

# The state of the States

The SDG India Index overlooks the aspect of inter-dependence of Sustainable Development Goals



U.S. MISHRA & S. IRUDAYA RAJAN

India was one among the 193 United Nations member states to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. It has been making sincere efforts to achieve these goals. The SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018, released to the public in December 2018 by NITI Aayog, is a useful comparative account of how well different States and Union Territories have performed so far in their efforts to achieve these goals.

In this effort, it has not been possible to establish suitable indicators for three of the 17 goals, including climate action (SDG-13). This is on account of either lack of identification of appropriate indicators or of the inability to compare different States. On the whole, 62 indicators representing 14 goals have been identified based on their measurability across States over time. A progress performance assessment has been made towards targets set by the Government of India, or the UN SDGs target for 2030, or the average of the three best-performing States. For reasons of comparability, all these indicators are normalised.

### Four categories

Based on a scale of 0 to 100, the States are categorised into four groups: achievers, front runners, performers, and aspirants. Achievers are those States which have already accomplished the set target. Front runners are those States that are very close to realising them. A majority of the States are categorised as performers and some lag behind as aspirants. Although classification sounds like an appropriate thing to do, there is arbitrariness in the exercise in the sense that in a unitary range, those States with scores till the midpoint are categorised as aspirants and a cluster of States in a close range of progress are termed as performers. A few States are designated as front runners. The three front runner States – Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Himachal Pradesh – assume values of



"India has been making sincere efforts to achieve the SDGs." Children eat at a temporary shelter in Hyderabad. \*AFP

66, 69 and 69, respectively, as against a range of States with values between 50 and 64. With the national score being 57, almost 17 States qualify as above or equal to the national score. Plotted on a graph, there is a negatively skewed distribution of scores with a reasonable tail to the left, a fat presence in the middle, and a tapering to the right. This needs to be recognised in classification; otherwise the arbitrariness with which the classification is made somewhat hints at a purposive designation of a few States in two extremes and a major share of them in between.

### The problem of averaging

Further, when one reads into the performance on various SDGs, it is found that many States fall into the aspirant category, especially for SDG-5 (gender equality), SDG-9 (industry innovation and infrastructure) and SDG-11 (sustainable cities and communities). These kinds of differences could well be emerging owing to a different number of indicators considered under different SDGs as well as their corresponding

variability across the States. This is evident in the variation of scores across different goals. For instance, in case of goals 1 and 2, the range for the majority of the States is between 35 and 80. For goals 3 and 6, the range is between 25 and 100. Again, for goal 5, it ranges between 24 and 50. Given these variations across different goals, merely averaging them not only compromises on robustness but also masks the disaggregated story to a large extent. Not only does the feature of the progress performance pattern need to be recognised in such classification but also the pathway of progress in development indicators, which has a character removed from linearity. Given that this is a measure of progress towards a target, the States near the target get a value closer to one compared to those which are away from the target assuming a lower value. These values are determined in relative terms in the sense that they represent the unitary position of the States within the available scale of gap between the minimum achieved and the target. Such positioning conveys a linear distance, which does not differen-

tiate a given distance between two States which have performed well compared with another pair of States which are far from achieving the target.

The difference in progress between the three front runner States is three points. This is perhaps not similar to the distance between the performing States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which too have a three-point difference. Such comprehension of achievement is limited as regards to comparing States, let alone designating them into four categories.

### What can be done?

Finally, the process of aggregation adopted to present the summary index of compliance with the targets being a simple average assumes that each of the goals as well as the corresponding set of indicators are equally important and can substitute for each other. This also overlooks the aspect of inter-dependence of various goals, although it is upfront stated in the exercise. To ensure minimum robustness of this measure, a geometric average would have served towards avoiding perfect substitutability of one goal with the other. It means achievement of progress in one goal cannot compensate for compromise in another. While this exercise serves as a report card of performance of States as regards compliance with the SDGs, its scientific adequacy is compromised with arbitrariness that presents a stereotypical pattern of performance rather than bringing out surprises.

