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) and backward classes students are being admitted to professional schools on reservation.

I gently asked one angry individual, “How many SC/STs do you know?” He began to search for an answer, which I interpreted as none.

I personally know SC/STs who came from not-so-great background and are doing very well professionally because of the opportunities they got. I am glad I interacted with them during my education and work life to know more about their upbringing and culture. If not I would have argued the same way my friend did.

Of course, I will not advocate to lower academic standard much just to find the diverse body since lack of preparedness of a few not only affect the person admitted, but also everyone in class.

The problem in India is that reservations are used at professional schools purely for

representation without much regard to academic readiness or social integration. There are abuses of the system that bring numerous conflicts. Instead, such representations for cultural diversity should begin at early stages of education — at primary school level both in government and private schools. Young minds are more willing to challenge their biases and such transformation is necessary in order to evolve into a perfect society. It solves the academic preparedness and social integration.

For a win-win bilateral trade diplomacy

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's second visit to the U.S. is garnering even more interest than his first trip, particularly because in the intervening year, the India-U.S. dialogue has intensified. The Prime Minister is also slated to travel to California, the first to do so at a time when people of Indian origin have established themselves as frontrunners in technology and entrepreneurship in this vibrant region. Indian industry has high hopes from the visit.

In the run-up to the Prime Minister's visit, the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue included encouraging emphasis on economic cooperation, placing it at the heart of the India-U.S. relationship. A joint work stream on Ease of Doing Business has been launched to address trade issues through quarterly meetings. As noted in the joint statement, CII and the American National Standards Institute will be setting up a portal for standards information to update trading companies on trade requirements. A notable mention was made of discussions on Totalisation of social security arrangements, raising hopes that a solution could be evolved on vexing social security payments made by Indian companies for their short-duration workers in the U.S.

Bilateral exchange of goods and services between the two countries crossed \$100 billion in 2014, up five-fold from 2000. The U.S. is India's second largest trade partner for goods and by far its largest export market. The two countries have decided to take strong measures to increase trade to \$500 billion while notable steps have been announced for increasing investments.

Indian investments in the U.S. are robust compared to investments in the other direction in relation to sizes of respective economies. As per a CII-Grant Thornton report, the top Indian companies in the U.S. have recorded over \$15 billion of investment across all states and employ about 95,000 persons directly. U.S. investments in India stand at \$28 billion cumulatively, according to U.S. sources. Indian industry expects Mr Modi's visit to act on a dual-pronged approach. On the one hand, issues hindering trade in goods and services need to be resolved to achieve the \$500 billion trade target in the shortest possible time. On the other hand, a huge push needs to be imparted to U.S. investments in India, particularly across manufacturing and infrastructure.

Regarding trade, the multiple dialogue platforms revived during the past year have set the stage for new announcements. The Trade Policy Forum, High Technology Cooperation Group and CEOs Forum are looking at cooperation in areas such as agriculture, services, manufacturing and intellectual property. Some of the matters taken up in these meetings include social security totalization, visa regulations, ease of doing business and international standards.

Trade in services can be promoted through facilitative regulations regarding movement of skilled personnel, technology and data. It is important to develop a separate work visa for professionals on short duration contracts so that they are exempted from Annual Quota, non-refundable social security taxes and labour conditions applications.

Stepping up investments

On the investment side, India's development agenda presents many opportunities. The U.S.-India Infrastructure Collaboration Platform has been envisaged to assist U.S. companies explore infrastructure opportunities in India. U.S. initiatives through the U.S. EXIM Bank

and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency would facilitate \$4 billion worth of investments in India. The India-U.S. CEOs Forum has requested an ambitious Bilateral Investment Treaty. Under India's Smart City initiative, the two governments have identified Allahabad, Ajmer and Visakhapatnam for partnership with U.S. companies. High-level committees are being set up for each of these cities including representatives of different departments, State governments and U.S. industry, and three MoUs have already been signed.

The manufacturing sector as a whole is set for rejuvenation under the 'Make in India' campaign. The 25 sub-sectors identified closely align with strengths of both U.S. and Indian industry, particularly in automotives, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology. The campaigns of Skill India, Digital India, Clean Energy and Swachh Bharat offer attractive vehicles for U.S. investors. Technology companies are already exploring potential under Digital India and could work on creating digital infrastructure, setting up e-governance services and leveraging the huge mobile space. This partnership could gain hugely from the Mr Modi's visit to California. With the strong personal commitment of leaders of both countries, the India-U.S. economic partnership is on track for a transformational jump and Indian industry greatly looks forward to the outcomes of the sustained dialogue process and the Prime Minister's upcoming visit.

