The tools for counting

It's time to debate the modalities of the next Census, given the earlier confusion over caste data

SONALDE DESAI

As the 2011 Census approached, demands for inclusion of data on caste in Census reached a crescendo. P. Chidambaram, the Union Home Minister at the time, was opposed to collecting caste data and blocked it by claiming that it was logistically impossible for the Census, but caste information could be collected via the planned Below Poverty Line (BPL) Census, later renamed the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC). Hasty inclusion of the caste question in the SECC has resulted in largely unusable data. The government tasked former NITI Aayog chairman Arvind Panagariya to look into this, but the effort has stalled. Consequently, if we want information regarding the size and characteristics of various castes in India, we must continue to look to the Census of 1931.

It is hard to imagine that the 2021 Census will not face another slew of demands for collection of caste data. It also seems likely that once again we will be unprepared for a full caste census. If we really want to collect data on caste in India and not let the discourse about Indian society be shaped by the political exigencies of colonial India, the time to plan is now.

An ongoing argument

Should we collect data on caste? Some would argue that the simple act of asking about caste creates a chasm within society. Part of this resistance comes from reaction to the preoccupation of colonial administrators-turned-arm-chair anthropologists who saw caste as the defining feature of Indian society. Colonial Censuses, beginning with the first Census in 1871, included questions about caste and used these data to divide and conquer India by first privileging Brahmins as interpreters of Indian culture and then targeting them as the roots of caste-based oppression and inequality.

G.S. Ghurye, the early 20th century pioneer of Indian sociology, reacted sharply by identifying this passion for classification as the source of anti-Brahmin movements. Veena Das, doyenne of modern Indian anthropology, also notes that the colonial Censuses via the process of recording caste generated a conception of community as a homogeneous and classifiable community and thereby influenced the processes of political representation. Consequently, post-Independence Censuses have shied away from including questions about caste.

The challenge for modern India lies in figuring out whether caste-based political mobilisation and strong sentiments for or against reservations would disappear just because we choose not to collect statistics about caste. Patels, Gujjars, Jats and Marathas do not seem to care about the lack of Census data as they demand reservations. Nor has the caste cauldron of Karnataka elections calmed because we can only roughly estimate the size of the Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities.

What is at stake?

Our political systems, civil society and courts continue to assume that broad caste-based social categories – Dalits, Adivasis, Other

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Backward Classes (OBCs) and upper castes – defined largely using data from 1931 Census and a few special purpose surveys continue to shape economic conditions in 21st century India. Without accurate data at a granular level for each of these categories consisting of thousands of *jatis* (castes) and *upjatis* (subcastes), we have no way of knowing whether this is correct.

Indian society has undergone a tremendous transformation since 1931. Land ownership that bolstered the power of upper castes has lost its hold. Land fragmentation and decades of agricultural stagnation have turned many upper caste landowners into marginal farmers barely eking out a subsistence. While landlessness, once the bane of Dalit existence, has left the landless better poised to take advantage of rising rural wages, particularly construction wages. Consequently, while at a broad brushstroke the National Sample Survey (NSS) shows that mean consumption expenditure of forward castes is higher than that of Dalits, clusters of poverty persist among forward castes. According to NSS data, the bottom fourth of forward castes are poorer than the top half of Dalits. India Human Development Survey shows that 56% of Dalit children ages 8-11 cannot read but neither can 32% of forward caste and 47% of OBC children.

Economic growth of the past century, combined with strong affirmation action undertaken by successive governments of the independent nation, may have changed relative fortunes of various groups. Some *jatis* may have managed to pull themselves out poverty and marginalisation, while others may have sunk into it. Hence, it is time to collect data that reflects the current situation.

Collection of caste data is not easy. The SECC asked interviewers to write down the name of the caste exactly as articulated by the respondent. By some reports, it has revealed as many as 46 lakh castes. Sometimes the same caste is spelt in different ways, at other times some individuals report their *jati* and others *upjati* making it difficult to create mutually exclusive categories. One cannot help but sympathise with the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation which were asked to tack on a question about caste at the eleventh hour in the SECC without any preparation.

However, we have nearly three years before the Census of 2021 and are fortunate to have data from the SECC and technologies rooted in machine learning at our disposal. It would be possible to set up an expert group that uses the SECC data in conjunction with other data sources such as matrimonial advertisements and State-specific Scheduled Castes/OBC lists to make a comprehensive list of castes and condense them into meaningful categories via machine learning tools. These categories could then be validated by domain experts from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) institutions in various States to come up with a district specific list of castes that would cover more than 90% of individuals in any given district. Interviewers could use this precoded list to allow respondents to self-classify with a small residual group's responses being recorded verbatim and categorised later. This is very similar to the technique through which occupational and industrial classification systems are created.

Genie's out already

Collection of data on castes is inherently risky. Politicians have long realised the advantages and disadvantages of capitalising on the sense of relative deprivation among various groups. A caste Census could easily roil the waters in ways that are hard to predict. However, once the SECC was conducted, the genie was out of the bottle. Demands are already rife for the release of these data. Conceding that these data are flawed and looking for better ways of collecting data on caste may be a way of calming the waters before the 2019 election.