The choice of indicators representing specific goals need not necessarily be guided by availability but also their explicit independence from one another. This may help in making a uniform set of indicators for each of the goals with proper representation without duplication. On the whole, this performance assessment may not be misleading, but it does not help us understand the relative significance of compliance in some goals that helps in compliance of the other. Thus, performance assessment of SDGs while overlooking the strict interdependence of them may not be rewarding.

U.S. Mishra and S. Irudaya Rajan are Professors, Centre for Development Studies, Kerala

## RESPONSE

# There is nothing to unfetter

There is no stay today against the government handing over 67.703 acres of land to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas Samiti



SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY

In the last paragraph of his article, “Ayodhya and the challenge to equality” (February 7, 2019, *The Hindu*), Sukumar Muralidharan writes: “The BJP government has demanded that the Supreme Court unfetter a large part of the land held in trust pending final settlement of the case.” I do not know how he came to this conclusion. The truth of the case is available in the September 27, 2018 judgment of the Supreme Court, delivered by Justice Ashok Bhushan. It states: “As a consequence of the events at Ayodhya on 6.12.1992, the Central Government decided to acquire all areas in dispute in the suits pending in the Allahabad High Court.”

### Disputed and undisputed land

The Narasimha Rao government’s decision is embodied in the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993. The area where the Babri Masjid once stood is just 0.313 acres. This Act was upheld, except for one unrelated subsection, by a Constitution Bench in 1994. The government, by the Act passed, also acquired the 67.703 acres owned by various Hindu entities, which surrounded the 0.313 acres, now called the “disputed” area. The undisputed area of 67.703 acres now largely belongs to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas Samiti, which is a party in the pending appeals in the Supreme Court.

The Sunni Waqf Board is the opposite party. Its suit claiming title to the disputed land (and not to the Masjid) was dismissed by the Allahabad High Court on September 30, 2010. The court held that where the central dome of the Babri Masjid stood is indeed, according to faith, the birth place of Lord Rama and belongs to him, with the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas Samiti as trustees.

As for the undisputed 67.703 acres, the Constitution Bench in 1994 held that the Indian government, which had nationalised the land, was free to utilise it as it wished. But Rao told the court through his Solicitor General that his government would hand over the land to the Hindus if it was determined that there was a “pre-existing temple”. This was also the proposal made during Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar’s tenure when I, as Minister of Law and Justice, negotiated with Syed Shahabuddin, who was then Chairman of the Babri Masjid Action Committee. Sha-

habuddin also told me that if it was proved that there was a pre-existing Hindu temple, he himself would lead the demolition squad to the Babri Masjid. Had Chandra Shekhar’s government lasted longer, this is what would have happened since Rajiv Gandhi was also in favour of building a Ram temple.

In 1994, the Supreme Court directed the Allahabad High Court to verify using scientific methods whether the Babri Masjid was constructed after a pre-existing temple. The High Court asked the Archaeological Survey of India to do this. Two archaeologists, B.B. Lal and K.K. Mohammed, in 2002 deployed scientific tools and concluded that there was indeed an extensive temple complex in ruins under the site where the Babri Masjid had stood. The court accepted this finding and relied on the same in its 2010 judgment. It is this judgment that the Sunni Waqf Board has appealed against in the Supreme Court.

There is nothing to “unfetter” – there is no stay today against the government handing over 67.703 acres of land to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas Samiti. The 1994 judgment did not place any fetter. The fetter was “engineered” by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government in 2002. The interim order of the Supreme Court of 2002 stayed the giving away of 67.703 acres. As Justice Ashok Bhushan noted in 2018, the interim order was superseded by a final order of the apex court stating that the stay was “operative until the disposal of the suits” in the Allahabad High Court. Hence it is no longer operative today.