The message from New York

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's takeaways from his ongoing visit to the United States are being keenly watched. His primary challenges in this phase relate to improving India's overall relationship with the U.S. while furthering his country's global ambitions. The decision, just hours before Mr. Modi boarded his flight, to clear defence purchases worth \$3 billion from Boeing in many ways demonstrated the importance that New Delhi attaches to the state visit. Expectedly, the Prime Minister has vigorously pushed for the reform of the UN Security Council — in speeches at the UN and later at a multilateral summit. Mr. Modi's decision to host the summit of the Group of Four nations was one of the key moments of his diplomacy in New York. While backing one another's bid for permanent seats in the UNSC, India, Germany, Japan and Brazil have collectively called for urgent reforms of the Security Council within a time-frame. At another gathering, Mr. Modi invited U.S. companies to step up investments in India. The top-level participation of American companies at the meeting, pointed to the importance U.S. industry is giving India. Executives from 42 Fortune 500 companies, with a combined net worth of \$4.5 trillion, were there.

While the overall message from New York is positive, the government has to work hard to bring to fruition the goodwill established: the task begins now. India's most important challenge here is to continue the campaign to reform the Security Council. Nothing much has come out of India's push over the years to restructure the global body. The challenge is to build a democratically evolved consensus among world powers, particularly among the Security Council members, on the need to reform the UNSC. Second, though American companies are keen to invest in India, they remain wary of "complicated regulations, confusing bureaucracy and poor infrastructure". If the government is serious about enhancing business and trade relations with the U.S. further, it should accelerate the pace of reforms at home and build quality infrastructure — of course making sure that its own long-term interests are not sacrificed or compromised. Third, bilateral relations between India and the U.S. have always been a tricky area for decision-makers. While defence cooperation has improved over the years, the failure to operationalise the nuclear deal, Washington's continuing support for Pakistan and reluctance to second major reforms at the UNSC are issues. Besides, the principle of a multilateral approach in India's foreign policy has not gone down well with the Washington elites. Mr. Modi ought to take up some of these issues when he meets Barack Obama on Monday. They should address them, so that what has often been

termed a “natural alliance” could be firmed up to mutual advantage.

The challenge of skills and jobs

The scale of the skilling challenge that India faces, and the urgency involved, have been palpable for some time, but new official data put into cold numbers the extent of the problem. Fewer than one in 10 adult Indians has had any form of vocational training, and even among those who have, the type of training is not the sort of formal skilling that employers seek – the majority had either acquired a hereditary skill or learned on the job. Just 2.2 per cent in all had received formal vocational training. In comparison, 75 per cent of the workforce in Germany and 80 per cent in Japan has received formal skills training. Even among the BRICS countries, India lags behind – nearly half the Chinese workforce, for example, is skilled. Very few Indians get a technical education in medicine, engineering or agriculture; fewer than one in ten Indians is a graduate, and among those who are graduates, the majority get undergraduate degrees in arts, science or commerce. The problem is more acute in rural areas and for women. Without access to affordable and appropriate skills training, young people, particularly those leaving rural areas and small towns for big cities, will be stuck in low-wage, insecure jobs that will leave them in want or poverty.

The Narendra Modi government has made skills and jobs one of its focus areas from the beginning of its term. In July, the Prime Minister launched an ambitious mission to impart skills training to 40 crore people by 2022, and the new government has a dedicated Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. The problem is that the previous government talked the same talk on skills but was able to achieve precious little; the proportion of young adults who had received vocational training was virtually unchanged between 2004-05 and 2011-12. There isn't any clear evidence yet that the new government is charting out a radically new path on skills. There remain multiple decision-making authorities on skills and little clarity about who exactly will do the work. Promises of corporate and foreign partnerships on skilling are pouring in, but how these mass skilling programmes will take off is unclear. Employers complain that job-seekers do not have the skills they look for; there is little evidence yet that curricula with these objectives in mind have been designed, or that new and affordable training institutes have been set up on a mass scale. Job creation has not kept pace with India's demographic momentum, and that will in the coming days pose a problem for a skilled workforce. But let's not put the cart before the horse – a poorly trained young workforce can neither bring workers out of poverty nor help a country grow quickly.

Revolt of the aspirational class

Hardik Patel is today one of India's most watched political serials. He represents a movement, enacts a fable and constitutes, along with Indrani Mukerjea, the two great aspirational tales of contemporary India. Today, one should not ask: “Who is Hardik Patel?,” but realise there is a Hardik in all of us. He is a Patel in a sea of Patels, who has branded his difference. He is a Patel who knows that he can make a difference.

The key to Hardik, the man, is his face, his style. There is a belligerence, an impatience representing an India which is tired of waiting, a majoritarian group ready to flex its regional muscles. Hardik understands market as well as electoral mathematics. The market tells him that you need a degree to be employed and the maths tells him that the political power of the Patels should guarantee educational entry. It is clear that this is a demand for more, a demand the Patels realise no electoral government can refuse. The bully-boy maths is clear and, with it, the barely repressed violence. In fact, this violence makes it clear that Hardik is neither Sardar Patel nor Mahatma Gandhi.

His quaint slogan relating to the proposed, then cancelled, ‘Reverse Dandi March’ explains it all. If the Dandi march spoke of non-violence and confronted the British Empire with the

vulnerability of the body, the reverse march not just abandons but completely reverses these symbols of the past. The idol of the present reverses the iconography of the past, trampling the memory of history in pursuit of politics.