It will take courage for a future government to collect data on caste and to use it to rationalise reservation policies. However, without better and more current data, our discourse on caste and affirmative action remains dominated by decisions made by the colonial administration.

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Change perceptions in J&K

Military and political action apart, dealing with the psychological aspects of affected communities is critical

D.S. HOODA

The suspension of operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has been called off by the government. Its fate was obvious ever since that bloody Thursday when journalist Shujaat Bukhari, and a young soldier, Aurangzeb, were brutally killed. The ceasefire will soon be forgotten and the new set of stories will be about the next phase of 'Operation All Out'. What will also be forgotten are the reasons that forced the government to announce the truce despite the success that the security forces had been achieving in counterterrorist operations. Anyway, with the State government now having fallen, there will be a fresh look to find a way forward.

The Valley of unrest: "In Kashmir, perceptions have been generated of a government being at war with its people." Kashmiri youth clash with paramilitary personnel on the outskirts of Srinagar on June 22. ▪ AFP

Internal and external facets

In seeking answers, we have to consider both the external and internal facets of the conflict. Pakistan plays a key role in keeping the conflict alive; its Army gives unstinted support to terror groups. In the absence of any incentive, and an almost complete breakdown of diplomacy between the two countries, some of us feel that the only option left to deter Pakistan is to keep up military pressure along the Line of Control (LoC). However, it appears that the government has taken the position that the 2003 ceasefire must be respected. The two Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs) had talks on May 29 and agreed to "fully implement the Ceasefire Understanding of 2003 in letter and spirit".

Unfortunately, the 2003 agreement was only verbal, so there is no "letter and spirit" to it. This has kept it fragile. For the ceasefire to succeed, it must be based on some strong principles that promote confidence between the two armies. As long as infiltration continues, forward patrols are attacked by groups from across the border, and soldiers killed, there can be no peace among troops facing off on the LoC. It is essential that the two DGMOs meet and formalise an agreement in which Pakistan agrees to do more to seal off its border to prevent terrorists from entering India. It is obvious that Pakistan will be reluctant to do this, but it must be put on the spot or exposed for the whole world to see.

There must also be greater interaction between the local commanders of the two armies – for instance, flag meetings can be held along the border. Often it is local dynamics that trigger firing, which then escalates and spreads to other areas. If confidence can be built between local officers, it will enhance peace. An example can be taken from Ladakh where regular border meetings with Chinese officers have been instrumental in keeping the border calm.

A multipronged approach

Looking at the internal situation in J&K, it is obvious that a multipronged approach involving both kinetic and population-centric measures is required. Perhaps the simplest in terms of understanding is the need to target the terrorists who have vitiated the atmosphere in the State. The security forces are confident and capable of dealing with this threat – 250-300 terrorists in the State can carry out a few high-profile terror attacks but are simply incapable of forcing any revolutionary change.

A little more complicated is the law and order situation in dealing with stone-pelting mobs. The injuries and deaths which inevitably follow these clashes lead to a repeated cycle of violence. However, there is no option but to check this with a firm hand. If the writ of the state is seen as weak, the population will distance itself from the government.

Meanwhile, the government must look at meeting the aspirations of the larger population with a view towards long-term conflict resolution. This is the most complex task, with many competing narratives being offered as solutions. When faced with this dilemma, it is sometimes helpful to go back to understanding why ethnic conflicts often defy solutions.

In his article, "Between Past and Future: Persistent Conflicts, Collective Memory, and Reconciliation", Irit Keynan writes: "Ethnic and national conflicts entail two major aspects – defined by scholars as a socio-political aspect and a socio-psychological aspect – with the latter no less crucial than the former... The socio-psychological aspect pertains to a wide range of issues relating to the community, including a community's sense of identity and self-perceptions, its fears and sense of collective threats, perceived past, and portrayal of its role in the conflict... The socio-political aspect involves issues such as land, natural resources, economic and political dominance. Despite the complexity of the socio-political matters, in situations of intractable conflict it is the socio-psychological aspect, as well as history, that dominates the relationship between the involved adversaries and plays a central role in interpreting and fuelling persistent animosity."

Israeli scholar Daniel Bar-Tal writes in his paper, "Overcoming Psychological Barriers to Peace Making: The Influence of Mediating Beliefs about Losses": "In (prolonged and violent) conflicts the involved societies evolve [a] culture of conflict of which the dominant parts are societal beliefs of collective memories and of ethos of conflict, as well as collective emotional orientation... These narratives are selective, biased and distorted as their major function is to satisfy the societal needs rather than provide [an] objective account of reality."

A similar situation is evident in J&K. In Kashmir, perceptions have been generated of a government being at war with its people. Given this reality, it should be clear that issues like good governance and development, while important, need to be accompanied by measures that address the socio-psychological aspects of the people of all regions of the State. This has been a key weakness in our approach, and the separatists, along with some politicians, have made the situation worse by continuously exploiting existing societal beliefs and collective memory, rather than pointing to their dangers.

