



Cautious optimism

The Economic Survey underscores the need to maintain fiscal credibility

The Economic Survey for 2017-18 paints the picture of an economy that gives reason for both optimism and caution. It projects that GDP growth could accelerate to 7.75% in 2018-19, from 6.75% in the current fiscal, reinstating India as the world's fastest-growing major economy. According to Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian, the key factors contributing to the positive prognosis are the reform measures: the July 1 implementation of the Goods and Services Tax and the steps taken to address the twin balance sheet problem in the banking sector. The latter includes the push to use the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code for debt resolution and the initiative to recapitalise public sector banks. Adding to these domestic enablers are the fair winds of a global recovery that have already lent a lift to overseas demand for India's goods and services. But capitalising on these favourable factors while remaining vigilant to other macroeconomic threats, including a key risk in the form of persistently high oil prices, would require exemplary economic stewardship. Among the concerns the CEA has flagged is one relating to what the Survey calls "a classic emerging market 'sudden stall' induced by sharp corrections to elevated stock prices." With Indian stock indices continuing to soar to new highs on an almost daily basis, the Survey warns against "sanguineness about its sustainability". A correction in the stock market, besides triggering capital outflows, could force policymakers to raise interest rates, choking off the nascent recovery.

On the fiscal front, the survey contends that the Centre needs to reappraise its priorities. The onus, it argues, has to be squarely placed on establishing and maintaining policy credibility. To this end, it argues against "setting overly ambitious targets for consolidation, especially in a pre-election year" that are based on optimistic and unrealistic assumptions. Instead, it recommends a "modest consolidation" that would signal a return to the path of calibrated deficit reductions. In doing so, it appears that the Survey is signalling that the government may have to retain the elbow room to stabilise the GST, complete the recapitalisation exercise and, most crucially, support agriculture. Devoting an entire chapter to 'Climate, Climate Change and Agriculture', the CEA and his team have stressed on the dangers climate change poses to the outlook for farm growth. With the potential to reduce annual agricultural incomes – by as much as 20-25% for unirrigated areas – the Survey calls for a range of mitigation measures including extensive provision of efficient irrigation technologies and a wholesale review of the cereal-centric approach to policy. Citing job creation and education as key priorities, the Survey sets out a plan for rapid economic expansion by recommending that policymakers keep their sights trained on strengthening "the only two truly sustainable engines – private investment and exports."

Renaissance man

At the Australian Open, Roger Federer gave us more reasons to believe he is the greatest ever

Roger Federer's iridescent late-career renaissance continued at the Australian Open on Sunday. The Swiss maestro has now won three of the last four Grand Slam events he has entered – a success rate great champions usually achieve during their athletic prime, not in the mid-30s. Indeed, Ken Rosewall, who claimed the 1972 Australian Open at 37, is the only man older than Federer (36 years and 173 days) to have won a Major singles title in the Open Era. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Federer's record-extending 20th Grand Slam crown was the certainty that accompanied it. Where last year's triumph in Melbourne was startling – it was his first Major victory in nearly five years – Federer entered the second week this time as the firm favourite. His striking, well-proportioned game looked in good order. Significantly, he seemed in no trouble taking the ball impossibly early; his repurposed single-handed backhand was equal to the task. A large part of his success over the last year owes itself to this more urgent style of play, which both conserves energy and discomfited the opponent. Although rewarding, it is a method fraught with risk. It requires the full range of Federer's genius to pull it off – in particular, his sense of timing and innate understanding of court-space. Through the fortnight, he balanced this risk-reward equation expertly, making the final without a set dropped.

The draw might have cleared for Federer – neither Novak Djokovic nor Rafael Nadal kept his appointment with the World No. 2 – but Marin Čilić proved a formidable adversary in the title round. The 6'6" Croat has reserves of easy power and moves well for someone his size. A Major winner himself, Čilić is no stranger to the big stage. Federer tightened up at least once during the match. He later admitted that in the fourth set his "mind was all over the place" – "I was so close and I was telling myself, 'Don't mess it up,' and then that's exactly what I did." But the greatest of athletes find a way of silencing the voice of doubt that whispers in their ear. If anything, Federer, at this stage of his career, seems to have become better at it. He appears more adept at relaxing into the moment and seizing it: he did it to spectacular effect against Nadal in Melbourne last year, shedding the mental baggage of defeats past; Čilić has never worried Federer in a similar manner, but victory demanded a masterful calming of the nerves. It is this ability to continually refurbish and nuance all facets of his game – the physical, the mental, the tactical, and the technical – that allows Federer to outcompete and outlive much younger opponents. It is this that sets him apart, even among the pantheon of tennis's finest.