More middle class than marginal

The 'Reverse Dandi March' is neither Swadeshi nor for Swaraj, it is more middle class than marginal. It projects ban, threat and boycott as messages. In fact, as Hardik explained, if Gandhi were present today, he would abandon non-violence, as the current state is more repressive and violent than the British Raj. When he argues, "bring out the swords," he moves closer to Bhagat Singh. In fact, even that comparison is unfair. Hardik smells more of Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal within a caste idiom.

In fact, he can be considered part of 'project Macaulay II'. If Macaulay spoke of English education and the power of the degree, Hardik speaks of education as a guarantee for jobs. There is a double battle here, a pitched struggle against two systems. First, it is a battle with the Patel patriarchs who have been pompous about power and remiss about caste responsibilities. The very idea of reservation handicaps the Patels in the education game and it is worse to see Patel-run educational institutions being extortionate about entry.

Harik Patel plays the new Macaulay by claiming "no degree, no democracy." There is an Oedipal struggle here where Patel challenges the patriarchy of Modi, claiming that the lotus will not bloom till the Patels come home. The Patels, despite minor differences, were a taken-for-granted constituency of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Hardik's father was a middle-level BJP worker. So, the revolt against both Modi and the Patel establishment emphasises an Oedipal revolt, establishing the role of youth in the movement. For them, the talisman is an educational degree in this era of development.

Hardik, one senses, is both popular and populist. His popularity is seen in the responses his calls for action attract. Every wave, threat or promise of violence adds a layer of support for him and his mystique. If the ban is the Modi regime's favourite policy, the boycott becomes Hardik's weapon.

Patel power is demonstrated by threats to withdraw milk supplies, and collective withdrawals from banks. Protests by women across towns and cities also shows that the movement has caught on. It is clear that this is not a Dalit struggle for rights but the struggle of a dominant caste asking for bigger takeaways from the caste pizza. A demonstration conducted in cars and tractors does not indicate backwardness.

There is a change in attitudes which indicates not just a new sense of society, democracy and law as rule games. Hardik and all the new Patels, Gujjars and Jats are very clear that the rules should work for them, that the Supreme Court ruling that reservation be capped at 50 per cent is irrelevant as long as they have not been accommodated. The cynicism of political life allows them the refuge of the Ninth Schedule, the safe haven that places laws outside the ambit of judicial review. However, the questions our democracy and the administrative system will soon ask is: How many provisions in the Ninth Schedule are the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) likely to have? Is it going to a special, dominant caste haven for the Gujjars, the Jats and the Patidars? The Patel attitude makes a mockery of the reservation games, because now it is every caste for itself. The battle now is for a bigger share and not for justice. One wonders if this scenario represents the altruistic world envisaged by Gandhi and Patel.

Hardik is contemporary. In fact the BJP, as a party and the ruling power, realises that he thrives on the present. He is a figure lapped up by the media, an ideal subject for interviews even if his is a reverse march. He thrives on the media and network and the BJP's attempt to block networks was a desperate attempt to mute his impact. The news of his arrest was enough to spark protests. He understands the media's power and its multiplier effect. Second, he knows how to work the media. By contacting the diaspora, he plays on Modi's weakness

because for Modi, they are the ideal Indians — hardworking and trouble free. Here, protest movements sound like agony aunt columns, while the diaspora abroad is stoic, civic and proud of its civic self.

The diaspora is Modi's ideal constituency as it is even more patriotic than the resident Indian. The Patels there represent a civic class as opposed to the local Patels, who are political and agitationist. Hardik is shrewd and calculating enough to issue threats of a Patel demonstration in New York. For Modi, that is sheer embarrassment and amounts to irreverence within the very symbolic constituencies he made powerful. Hardik, the trickster, was not something the BJP anticipated.

A Patel vs. Patel battle

The battle between Patel and Patel is fascinating to watch. 'Patel vs. Patel' is the stuff of graphic novels, somehow reminiscent of *Mad* magazine's great comic strip *Spy vs. Spy*. At one end stands Anandiben, who has been completely ambushed by the Patel uprising in her backyard. The Chief Minister invokes the riots of 1985 and 1987 but what she really seems to fear is a Nav Nirman Andolan-like agitation. It may be recalled here that the Nav Nirman agitation of 1974 brought down the elected government of then Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel.

Anandiben gives the official spiel that caste and community have no role in the secular game of development while realising that her politics and power is totally Patel- driven. It is interesting that she treats the masses as 'labour' needed for development while Hardik speaks the language of electoral politics. The Chief Minister emphasises caste and class as the critical categories while Hardik plays up the youth card. For Anandiben, 'youth' is not a category. She sees Hardik's complaints as humbug, clearly showing she is out of touch. The first threat to Modi's legitimacy is emerging from his own backyard and the BJP is speechless with misunderstanding. Hardik realises that youth and women are bandwagons on which he can ride to power.

It is clear that Hardik is no longer a local figure because media and the limits of electoral politics have made him a new hero. Hardik Patel is not just a sign but a symptom that the politics of caste quotas needs to be revisited and debated. Our politics has become a politics of quotas where administrative fiat can make or break the future of communities. The battle to be seen as "more backward" becomes critical. Caste becomes the most critical idiom of politics, a currency to be speculated with, in the electoral brokerage of power. The gap between distribution as disbursing an increasing share of the cake and justice as a normative phenomenon becomes bleak.