### Two questions

Two questions remain. One, why give to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas Samiti the 67.703 acres and why not to the other owners who were there prior to government nationalisation? This is because, except the Samiti, all the others accepted compensation from the government after nationalisation. Two, why did the BJP go back to the Supreme Court for getting land which is now unfettered? It did so after receiving bad bureaucratic advice to play safe. We have lost an opportunity again.

Mr. Muralidharan has not only exhibited ignorance of these facts but has confused the issue with the irrelevant consideration of secularism. Only fundamental rights in the Constitution matter, not Western-borrowed concepts. The word secularism does not figure in any of the Articles of the Constitution. It was grafted during the Emergency in the Preamble, along with socialism. The two words are comatose today since nobody in the mainstream knows what they mean.

Subramanian Swamy is Member of Parliament and a former Union Law Minister

## SINGLE FILE

# Getting India’s history right

It is time to stop raising generations on a diet of victimhood

UDAY BALAKRISHNAN



THE HINDU ARCHIVES

T.E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is a great read but is it a credible record of the Arab uprising against the Ottomans? The Arab historian Aziz al-Azmeh was scathing in his denunciation of Lawrence, holding that his was a work of fiction. But

that is not the way many others recalled it over the years. Except for those nursing an acute sense of victimhood, Shashi Tharoor’s engaging polemic, *An Era of Darkness*, is not a serious, objective work of historical scholarship. While the British rule of India had its rotten side, it had a redeeming one as well. As Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh had the courage to acknowledge this in his widely publicised July 2005 speech at Oxford University – all without one whit downplaying the harmful aspects of British rule. That is a balanced perspective.

The best of our historians tie themselves in knots toeing a nationalistic line, however unintentional that might be. A widely acclaimed book, *India’s Struggle for Independence*, by Bipan Chandra and some of India’s best regarded historians, is a case in point. Partition is seen as the outcome of Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s intransigence and the Congress’s inability to carry the subcontinent’s Muslims along. The latter point is Bipan Chandra’s view too. But any historian claiming to be objective would also have highlighted Abul Kalam Azad’s objection to Partition on the grounds that it would reduce, intentionally perhaps, the Muslims from a politically powerful quarter of the population to a less significant and vulnerable minority in free India. Developments since then have proved him right.

The mass killings and forced migration of millions caused by Partition was entirely foreseeable, especially in the light of the extreme violence that accompanied Jinnah’s ‘Direct Action Day,’ a year before. Then why couldn’t independence have been delayed to ensure a less cataclysmic separation? This is rarely discussed anywhere, and never in our schools, where most Indians have their last brush with history, reinforcing life-long prejudices.

It is time we stopped raising generations on a diet of victimhood while at the same time hoping to make peace with those of our neighbours we feel most threatened by. With the evidence now available, we should accept that, far from being victims, we share historical responsibility for our difficult relations with Pakistan and our border dispute with China. As the largest country in the subcontinent, and its principal economic driver, India has a great stake in getting its history right, for lasting peace to follow.

In his perceptive essay, “The Decline of Historical Thinking” in a recent issue of the *New Yorker*, Eric Alterman observed, “A nation whose citizens have no knowledge of history is asking to be led by quacks, charlatans and jingos.” How true of today’s India!

The writer has taught public policy and contemporary history at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru



## NOTEBOOK

# The unsung heroes of every scoop

It is the duty of journalists to protect the identity of their sources

S. VIJAY KUMAR

A week after I exposed the sensational gutkha scam in Tamil Nadu in June 2017, a retired police officer called to say that he knew who “planted” the story.

His theory was that one of his juniors had used me to settle scores with some colleagues. Even before I could dispel his suspicion, he confirmed what I feared the most by saying, “I know you spoke to him a day before writing the story.”

He was right. I did call and meet the person concerned, and wanted his reaction since he held a key post when the scam took shape. But the officer in question politely declined to comment and was just one among the dozens I had called or met for the story. But how would anybody know who I spoke to or met a day before writing the story? This was not all. Many people who called me to express shock at the

scandal also showed a keen interest in knowing my source and the contents of the classified Income Tax documents, which had details of the beneficiaries.