Walking with others on a tightrope

Gandhi knew well that one cannot be a friend of Truth without living on the edge



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

January 30 marks the 70th anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Once again the ideas of non-violent resistance and self-transformation are brought before the public arena. But more than ever, this is an opportunity to evaluate the theoretical and practical status of M.K. Gandhi in India and in the world.

Gandhi everywhere

It is practically impossible to live in India and not to see or hear references to Gandhi. Gandhi is by far the most recognisable Indian put on currency notes. He is also honoured all over the country with statues erected in the middle of town squares and his pictures posted on the walls of business offices and shops, even restaurants. But this does not mean necessarily that Gandhi is well read and understood by all Indians. A quick look at everyday Indian politics and the debates in the press and elsewhere shows that the spirit of Gandhi is no more fully present in his native country. Though his name is pronounced by all politicians and managers, when it comes to his teachings, young, middle class technologists, corporate lawyers and businessmen in India consider Gandhi an old-fashioned figure with his preference for an austere, simple lifestyle.

Despite being misread and misunderstood, Gandhi's legacy lives on over 70 years after his death. Today, for many non-Indians, the name "Gandhi" is synonymous with non-violence and civil resistance. As such, Mahatma Gandhi continues to be studied and taken seriously by all those around the world, (including Indians) who are

engaged in the struggle for freedom and democratisation. Over the last seven decades, political and spiritual leaders and civil activists, from Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama through to Aung San Suu Kyi, from young militants of Otpor in Serbia to the freedom fighters of Tahrir Square in Egypt, have increasingly incorporated the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence in their protest repertoires, realising the ways in which it challenges the ruling elite's power and domination.

More interestingly, there has been a new interest in Gandhi among political theorists in the West. For the past seven decades, very few theorists considered Gandhi's seminal work, *Hind Swaraj*, as a major work in modern political thought next to Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Mill's *On Liberty*. But a new interest in Gandhi the political philosopher is emerging among the comparative political theorists. Actually, his relevance to contemporary debates becomes even more pertinent by analysing his philosophical and political contributions in a comparative perspective. Moreover, it reveals the multidimensional aspect of Gandhian thought while providing a sharp contrast between his approach to ethics, pluralism and autonomy and many challenges of our contemporary world, including lack of empathy, legitimised violence and exclusion.

An ethics of empathy

As such, what the comparative analysis of the Gandhian thought reveals to us is that unlike many contemporary liberal political thinkers, who put rights before duties, empathy and cross-cultural understanding are the hallmarks of the Gandhian view of everyday politics. The heart of Gandhi's ethics of empathy is to look within oneself, change oneself and then change the world. That is to say, at



a more fundamental level, for Gandhi, cultures and nations are not isolated entities, because they all play a special role in the making of 'human history'. Therefore, 'Gandhi rarely speaks in terms of linear world history. His goal for every culture (including his own) is the same as his goal for every individual: to experiment with Truth. This is a way to open up the world to a harmonic exchange and a transformative dialogue among cultures'.

At a more philosophical level, in Gandhi's view, every culture should learn from others. As a result, politics for Gandhi is a matter of non-violent organisation of society with the aim of becoming more mature and more truthful. At the same time, Gandhi is always concerned with cooperation among nations in terms of mutual understanding, empathic friendship and non-violent partnership.

Last but not least, Gandhi is a thinker and a practitioner who is constantly experimenting with modes of comparative and cross-border cultural constellations. As he affirms, "I do not want my house to be walled in on sides and

my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." This statement of Gandhi has a particular relevance to the cultural situation in our globalised world. Gandhi's 'house' can be understood as a metaphor for an autonomous and democratically self-organised system within a decentralised community of 'houses' where communication between equally respected and equally valid cultures can take place. In other words, this capacity to engage constructively with conflicting values is an essential component of practical wisdom and empathic pluralism of Gandhian non-violence.