The court intervenes to argue that caste cannot be the sole determinant of reservation. In fact, it struck down the government's notification that included Jats in the official list of OBCs. Hardik Patel's campaign has opened up the Pandora's Box about justice and the ability of electoral democracy to handle issues of affirmative action.

Hardik is the new sign of our times and his actions indicate that the new generation is not going to wait for the court or the Parliament to determine its fate. In fact, what Hardik represents is the ambitions of the small town, ready to see democracy and market as acts of consumerism. This is a generation that has no memories of the ration card, that believes in speed and struggles for instant gratification, which believes that life, whether in the form of a start up or a struggle, is just a few steps away. The power of the Hardik Patel story lies in this. He is representative of the new Indian small town — confident, parochial, primordial yet deeply modern. He is the new Indian of the global era, one who can make or break democracies. His mood becomes the litmus test of politics today.

Third date with Barack

Modi and Obama have an opportunity to set even more ambitious goals.

After holding forth on sustainable development, pitching for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, schmoozing with American businessmen, and charming the diaspora, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will turn his attention this week to two of India's most important relationships — America and Pakistan.

When all is said and done about the great global issues of the day, boosting ties with America and limiting the problems with Pakistan have always remained at the very top of India's foreign policy agenda. Since the early 1950s, when the US drew Pakistan into Cold War alliances, New Delhi has spent much of its diplomatic energy in managing the triangular dynamic with Washington and Rawalpindi. Despite the talk of de-hyphenation in Washington, Pakistan continues to loom large on India-US relations.

If the script of Modi's meeting with US President Barack Obama is not difficult to discern, there is no word yet on the PM sitting down with Pakistan's Nawaz Sharif. Those familiar with the drama of India-Pakistan diplomacy, however, know that Modi's meeting with Nawaz will not happen until it happens.

If you are a betting person, your money should be on a meeting of some kind taking place. It does not really matter how the officials might choose to describe it. That Modi and Nawaz are staying in the same hotel — the Waldorf Astoria — certainly improves the odds in favour of a rendezvous. In any case, if you go by the record, Indian and Pakistani leaders tend to meet more often than not on the margins of international gatherings.

It will be Modi's third encounter with both Nawaz and Obama. The dating metaphor has already been used in these columns. That would certainly apply to Modi's engagement with Obama. It is in the third date when things are supposed to get intimate and interesting. For Modi and Obama, there is much to celebrate as they reflect on the intensive bilateral engagement over the last one year and explore ways to bring India and America closer than ever before.

Modi and Nawaz, in contrast, have every reason to be cautious. Given the failures of the past two rounds — in Delhi and Ufa — one will have to be an optimist to imagine that Modi and Nawaz will be "third-time lucky". Pessimists might think of baseball — "three strikes and you're out". One more misstep might make it a lot harder for Modi and Nawaz to move forward.

With America, Modi has set a scorching diplomatic pace. Two summits in quick succession — in September 2014 and January 2015 — have defined an expansive agenda for bilateral relations. The third encounter this week will be much briefer, but could yet be substantive. As they pat each other on the back, Modi and Obama would want to lock-in many of the recent gains and compel their bureaucracies to turn declarations into tangible outcomes.

Contrary to the perception that Obama is a lame-duck president, he is now free to pursue his foreign policy goals and has the power to make things happen right until his last week in office in January 2017. The Republicans are also supportive of any American progress with India. While Modi is at the peak of his power, he needs to do a lot more to get the Indian bureaucracy to deliver on the big ideas that he has outlined.

Together, Modi and Obama have an opportunity to lock-in recent gains and set even more ambitious goals. Two issue-areas present themselves. One is to unveil a series of specific steps to realise the shared objective that Modi and Obama identified when the US president came to Delhi last January — constructing a stable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific littoral. Stronger defence ties, purposeful political consultation and strategic coordination with other partners should form the heart of the proposed roadmap.

The other is to outline a framework for expansive cooperation on mitigating climate change. Can India and America do what Beijing and Washington did a year ago to turn an adversarial

climate discourse into a collaborative one? For both Obama, who is looking at his legacy, and Modi, who has begun to change the domestic narrative on climate change, a deal on energy and environment will be a big political prize.

If the American outlook is full of possibilities, engaging Pakistan remains a challenge for Modi. To get it right the third time, Modi must dispose of the obsession with drafting joint statements at the end of every meeting with Pakistan. Instead, he needs to focus on getting two things done.

One is to consolidate the current efforts to restore the ceasefire on the border. Silencing the guns on the frontier has become the precondition for any sustainable dialogue between the two countries. The other is to return to the terms of dialogue that Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf agreed on, after much trial and error, more than a decade ago in January 2004.

While Vajpayee was voted out of power a few months later, his successor, Manmohan Singh, stayed the course. The Vajpayee-Singh framework had three elements — Pakistan will address India's concerns on terrorism, Delhi will negotiate on the Kashmir question, and the two sides will implement a range of confidence-building measures. This seemed to work well, until the 26/11 attacks on Mumbai shattered the Indian consensus.