The government also needs to embark on a strong perception-changing programme that challenges the existing narratives, brings out the horrific cost of conflict to the people and the benefits of peace and cooperative relations. Concrete steps by the government are a must. We often think of social media as the answer to all our perception-shaping issues but without follow-up action, the impact of social media can soon fade.

The conflict in J&K defies simple solutions. Among the many actions required to be taken on the military, economic, political and social fronts, dealing with the psychological aspects of affected communities is critical. Memories and perceptions are perhaps the biggest hindrances to reconciliation and must be addressed by showing greater empathy.

Lieutenant General D.S. Hooda (retired) is a former Northern Army Commander

WHERE

Enforcing a plastic ban in **Maharashtra**

On Saturday, the Maharashtra government began enforcing a ban on plastic, a decision it announced in March. On World Environment Day, June 5, India was the host nation, with the theme for this year being 'Beat plastic pollution.'

What is the plan?

On March 23, the government issued a notification banning the manufacture, use, transport, distribution, wholesale and retail sale, storage and import of plastic bags with and without handle. The ban also covers disposable products, made from plastic and thermocol (polystyrene), such as single-use disposable dishes, cups, plates, glasses, fork, bowl, container, disposable dish/bowl used for packaging food in hotels, spoon, straw, non-woven polypropylene bags, cups/pouches to store liquid, packaging with plastic to wrap or store the products and packaging of food items and grain material. The ban is not applicable to PET bottles, irrespective of capacity. These bottles, however, should have predefined buyback price ranging from ₹1 to ₹2, depending on the size, printed on them.

Plastic used for packaging of medicines, compostable plastic bags or material used for plant nurseries, handling of solid waste, plastic bags not less than 50 micron thickness used for packaging of milk (with the specific purpose printed on it), plastic manufactured for export in SEZs and plastic to wrap the material at the manufacturing stage are excluded from the ban. The ban is applicable to manufacturers and consumers as well as the chain in between, which includes shops, hawkers, vendors and offices.

What is the penalty?

Urban and rural civic bodies, Collectors, forest officers, police authorities and Maharashtra Pollution Control Board officials have been empowered to implement the ban and take legal action. The penalty for violating the ban starts from ₹5,000 (first offence), ₹10,000 (second time) and ₹25,000 (third time) with three months in jail. In case one fails to pay the minimum penalty, the civic body can file a prosecution complaint before the court, which will decide the amount to be paid.

Why was this necessary?

Environment experts have been blaming plastic for choking of nullahs in Mumbai and the flooding in parts of the city during monsoons. Yuva Sena president Aaditya Thackeray was one of the first to demand a complete ban on plastic, a demand which was accepted by Shiv Sena leader and Environment Minister Ramdas Kadam. Plastic bag manufacturers approached the Bombay High Court against the decision, but their appeal was turned down. The Federation of Retail Traders Welfare Association, too, has gone to court. A hearing was held on Friday, but the plea was rejected. The State has 2,500 units making plastic bags, employing 56,000 people. They owe nearly ₹11,000 crore to banks as of March 31. The Clothing Manufacturers' Association of India has spoken out against the ban, saying the apparel trade employs 30 lakh people in the country and depends on polypropylene for packaging.

What is the alternative?

The State is not directly providing alternatives to banned items and has relied on people for solutions. Urban local bodies, like the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), have invited manufacturers of alternative products to showcase their wares at a three-day exhibition.

What lies in store?

The BMC has trained 250 inspectors for levying penalties. Their list is available on its website, along with that of its 37 collection centres where people can dispose of plastic. While levying penalty, they will be registering the offender's Aadhaar number, PAN number or driver licence number. It has also started a dedicated helpline for door-to-door collection. As on June 21, the BMC has collected 145 tonnes of banned plastic from Mumbai. However, most of this was plastic segregated from regular waste and only a fraction is from the 24 dedicated bins for dumping plastic. This underlines the need for more awareness.

ALOK DESHPANDE, TANVI DESHPANDE

Lessons from dark times

Remembering Emergency: The people must stay at the forefront of protecting democracy

M Venkaiah Naidu

"WHEN I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall..." said the apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi.

These prophetic words came true more than four decades ago when the people of India rose against a tyrannical onslaught on the foundational principles of Indian democracy. Dissent and disagreement were replaced with suppression and sycophancy as an atmosphere akin to a totalitarian regime became the order of the day for 21 months.

The darkest chapter in modern India's history unfolded on June 25, 1975, when President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed proclaimed Emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution on the grounds that "the security of India is threatened by internal disturbance". As per the Constitution, the President can declare Emergency only on the recommendation of the Union cabinet, However, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, without consulting her cabinet, recommended its imposition and the cabinet had ratified the decision the next day. In other words, it was a fait accompli for the Cabinet although one minister was believed to have expressed reservations.