The gutkha scam story is perhaps the most challenging one I have done in my career. It had its origins in a secret note of the Income Tax department to the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary. The note contained details of officials or politicians who allegedly took huge bribes from the manufacturer of the MDM brand of gutkha to facilitate the storage, transportation and sale of the banned substance in Chennai.

Though a copy of the document was made available to *The Hindu*, the State government maintained that no such papers existed on record. I had to keep writing stories to expose the multi-crore scam despite constant monitoring by vested interests.

With pressure mounting

on the beneficiaries, and the Opposition parties demanding a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation, I had strong reason to believe that my phone was being tapped. Senior police officers cautioned me that even calls over WhatsApp were not foolproof.

It appeared to be me that the investigators were focussing more on the informer than the inputs. It had perhaps become a standard operating procedure to stalk the writer and his/her sources. I had a tough time writing the follow-up stories – while a couple of sources refused to meet me fearing surveillance and would occasionally pick up only Internet-enabled voice calls, a few others blocked my number. Some friends, including a few in the police, kept a safe distance. I quit Facebook, limited conversations to personal meetings, and used mobile phones as

sparingly as possible.

It felt like I was playing hide-and-seek when I would leave my phone in office and take the bus to the beach to meet someone. I would deliberately call a dozen people in order to conceal the source’s identity. It has been three years since I stepped into the police headquarters and the Commissionerate. My sources had no motive in passing on the papers except to bring out the truth. Sources are always the unsung heroes of every scoop. It is the duty of all journalists to thoroughly research the information they receive and go to print only when there is indisputable material evidence to corroborate it.

The series of stories in the gutkha scam will go on till the logical conclusion. Fresh inputs and informers will emerge as the case develops. And the promise to protect the identity of sources will be kept always.

## FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 12, 1969

### Bombay almost normal

The Maharashtra Chief Minister, Mr. V. P. Naik, to-day [February 11] told Pressmen that the situation in Bombay city was returning to normal. Except for a few sporadic incidents in the afternoon the city [Bombay] was free from any incident since this evening. Mr. Naik said he was advising BEST to run normal services from Wednesday [February 12] in order to end the inconvenience caused to the people. He had full confidence that the people would see that the normal services were allowed to run without any trouble. Political and social workers were trying to approach people to create a peaceful atmosphere, Mr. Naik said. Mr. Naik appealed to the people to maintain the fair name of the city and help in bringing about normalcy. He said he had a brief talk with the Prime Minister on the telephone about the situation.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 12, 1919

### Moplah Outbreak.

The following are fuller details [available in Calicut] of the Moplah trouble in Pandalore: Nine Moplahs led Checku by Haji, an ex-Head Constable of Police with several previous convictions, went on the warpath in Mankada Pallipuram Amsom at dawn on Friday [February 7]. The rest were mostly youths of eighteen and thereabouts. They were armed with a few guns, knives and spears. They murdered five Namboodiri landlords who had gone to bathe in the river near the residence of another Namboodiri where a marriage feast was being celebrated by some hundreds of Namboodiris and others. Some of the murdered men were valuable ornaments but the fanatics did not touch these. Afterwards the gang proceeded to Pandalore where it is believed they had designs on the life of the Nair Adhikari. They killed two male relatives of his, burnt two temples and about a dozen houses and a haystack and marched to Nenmini Amsom and entered the house of Kayalot Wariar and obtained rice and other provisions from the Wariar’s agent.

## CONCEPTUAL

# Assassination market

ECONOMICS

This refers to a prediction market where participants with money can place bets on the likely date of death of a given individual. Assassination markets thus reflect the probability, as predicted by the people betting their money in the marketplace, of the death of a certain person at various points in the future. While bettors usually try only to predict the likely date of death of important personalities, some critics of assassination markets have feared that these markets could actually induce large bettors to plot the killing of the people they bet on in order to win huge sums of money. Assassination markets are thus deemed to be illegal in many countries.

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