Pakistan has already figured in the dialogue between the Indian and American leaders last week. Agreements between Delhi and Washington on more counter-terror cooperation are indeed welcome. But Delhi can't really expect that the Americans can or will solve India's problems with Pakistan. India can better leverage support from the US and other international partners only when it has a strong and sustainable engagement of its own with Pakistan.

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Health and The UN

The failure of the millennium development goals (MDGs) has been blamed on a lack of adequate financing and governance failure.

September 8 marked 15 years to the day since the United Nations adopted the millennium development goals (MDGs). Soon the world will adopt a new regime in global milestones, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) that extend for the next 15 years, from 2015 to 2030. Given the way the MDGs captured the imagination of the developing world, it is perhaps safe to say that the SDGs will be a similar rallying point on a series of development issues.

Of the eight MDGs, three relate directly to health. The first goal was to reduce mortality among children under the age of five; this is only moderately on-track. The second goal was to reduce maternal mortality. On this India is off-track. India is on-track for the third goal, which was to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, and only moderately on-track on the fourth goal, which was to halt and reverse the spread of malaria and other major diseases. In short, we have achieved only one out of four targets. Globally, this is a worry, because if India does not achieve the MDGs, given its size, neither will the world.

Are the SDGs any different from the MDGs? For one thing, only one SDG addresses health, as compared to three MDGs. On maternal and child health, the SDGs extend the MDGs, since they have largely not been met in many developing countries. Non-communicable diseases have been included, reflecting concern for the growing incidence of non-communicable disease even among the poor. Alcohol abuse and tobacco have also been targeted.

Interestingly, the targets that have a specific timeline mentioned are those for which cost-effective interventions have been identified — for example, institutional delivery to reduce maternal mortality. It raises the question: Are we adopting goals that have the "right" cost-

effective interventions, rather than discovering cost-effective interventions for the right goals? For instance, mental illness is one of the most prevalent morbidities in India, and suicide is the leading cause of death among people between 15 and 29. There is only a passing mention of this in the SDGs. Perhaps because there is no cost-effective intervention against mental illness and suicide?

If the SDGs are seeking to complete and extend the task of the MDGs, they should learn from the experience of the last 15 years. The failure of the MDGs has been blamed on a lack of adequate financing and governance failure. This seems to be a simplistic answer. The critique should look also at the way the MDGs were structured. First, the goals and targets were interpreted too literally, without reference to the starting point from which different countries began the journey. Second, the cost-effectiveness analysis focused on addressing the biological causes of disease, with little recognition of the social determinants of health. It was this biological agent that was the target of the cost-effective intervention, maybe because biological causes are easier to tackle.

Let us consider one of the key goals that India has failed to achieve — reduction in maternal mortality. Institutional delivery was the solution chosen to achieve this goal. Strengthening health infrastructure, training manpower and incentivising women who would otherwise have given birth at home to come to an institution for their delivery have been the goals of the health system since 2005. Yet we did not achieve the MDG for maternal mortality reduction. Why? The answer lies outside the health system: Poor women in rural areas face tremendous challenges in reaching an institution for delivery, despite government subsidies. There is evidence that skilled birth attendance inside the home can be just as safe. Many women find it more comfortable, less socially intimidating, and certainly less expensive. But it takes time and sustained effort to ensure the quality of care that will make it a credible choice.

This should teach us that the goals we set should be informed by the realisation that health issues cannot be seen in isolation from the social context. Can we put in place strategies that may not bring quick wins, but over a period of time will ensure better health equity? Can we liberate ourselves from time-bound targets? We need to recognise the flaws in the design of these targets and reflect on ways to address them if we are to fare any better in the next 15 years than we did the previous 15.

From plate to plough: Losing the pulses

This year, with an almost similar rain-deficit, the likely damage is anybody's guess. The average agri-GDP growth in the first four years of the 12th Five-Year Plan is going to be below 2 per cent, way below the target 4 per cent.

With each passing day this year, agriculture seems to be sagging and so is the Indian farmer. Deficit monsoon rains appear to be the trigger. Although rains offered some respite to Marathwada, the situation in India's largest agri-state, Uttar Pradesh, has gone from bad to worse.

Last year's drought, with monsoon rains falling short of the long period average (LPA) by 12 per cent, saw foodgrain production fall by close to 5 per cent. This year, with an almost similar rain-deficit, the likely damage is anybody's guess. The average agri-GDP growth in the first four years of the 12th Five-Year Plan is going to be below 2 per cent, way below the target 4 per cent. Lower growth is causing increased farmer distress and rising suicides. With agriculture still engaging almost half of India's labour force, any political party that brushes it aside will do so at its own peril. The Narendra Modi sarkar seems to be losing the pulse of the Indian farmer.