To prevent any attempt to throttle democracy on the grounds of internal disturbance, the Janata Party government had carried out the 44th Amendment in 1978. As a result, the President can declare Emergency only due to external aggression and the condition of "internal disturbance" was replaced with armed rebellion. The President's proclamation has to be approved by both the houses of Parliament within a month.

The imposition of Emergency in 1975 was preceded by a widespread anti-corruption movement in Gujarat, popularly known as Nav Nirman Andolan. It led to the resignation of the then Gujarat Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel and eventually to the dissolution of the Assembly. Around the same time, a students' agitation gathered momentum against corrupt rule in Bihar, even as people in the rest of the country became increasingly resentful of soaring prices and corruption. Veteran socialist leader, J P Narayan, gave a call for "Sampoorna Kranti". JP became the messiah of the masses.

Less than a fortnight before the proclamation of Emergency, Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court had set aside the election of Mrs Gandhi for electoral malpractices and barred her from contesting elections for six years. He, however, stayed the order for 20 days to allow Mrs Gandhi to file an appeal. After her appeal was admitted in the Supreme Court, Justice V R Krishna Iyer granted a conditional stay on June 24 and held that Mrs Gandhi cannot participate in debates or vote as an MP. He referred the issue to a larger bench. The very next day, a massive public meeting was addressed by JP at Ramlila Grounds demanding Mrs Gandhi's resignation. Although there was no major incident anywhere in the country on the law and order front, Emergency was imposed on June 25.

Top political leaders, including JP, Morarji Desai, A B Vajpayee, L K Advani, Madhu Dandavate, Ramakrishna Hegde, Chandrashekhar, Charan Singh, Nanaji Deshmukh, Deve Gowda, Nitish Kumar and several RSS leaders were arrested without any charge in midnight swoops. Thousands of others were detained either under the draconian MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) or DIR (Defence of India Rules).

People in India and rest of the world were stunned by the unprecedented developments as fundamental rights were suspended, judiciary was superseded, various organisations were banned, forcible sterilisations were carried out and thousands were brutally tortured.

Although a number of journalists met at the Delhi Press Club and passed a resolution condemning promulgation of Emergency, the media by and large meekly surrendered to the censor, barring a few honourable exceptions like the fearless Ramnath Goenka's The Indian Express, The Statesman and Mainstream. Well-known journalist, Kuldip Nayyar was among those arrested. The government categorised the media as friendly, hostile and neutral and gave advertisements to only friendly publications. This attitude of the media was later famously described by L K Advani, who said that the press crawled when it was asked to bend.

Sweeping constitutional amendments were carried out like the 39th amendment which prohibited SC from hearing election petitions and the 42nd amendment, which declared that any amendment to the Constitution cannot be questioned in any court. Even the tenure of legislatures was extended to six years.

However, all the attempts to throttle democracy came to naught. The people rose like a tidal wave and voted the Janata Party to power and the government headed by Morarji Desai was sworn in. It nullified some of the black laws legislated during the Emergency. The Shah Commission appointed to probe into the excesses committed during the Emergency concluded that its imposition was totally unwarranted.

I was incarcerated during the Emergency for 17-and-half months under MISA for having invited JP to address the students at Andhra University, where I was studying. As an ABVP activist, I was acting as an underground courier for the states of AP, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Initially, I was lodged in Visakhapatnam jail and later shifted to Musheerabad jail in Hyderabad.

I have recounted the dark deeds of the Emergency to remind the people, especially the younger generation, to always be at the forefront of strengthening democracy.

An important lesson taught by Emergency is that the people of India, although peace-loving, will never tolerate authoritarianism. The fact that people have peacefully overthrown a despotic regime not only showed the maturity of the Indian electorate but also the resilience of India's Parliamentary democracy. Freedom is the lifeline of democracy and any stifling will sound the death knell of the rights guaranteed under the Constitution.

The writer is Vice President of India

With the breakdown of the alliance, the Union will again polarise the state through proceedings in court. On Article 370, the BJP in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, will reiterate its position for its abrogation, as was done in 2015 by a BJP member of Parliament seeking a debate on the issue. One wonders at whose instance petitions are filed in courts to raise such contentious issues and that too always before an election.

Why we treasure democracy

The nasty experience of Emergency and the unsavoury condition of societies plagued with attempts at domination teach us to value democracy

THE PUBLIC EYE

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Politics anywhere, any time is messy, and democratic politics is messier, if only because its dirt is in full public view. It has the appearance of perpetual chaos, continual disorder. Why do all of us put up with it then? Why do so many prefer it to other political orders?

For peace, freedom, well-being

The attractiveness of democracy lies in its ability to give us a peaceful transfer of power. To be sure, it is not for those in search of equanimity and inner calm, or for those easily unnerved by disagreements and conflicts. It is for the street-smart, with a flair for some adventure in public life. It draws on our agonistic energies, bringing conflict upfront. But it frees us from the bloody battles and gory coup d'états through which wealthy and powerful super elites conventionally settled their conflicts. It is a non-violent substitute for the marauding warrior ethic.