It also involves a belief in the fact that an understanding of moral views is possible among all people of all cultures because they all participate in the same quest for Truth. This why Gandhi affirms, "Temples or mosques or churches... I make no distinction between these different abodes of God. They are what faith has made them. They are an answer to man's craving somehow to reach the Unseen." Consequently, the Gandhian non-violent approach to plurality is a way of bridging differences and developing intercultural awareness and understanding among individuals and nations. As a result, Gandhi suggests a view of civilisation deeply rooted in an ethics of non-violence. However, his ontological and political demands for an ethical approach to human affairs are not of an utopian nature, but more of a dialogical sensibility. Maybe that is why Gandhi's response to the phenomenology of violence is not the exclusion of certain historical self-consciousness but a mutual recognition among subjects of history. As a matter of fact, the pluralistic and inter-cultural recognition in the Gandhian vision

of democracy can determine our sense of who we are and the value accorded to the common world we live in. That is, for Gandhi, one's sense of freedom is never a matter of simple self-introspection. Rather, understanding oneself as an autonomous self-consciousness requires the recognition of the otherness of the other. For Gandhi, recognition is the mechanism by which our democratic existence, as self-transformative beings, is generated.

Importance of dialogue

The point here is that in Gandhi's political philosophy, the experience of freedom derives from the diverse modes of participation in common concerns and community-engendering values spelt out in terms of a dialogue with the otherness of the other. Actually, Gandhi's message would be that dialogue with the other would save the self from its own tyranny. In short, what all this means is that with Gandhi, human conscience finally returns to earth, to the here and now, after centuries of temptation looking for salvation in eschatological constructions.

Gandhi knew well that one cannot be a friend of Truth without living on the edge. For him, therefore, thinking and living became one. But, thanks to his comparative and dialogical attitude, he always thought differently and lived marginally. His opening up to the world went hand in hand with his act of being free. While listening to his inner voice, he also had an acute sense of the world. Gandhi preferred to walk with others, even on a tightrope, rather than walking alone on a rigid, inflexible and impenetrable ground. This is his legacy, which is needed now more than ever.

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A path to executive power

The issue of office of profit must be understood as part of the legislature's institutional separation



MATHEW IDICULLA

On January 21, President Ram Nath Kovind approved the recommendation of the Election Commission (EC) to disqualify 20 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). They were deemed to have been holding offices of profit as they were parliamentary secretaries to ministers in the Delhi government. The party protested the move saying the EC had acted in a unilateral manner as its MLAs had not been given a hearing.

There is a lot at stake here since disqualification necessitates by-elections. However, due to the comfortable majority the AAP enjoys, the move will not bring down the Delhi government.

Office of profit debate

There are multiple questions this issue raises. Did the EC act in a fair manner and was its decision to disqualify the MLAs legally sound? The appointment of parliamentary secretaries also raises broader concerns about the nature of executive

power in a parliamentary system.

The concept of office of profit originates from Britain where, during the conflicts between the Crown and the Parliament in the 16th century, the House of Commons disqualified members from holding executive appointments under the Monarch. The underlying principle behind this is the doctrine of separation of powers. The office of profit rule seeks to ensure that legislators act independently and are not lured by offers from the executive. India's Constitution makers adopted this idea under Articles 102(1)(a) and 191(1)(a) which state that a lawmaker will be disqualified if he or she occupies "any office of profit" under the Central or State governments, other than those offices exempted by law. While the term "office of profit" is not defined in the Constitution, the Supreme Court, in multiple decisions, has laid out its contours.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had appointed 21 MLAs as parliamentary secretaries soon after the AAP government assumed office in 2015. When this decision was challenged before the High Court, the Delhi government sought to retrospectively amend the Delhi Members of Legislative Assembly (Removal of Disqualification) Act, 1997 to exempt parliamentary se-



cretaries from the definition of "office of profit". However, the Lieutenant Governor reserved the matter for the President, who refused to give his assent to the Bill. Thus the position of the parliamentary secretaries became precarious.

The Delhi High Court, in September 2016, set aside the appointment of parliamentary secretaries since it lacked the approval of the Lieutenant Governor. Citing this, the AAP claimed that since the appointment was anyway void, the MLAs could not be said to have been occupying an office of profit. However, the EC said that the MLAs "de facto" held the office of parliamentary secretaries. The AAP now alleges that the EC is acting in a partisan manner, as in other States, the striking down of the office of parliamentary secretaries has not resulted in the disqualification of MLAs. While the legality of the decision in the instance in Delhi will be decided in court, it is also critical to examine what the

practice of appointing parliamentary secretaries reveals.

Rewarding loyalists

The trend of appointing MLAs as parliamentary secretaries is done across the political spectrum. Many of these have been legally challenged and struck down by the judiciary. Recently, the Supreme Court struck down the Assam Parliamentary Secretaries (Appointment, Salaries, Allowances and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2004, calling it unconstitutional. Hence, the issue has a chequered legal past.