We want to focus on real pulses, which are significant sources of protein to the Indian population. This year, pulses prices are going through the roof. The government appears optimistic, but traders are not. Tur/arhar (pigeon pea) prices on September 18 hovered

between Rs132 per kg in Delhi to Rs142 per kg in Raipur, with Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai falling within this range. Compared to the same date last year, this amounts to an increase of 69 per cent in Delhi and 114 per cent in Raipur, with Mumbai at 73 per cent, Chennai at 74 per cent, and Kolkata at 78 per cent. The average price increase, in the five centres combined, is 82 per cent in a single year! But tur is not the only one on fire. The five centres saw chana (chick pea), urad (black gram) and masoor (lentil) retail prices rise 51 per cent, 40 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively. Thankfully, pulses didn't follow suit with onions, whose retail prices have gone up by 84 per cent in Delhi and 206 per cent in Chennai. The government has tried out various policy instruments, but there is no foreseeable relief. The standard policy tools are three-fold: One, restrict/ ban exports of these commodities and open up imports at zero duty; two, invoke the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) to impose stocking limits, forcing private trade to liquidate stocks immediately; three, suspend/ ban forward and futures trading. This is what the government has been doing since 1955. Nothing has changed. The cabinet has cleared the invoking of the ECA; the agriculture minister went on record about importing 5,000 tonnes of tur; and there is news of the impending suspension of commodity trading in futures. These are sensitive commodities and employing these archaic tools today reveals the government's ignorance of how to run a market economy. We are not a socialist state of the 1960s. The tool box needs innovation and greater alignment with market forces.

Take trade policy first. Allowing import of pulses at zero duty and imposing export controls reflect an inherent consumer bias. With an open export-import policy, prices of a commodity will settle between its export and import parity prices — and if our domestic prices are higher, nothing will go out. But if our farmers/ traders can get a better price outside, it will only incentivise the peasantry to produce more. Consumers can be protected through an income policy instrument. So, abolish all export controls on pulses. Importing and selling pulses in domestic markets at prices below the import parity price is anti-farmer.

What one fails to understand is that, despite knowing in advance about a two million metric tonne (MMT) fall in pulses' production in 2014-15 and being able to foresee the pressure on prices, the government failed to import enough to bridge the supply gap. To manage price volatility, the government needed at least one MMT of pulse imports. Private trade imports about four to five MMT of pulses. About 0.6 MMT of tur is imported.

Consider stocking limits under the ECA. To support the consumption, spread through the year, of a commodity harvested within a short-span of one to two months, someone has to stock. By putting stocking limits, all large stockists are converted into "hoarders" overnight and compelled to offload in a few days. This offloading may give temporary relief, but the resulting low private stocks will haunt future markets. In the long run, this tool will discourage the creation of storage capacities. Farmers will sell immediately after harvest and, in the absence of storage incentives, there would be a glut and prices will plummet.

The role of commodity exchanges is least understood by our bureaucrats and policymakers. A robust commodity exchange should facilitate price discovery and spot prices/ premiums should be reflective of future volatilities. With regulations through the FMC/ Sebi, the exchange can act as a messenger of short- to medium-run future prices. But shooting the messenger by suspending/ banning futures is like shooting yourself in the foot.

Here is our submission: Abolish export controls on pulses, abolish stock limits, and let forwards and futures flourish. Keep imports open and let the government hire some stocking facilities (about one MMT) from the private sector for pulses. Let the government also play in forwards and futures to ensure some price stability. To do this, the skills of our bureaucracy will have to be upgraded to understand how to manage commodity prices in a market economy. Is there anyone to bell the cat?

Diplomatic impunity

The victims can also pursue the matter in Saudi Arabia, though this seems a remote possibility. The fact that the victims belong to a third country, Nepal, complicates the legal process. (Source: Express file photo)

The recent incident in which Majed Hassan Ashoor, first secretary of the Saudi Arabian embassy in New Delhi, was alleged to have sexually abused two Nepali maids has thrown up questions over diplomatic immunity, especially for very serious crimes. What lessons can be learnt from this incident? Should diplomatic immunity have limits?

Relations between states have since antiquity involved the use of diplomats as representatives of a sovereign power in another state. It has come to be accepted that in the interest of orderly and fruitful conduct of interstate relations, the representatives of a foreign power are regarded as virtual extensions of the sending state, and are thus not subject to the laws of the receiving state. Over the years, this has been codified into international law. Diplomatic immunities and privileges are provided under two international conventions: the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations and Consular Relations, adopted in 1961 and 1963, respectively. It is important to note that the person and premises of a diplomat are inviolable and cannot be entered, except with the permission of the sending state. A diplomat can be proceeded against only if the sending state waives immunity. A receiving state can declare a diplomat “persona non grata”, and in such a case the diplomat must be withdrawn or lose her immunity.

The framework of the Vienna Conventions has served well over the past decades to regulate the regime under which diplomats operate. Diplomats are mostly conscious of the need to respect the laws of the host country, and are careful not to give offence to local sensibilities as a matter of commonsense and to function effectively.

Regrettably, the actions of a few diplomats have led to a public demand to review the question of diplomatic privileges and immunities. Cases include the abuse of import privileges, non-payment of dues for local services, traffic offences, etc. In rare cases, diplomats have caused death or serious injury in traffic accidents, including while driving under the influence of alcohol. Most cases arise from the aberrant personal behaviour of diplomats and have nothing to do with their official functions. In other cases, the receiving or sending state may intentionally misuse diplomatic privileges to gather intelligence, etc. But these incidents are dealt with quietly.