Second, it eliminates the most basic fears and anxieties to which social and political life is prone – the fear of being killed, beaten or humiliated for doing or saying what we want or for challenging the powerful. It promotes the maximum possible openness in our lives – in how and what we think, speak, behave. None of us can survive without some limits on speech and action, but democracy allows us to test and stretch them tantalisingly close to breakdown before deftly pulling back. An extricable link exists between democracy and public freedom.

Third, no other system – a monarchy, dictatorship or an empire – takes seriously a people's own view of its needs, wants and goals, giving the best possible shot at satisfying them.

The difficulties of democracy

Alas, democracy does not come easy. And Indian democracy has been built in the most difficult circumstances. Many expected it to fail even after the introduction of universal adult franchise and constitutionally mandated institutions. A culture of equality is believed to be crucial to democracy but India inherited a social structure replete with hardened gender and caste inequalities. A democracy's success depends on fairly high levels of growth, but India's rate of growth in 1947 was virtually zero, with 65-70% of its population trapped in extreme poverty. Successful democracies need a fair degree of cultural, linguistic and religious homogeneity but India has deep cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Most Western democracies have high levels of literacy and education but a substantial section of the Indian population was illiterate, with virtually no formal education.

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Yet Indian democracy has survived; indeed, democratic mechanisms have been deployed to attack gender and caste inequalities, bring millions out of poverty, and to nurture its famed diversity. Besides, lack of education has not lessened popular enthusiasm in its favour. And this brings us to the most admirable feature of Indian democracy: born amidst forms of social sickness exacerbated by colonialism and new diseases fomented by it, it has had to fight these and incessantly reproduce its own conditions of survival. In the absence of social conditions crucial to its durability, it has had to continually give birth to its own nurturing conditions and heal itself after falling sick. Indian democracy is largely self-sustaining. Respect is due to it in the same way it is owed to largely self-made persons.

Helping democracy grow

Largely, not entirely, like other claims of self-creation, this one too is a trifle exaggerated. Two external conditions help democracy to grow. First, a stateless society can't be democratic because the conditions of democracy are not automatically reproduced but need an effective state. But just any state won't do. Though Indian democracy was preceded by a relatively modern state, the very same state hindered it too. The colonial state apparatus inherited by us was insensitive to the needs of the people, working almost entirely for the British Empire. A number of colonial laws were repressive and excessively regulatory. Their primary objective was the creation of a 'nuisance-free' public order, controlling a defiant population and exploiting them for the benefit of the empire. The colonial state was built to resist democracy, not facilitate it. This repressive apparatus, a permanent threat to our democracy, always comes in handy for authoritarian officials/leaders, as it did during the Emergency. So, democracy needs a competent state, but one that is tamed to work for it.

Second, to be democratic, the state must be relatively independent of classes and ethnic groups in society. No class or ethnic group (religious or linguistic community) must completely control state power, or use it to push its own agenda in its entirety. Therefore, each class and ethnic group must learn to live with this fact – that all its objectives cannot be met. This realisation occurs either when each class or ethnic group has enough power to prevent inter-group domination or when, for the sake of a more inclusive moral vision, every group forsakes part of its interests and achieves a principled compromise. By curbing the inclination to impose our agenda on others, and instead arriving at negotiated settlements, we produce stable democracies. This precisely is achieved in the Indian Constitution.

Any attempt to subordinate the state to the whims of a powerful individual or to use it disproportionately in favour of one group disturbs this delicate consensus, destabilises Indian democracy and wrecks the collective future of its citizens. The nasty experience of our own Emergency and the unsavoury condition of societies plagued with attempts at domination (by the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka or Sunnis in Pakistan) teach us to treasure democracy. Forgetting this lesson is disastrous.

DATA DRIVE

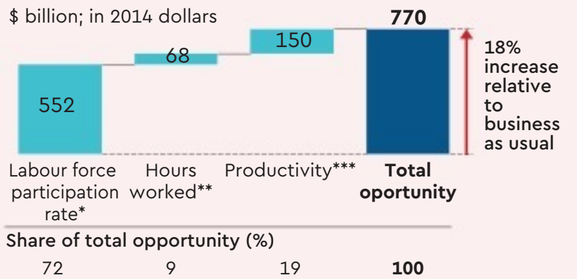
Gender parity can boost economy

INDIA CAN ADD $770 billion to its GDP by 2025—18% higher than business-as-usual GDP—if it addresses gender inequality at work and in society. At present, the contribution of women to India's GDP is 18%—one of the lowest proportions in the world—reflecting the fact that only 25% of the country's labour force is female, says a McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report that studied the economic cost of gender inequality and related issues. The study underlines that more than 70% of the potential GDP opportunity would come from increasing women's participation in the labour force by 10 percentage points. In the Asia-Pacific region, advancing gender equality could add $4.5 trillion to the region's collective GDP by 2025, a 12% increase over the business-as-usual trajectory. China, where women contribute 41% to the overall GDP and comprise 44% of the workforce, would benefit the most ($2.6 trillion addition to its GDP) by addressing gender inequality. In the Asia-Pacific region, women contribute 36% to GDP and make up 37% of the workforce, almost in line with the global figures of 36% and 39%.