So why do State governments create such posts in the first place? Such posts are mainly to reward MLAs who do find a place in the cabinet. One of the major constraints in cabinet formation is Article 164 (1-A) of the Constitution which limits the number of Ministers in State cabinets – including the Chief Minister – to 15% of the total number of MLAs of the State; for Delhi it is 10% of the total seats. It is to get round this constitutional cap that State governments create such posts.

Article 164 (1-A) was inserted by the 91st Constitutional Amendment in 2003 on the recommendation of the M.N. Venkatchaliah-headed National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution. While it can be debated

whether the prescribed cap is too harsh, constitutional constraints and office of profit restrictions seek to prevent the creation of multiple executive posts to reward loyal legislators.

In India's parliamentary system, contesting elections to the legislature is primarily seen as a path to exercise executive power. It is often ignored that holding the government to account is not only the Opposition's role but also that of the entire legislature. Rewarding MLAs with executive posts can restrict them from performing their primary role.

The creation of such posts can also be attributed to the larger institutional malaise facing the legislatures. Lawmakers have been feeble over the years through measures such as binding party whips and a purely executive-driven legislative agenda. In such an institutional milieu, lawmakers increasingly seek positions with perks to exercise influence. Unless legislatures are truly strengthened and the disproportionate power of the executive in the legislature curtailed, the demand for creating such posts will continue to persist.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Polis and state funding

Most of the committees, even before and after the Indrajit Gupta Committee, have also suggested partial state funding of elections, citing India's economic conditions ("A vote for state funding", January 29). However, state funding can succeed only if it is in full. Other than that, such funding could also lead to the creation of bogus/ghost parties to tap such money. The Indrajit Gupta Committee also highlighted the need for internal party democracy, as a safeguard. Citing the example of foreign countries which have different demographic and political systems cannot be replicated appropriately in India. Unless there is a strong economy and there are key reforms on political transparency and corporate

funding, there is no point in moving towards state funding of elections.

SANJAY MOHITE, Bengaluru

There is a hidden danger in the introduction of electoral bonds 'aimed at improving the transparency and accountability of electoral funding'. According to the new regulation, the Central government can track the financial resources of all political parties which may lead to the government taking discriminatory actions against individuals or firms who or which may financially aid the Opposition. This could result in the ruling party gaining the upper hand in an election.

JELVIN JOSE, Adichilly, Thrissur, Kerala

IPL auction

Why does one have to be

swept away in the euphoria over the Indian Premier League (IPL) auction because of the unbelievable amounts of money involved? The "accomplishments" of players in the IPL fade away once the show is over. Cricket fans, on the other hand, will still recall with admiration the epic 281 runs scored by the legendary V.V.S. Laxman against Australia, way back in 2001. The IPL tournament consumes way too much electricity in a power-starved country such as India. Water, also a scarce resource, is used extensively to cure pitches. One can hardly expect any "ideal performance" from such an instant form of cricket (Editorial - "Retail therapy", January 29). No one has an idea about the foreign exchange expended. For a budding cricketer, the IPL is

not an ideal game to watch to hone his skills.

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

Irrespective of the hype which surrounds it, the IPL players' auction expectedly follows a cool, calculative business approach. Big names may not find takers if they do not fit into the scheme of things for a team, while relatively unknown players may fetch astronomical amounts.

While cricket puritans are ignored, all-rounders are much sought-after 'variety'.

VIJAI PANT, Hempur, Uttarakhand

Heavyweight champion

Roger Federer winning his sixth Australian Open and 20th Grand Slam title, at 36, is phenomenal 'Sport' page – "Ageless Federer creates

history again", January 29). His second golden age is a tribute to his dedication, professionalism and undiluted love for the game of tennis. He continues to defy time and logic. He makes tennis beautiful and delightful to watch. Marin Čilić was gracious in defeat.

C.G. KURIAKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

The glory of the legendary 'Fed-Ex' is testimony to his steely determination, grit,

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A front-page report (Jan. 29, 2018) on Jammu and Kashmir police filing a case against an army unit had referred to injuries sustained by a Junior Commissioner Officer. It should have been Junior Commissioned Officer.

Typographical error: A front-page headline on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2018, read: "Health Ministry to study 2017 spike in vaccine-related adverse events". It should have been Health Ministry.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com