The recent case involves serious allegations of gangrape and sexual abuse on the part of the diplomat. The Saudi government will hopefully take strong action against him and provide compensation to the victims, though this cannot mitigate the offence. The victims can also pursue the matter in Saudi Arabia, though this seems a remote possibility. The fact that the victims belong to a third country, Nepal, complicates the legal process.

Indian actions have been in conformity with the Vienna Conventions, though the entry into the Saudi diplomat’s residence by the Gurgaon police has been questioned. Ideally, the ministry of external affairs should have been consulted before making a raid. The police claim that the residence was not known to be a diplomat’s residence raises serious questions, especially since information on all residences hired by diplomats and, indeed, all foreigners is required to be sent to the police.

Generally speaking, police officials are not aware of the nuances of diplomatic immunities and privileges. This needs to be corrected by giving special training to police officers.

There is a demand to set some limits on diplomatic immunities and privileges, especially for very serious crimes. This demand has been articulated in many countries. There are also issues connected with the diplomatic bag system, security and counterterrorism, such as frisking of diplomats at airports, and public health exigencies that may need to be considered. Certainly there should be more effective mechanisms to ensure that diplomats do not abuse their privileges and commit serious crimes.

The Vienna Conventions were finalised after a long process of negotiations, with the United Nations heavily involved. Based on this history, the first step towards revising the Vienna Conventions should be taken by the UN General Assembly and the International Law Commission. A revision can be done, but UN members must give it priority. Activists should collectively put pressure on governments and get some of them to bring up the matter at the UNGA.

The process will be long and will need much patience, besides dealing with a Pandora's Box of issues.

Bonfire of justice

Pranab Mukherjee has become the third president whose consent has been sought for Gujarat's new counter-terrorism law — in its latest variant, named the Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime Bill (GCTOC). His predecessors, A.P.J. [Abdul Kalam](#) and Pratibha Patil, had rejected earlier bills. This time, it has the backing of the Union home ministry. The contentious features of the proposed law are well-known: It allows for electronically recorded confessional statements, if made to a superintendent of police, to be admitted in evidence; extends police custody to 180 days; and makes bail extremely hard to obtain. Gujarat had complained — not without reason — that the earlier denial of presidential assent had been politically motivated, noting that [Congress](#) governments had passed similar legislation in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Yet, three wrongs don't make a right. The reasons for concern are rooted in the history of the mercifully repealed mother legislation — the notorious Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA). TADA was widely abused: Gujarat, with no terrorism problem, initiated 19,000 of the 67,000-odd cases, using it with equal enthusiasm against bootleggers, small-time criminals, and the completely innocent. Also, 80 per cent of TADA cases were registered against Muslims, suggesting flagrant communal bias. Besides, there was compelling evidence of confessions being coerced, often through torture. It achieved little — the late Rajesh Pilot, then internal security minister, admitted that, between 1985 and 1994, just 8,000 of 67,000 TADA cases went to trial, and just 725 people were convicted. Maharashtra's Control of Organised Crime Act, too, has engendered exactly this kind of abuses.

A real debate is needed on the criminal justice tools India has to deal with terrorism. India's laws weren't designed to deal with situations where civil institutions collapsed in the face of insurgencies — as seen in Punjab, Chhattisgarh and the Northeast. Moreover, nation-states have had to introduce new laws not dissimilar to the GCTOC to deal with the challenges of transnational terrorism, carried out by skilled personnel trained to defeat law-enforcement. Elsewhere, these legal instruments were introduced along with substantial enhancement in police investigative capacity — and, critically, police accountability. Indian lawmakers have done next to nothing to bring police forces out of the colonial era. In the absence of police capacity-building, brutality remains the principal investigative tool. Laws like the GCTOC institutionalise this. Their outcome will be a bonfire of justice — the cornerstone on which our republic rests.

US revisited

For a country many look to as the next big emerging growth engine, just when the current one is sputtering after a virtually uninterrupted 35-year run, it matters a great deal to be seen and heard on the world stage. This is what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has apparently attempted in his various foreign trips and interactions with world leaders, even if there are cynics who might view these more as acts of self-projection. Any aspiring power, nevertheless, has to assert itself in the world arena and show that it means business while willing to proactively engage on issues from global security to climate change. Modi's latest US visit — where he has held roundtables with top American CEOs across sectors, and made a powerful pitch for India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC) along with Japan, Germany and Brazil — should be viewed as part of this larger signalling exercise.

The main purpose behind his reaching out to business leaders, both in New York and Silicon Valley, has seemingly been to reassure them that India is indeed the place today to invest in — be it in infrastructure and smart cities, consumer-facing sectors or even transformative digital technology and app-based products. Moreover, the country has a government under him that is firmly committed to reforms and de-regulation; while the pace of these may not always match up to expectations, one need not harbour any doubts over their direction. The same India-cannot-be-ignored message and keenness to occupy centre stage in world affairs was sought to be conveyed by the call for an urgent reform of the UNSC to “include the world's largest democracies (and) major locomotives of the global economy”. There can, likewise, be no meaningful 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development without taking into account the growth and industrialisation aspirations of 1.3 billion people representing one-sixth of humanity.