The report suggests that the government should make a concerted effort to expand job opportunities for women and expand training and connectivity to markets.

India could add $770 bn to annual GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality

Incremantal 2025 GDP from improving gender equality in the best-in-region scenario, relative tp the business-as-isual scenario



*Implies female labour-force participation rate increasing from 27% in 2014 to 37% in the 2025 best-in-region scenario
**Implies full-time equivalent rate for females increasing 89% in 2014 to 95% in the 2025 best-in-region scenario
***Implies weighted productivity for females increasing from $4,000 in 2014 to $9000 in the 2025 best-in-region scenario

Gender inequality today

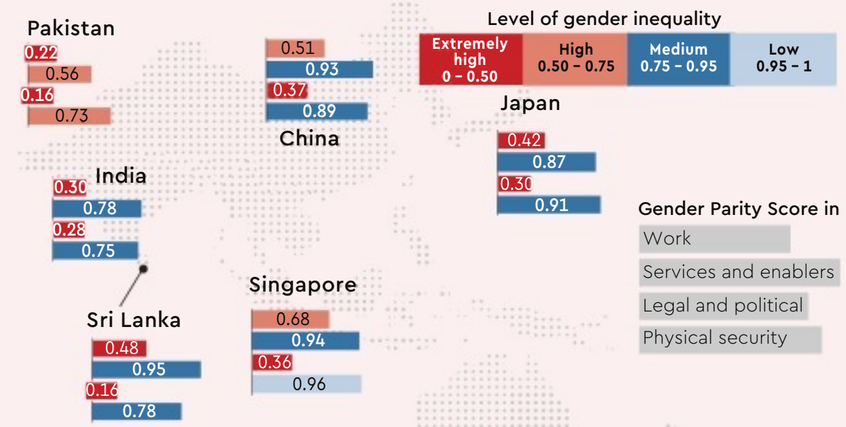
Level of gender inequality	India	Asia Pacific best	Asia Pacific average	Global best
	Extremely high 0 – 0.50	High 0.50 – 0.75	Medium 0.75 – 0.95	Low 0.95 – 1.00
Gender equality in work	0.30	0.73	0.44	0.73
Gender equality in society				
Essential services and enablers of economic opportunity	0.78	0.96	0.85	0.97
Legal protection and political voice	0.28	0.66	0.32	0.84
Physical security and autonomy	0.75	0.96	0.82	0.97

India has achieved significant improvements in access to household infrastructure since 2011

% of households with access

*Clean drinking water as of April 2017; sanitary toilets as of May 2017; clean cooking fuel as of December 2016.

Gender inequality is high in Asia Pacific



(Map not to scale)

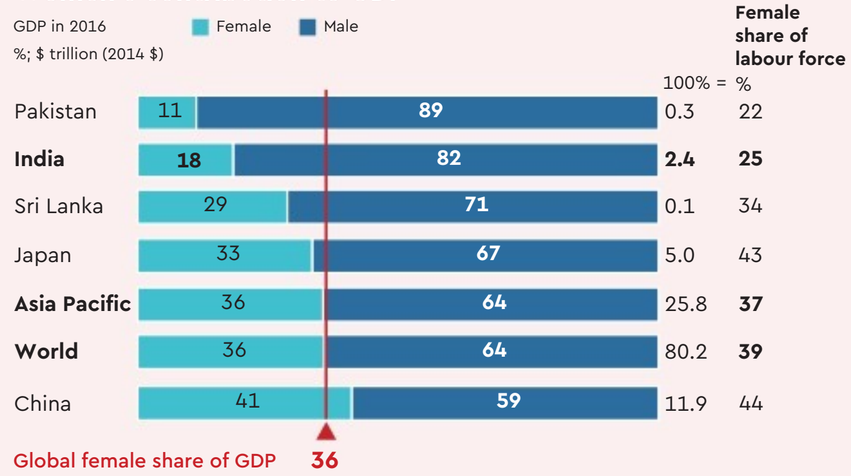
India has extremely high levels of gender inequality on six indicators

Level of gender inequality: Extremely high | High | Medium | Low

	India	Asia Pacific best	Asia Pacific average*	Global best
Gender equality in work	**0.30**	**0.73**	**0.44**	**0.73**
Labour-force participation rate F/M ratio	0.34	0.93	0.60	1.00
Professional and technical jobs F/M ratio	No data	1.42	0.95	2.66
Perceived wage gap for similar work F/M ratio	0.50	0.78	0.56	0.86
Leadership positions F/M ratio	No data	0.96	0.25	1.13
Unpaid care work M/F ratio	0.10	0.58	0.25	0.85
Gender equality in society				
Essential services and enablers of economic opportunity	**0.78**	**0.96**	**0.85**	**0.97**
Unmet need for family planning % of women	13	4	10	4
Maternal mortality Per 100,000 births	174	5	102	3
Education level F/M ratio	0.87	1.00	0.92	1.00
Financial inclusion F/M ratio	0.66	1.00	0.76	1.00
Digital inclusion F/M ratio	0.72	1.00	0.77	1.00
Legal protection and political voice	**0.28**	**0.66**	**0.32**	**0.84**
Legal protection index	0.40	1.00	0.47	1.00
Political representation F/M ratio	0.18	0.55	0.19	0.93
Physical security and autonomy	**0.75**	**0.96**	**0.82**	**0.97**
Sex ratio at birth M/F ratio	1.11	1.03	1.11	1.02
Child marriage % of girls and young women	21	0	14	0
Violence against women % of women	37	14	28	6

*Weighted average based on 2016 female population.

Women's contribution to GDP



Source: The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific — McKinsey Global Institute

The APAC's gender-parity imperative

Asia-Pacific (APAC) economies could boost their collective GDP by $4.5 trillion every year, by accelerating progress towards gender equality

OLIVER TONBY & ANU MADGAVKAR

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GENDER EQUALITY OFFERS a sizeable economic opportunity for any country. A government that hopes to achieve strong growth without tapping into women's full potential is essentially fighting with one hand tied behind its back. In fact, new research from the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) finds that Asia-Pacific economies could boost their collective GDP by $4.5 trillion per year by 2025, just by accelerating progress toward gender equality. That would be the equivalent of adding an economy the combined size of Germany and Austria every year. The opportunity is especially large for India, where GDP would grow by as much as 18%.

Gender equality contributes to growth in three ways. According to MGI, 58% of the gains in the Asia-Pacific region would come from raising the female-to-male ratio of labor-force participation, 17% from increasing women's work hours, and the remaining 25% from having more women working in higher-productivity sectors.

But, equality at work goes hand in hand with gender equality in society. While there have been notable advances in girls' education and health, women across the region remain subject to traditional attitudes that define their primary role as being in the home. As a result, women often lack access to the financing needed to start or expand a business, and to the training needed for the modern labour market. To be sure, tackling gender inequality is a complex, long-term challenge that requires broad social engagement. But, there are five areas in the Asia-Pacific region where governments, companies, and non-governmental organisations could start to make meaningful progress. The first is women's participation in higher-quality jobs. While women currently account for half of the region's population, they contribute just 36% of its GDP. But, GDP does not account for the unpaid work that they do in the home, which could conservatively be valued at an additional $3.7 trillion of economic output.

Globally, the value of women's unpaid work performed is three times higher than that of men, whereas in the Asia-Pacific region, it is four times higher. In some cases, the time that women spend on such tasks may be a personal choice. But, true equality of opportunity eludes too many women who want to earn money outside the home.

This problem can be addressed in a number of ways, starting with more flexible workplace policies, affordable childcare, and expanded skills training, particularly in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Moreover, in countries such as India and Indonesia, investment in infrastructure and transportation can reap dividends by connecting more women to productive work opportunities. A second priority is to address women's under-representation in business leadership circles. Globally, there are fewer than 40 women for every 100 men in leadership positions (including in politics), and in the Asia-Pacific region, that figure falls to around 25. Though the share of women sitting on company boards across the region did double between 2011 and 2016, from 6% to 13%, it remains far too small.

Breaking the Asia-Pacific region's glass ceiling will require dismantling several barriers, including cultural expectations that women should prioritise childcare over their careers, a lack of suitable or affordable childcare, unconscious bias in the workplace, and a scarcity of role models and sponsors. But, most critically, too few companies in the region offer flexible working options. A third priority is to improve women's access to digital technology, which can open countless economic (and social) doors—including into finance. In fact, women have already begun to thrive in some of the region's burgeoning digital industries. In Indonesia's largest online marketplace, women-owned businesses account for 35% of total revenues. And, in China, women found 55% of new internet businesses.

Building on these successes will require more training for women in the use of digital technologies. In Asia's booming internet market, digital technologies could be a double-edged sword: if the gender gap is not closed, women will be left on the sidelines of the technology-driven revolution sweeping the region. A fourth priority is to change social attitudes about gender roles. The traditional view that women belong in the home is arguably the largest barrier to women's advancement in both society and the workplace.

The World Values Survey's findings on this issue between 2010 and 2014 are revealing. Across the Asia-Pacific region, 44% of respondents said that men make better leaders than women. And, 70% of Indian respondents—compared to just 21% of Australian respondents—agreed with the statement: "when a mother works for pay, the children suffer." Leaders in government, business, the media, and individual communities need to work together to change such views.

The final priority is to pursue more regional collaboration to achieve gender equality. Public and private initiatives tend to work best when they are tailored to specific communities and countries. But, regional partnerships that are established around shared goals could give national and local efforts more momentum. For example, Asia-Pacific countries could come together to provide more financing for gender-equality initiatives, and to encourage more gender-based investment and budgeting. And, more broadly, governments could do more to share knowledge about which approaches work best.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the world's fastest-growing and most innovative economies. It is forging an exciting new future, and assuming an ever-greater global role. Yet, women are not playing an equal part in this drama, as many leaders have come to realise. Now is the time to accelerate progress toward gender parity, and to women's power to deliver growth and improve social well-being.