But all these right noises and photo-ops with Fortune 500 CEOs will not carry credibility unless accompanied by concrete policy action back home. Investors ultimately want ease of doing business — which is what a robust bankruptcy law and a nationwide goods and services tax regime would greatly enable. They seek stability, transparency and predictability in taxation and regulatory policies. The current government hasn't exactly covered itself in glory — whether in trying to break the legislative logjam in Parliament, creating new uncertainties through retrospective tax demands on capital gains by foreign portfolio investors (thankfully, since resolved) or the forced withdrawal of Maggi noodles from stores based on questionable sampling and testing procedures. Similar uncomfortable questions would be asked about whether Modi's messages of openness are consistent with the anti-minorities, venom-spitting views of some of his own ministers. A country aspiring for global leadership cannot be seen to tolerate such small-minded parochialism.

A voice, under 35: What's not to 'like'?

While it is important for people to behave responsibly on social networks, it is not too much to expect the government to behave responsibly as well. Successive governments have tried to curb free speech on the internet by bringing in several regressive laws and policies, the latest example being the draft National Encryption Policy. (Source: Illustration by CR Sasikumar)

Remember me? Rinu Srinivasan? Does the name ring a bell? It's alright, don't tax your brain. It's been years since I faded away from mainstream news channels and the media in general. However, if you spin back the clock three years to November 2012, it was my Facebook friend, Shaheen Dhada, and I who hogged headlines across the country for a period of two or three weeks. Back then, we were better known by the “Palghar girls” moniker.

Now that you've sort of recognised me, I will briefly recap what happened to me on the evening of November 18, 2012. It all started off with Shaheen, my Facebook friend, posting

an update on her timeline that read: “Every day thousands of people die, but still the world moves on. Just due to one politician died a natural death, everyone just goes crazy. They should know, we are resilient by force not by choice. When was the last time did anyone show some respect or even a 2 mins silence for Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Azad, Sukhdev, or any of the people because of whom we r free living Indians... Respect is earned, not given and definitely not forced. Today, Mumbai shuts down due to fear and not due to respect!!!”

I liked this status, commented on it and shared it on my Facebook wall. Several others commented as well, but as I later found out, they quickly deleted their comments.

I went back to my usual routine after doing this. Fifteen minutes later, I was at the Palghar police station, detained by the police and surrounded by a mob of over 500 people.

My dad was with me, shielding me from any possible attack. He was, however, unable to stop two women from slapping me on the face.

To this day, what happened at the police station sends shivers down my spine. After a harrowing seven hours at the police station, we were given leave to go and were ordered to come back early the next morning. The next day, we waited endlessly at the police station while the police looked for sections to book us under. Finally, they homed in on the now-defunct Section 66A of the IT Act and IPC Section 295(A). We were presented at the local court and granted bail. Through the rest of November and much of December, I lived under the constant fear of being attacked and was provided police protection. Thanks to my parents, brother, the media and a few friends who stood by me, I was eventually able to get relief from this ordeal and ended up in Kerala for my studies.

Overall, I was quite pleased with the speed with which our case was handled and eventually resolved. But then, we had massive media attention, which must have led to our plight being highlighted the world over. Had it not been for the media, I might still have been doing the rounds of the courts. For the same reason, my opinion on the Indian judiciary might be slightly skewed — my experiences with the judicial system have been largely positive. I am aware that there are others who are not so lucky. Whenever I hear about people who have been fighting cases for decades, with no solution in sight, I am sad and happy at the same time. Sad for them — and happy for me, as I thank my stars that I am not embroiled in a legal wrangle. So yes, I would like to see our legal system deliver justice more efficiently and faster.

That event was a life-changer. On that fateful November evening, I learnt a lot about what social media is and how powerful a medium it can be, even capable of making or destroying a person’s life. However, not to be deterred, I was back on Facebook within a week of this ordeal, and have remained active on it since then. A lot has changed in the intervening months, and Shaheen and I eventually got justice two years later, when the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A earlier this year.

Over the last three years, I finished my audio engineering course and as of today, am waiting for my internship. I also managed to sing for a Malayalam movie called Oraalpokkam. As a singer, I also want to master the arts of recording and audio-editing.

As someone who ended up suffering because of an innocuous Facebook post, I feel somewhat qualified to give my fellow youngsters a piece of advice. There is no doubt that social networks today are a perfect example of a double-edged sword. As long as you handle it with care and use it responsibly, it should be all fine and dandy. However, one careless move could end up affecting your life in ways you cannot even imagine.

While it is important for people to behave responsibly on social networks, it is not too much to expect the government to behave responsibly as well. Successive governments have tried to curb free speech on the internet by bringing in several regressive laws and policies, the latest example being the draft National Encryption Policy. It is high time lawmakers and policymakers realised that it would be near impossible to put a complete curb on the

dissemination of information on the internet. We are a free-flowing, plural, secular democracy, and unlike North Korea or China, we do not wish to be ruled by a police state that tells us how to use the internet or social media.

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