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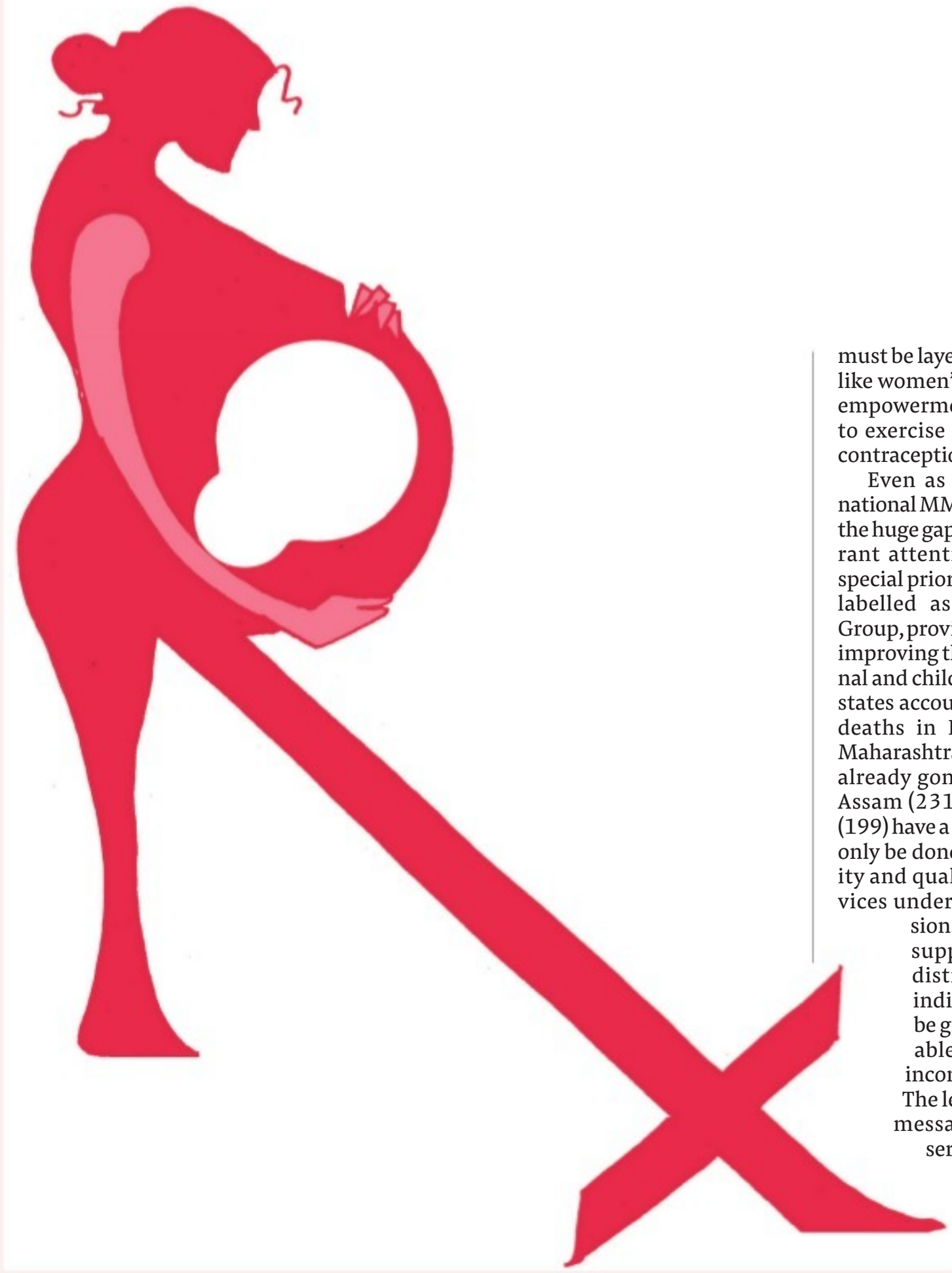

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FALLING MATERNAL MORTALITY

Mothered by primary care & public financing

Two messages come through from the Indian experience: First, strong primary health care is essential to achieve the maximum impact. Second, public financing is vital for infrastructure development, health workforce skilling, and stimulating demand for services

THE UNION HEALTH ministry recently reported a significant fall in maternal mortality ratio (MMR), from 167 in 2011-13 to 130 in 2014-16. MMR is the number of deaths in pregnant women per 100,000 live births. India has now achieved the target set under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015 and seems poised to reach the target of 70 by 2030, set under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When we look at the past MMRs of 677 (1980) and 556 (1990), the progress achieved has been commendable.

There is no doubt that, despite the recent acceleration in decline, we still have a long way to go, in terms of catching up with a South Asian neighbour like Sri Lanka (MMR of 30). China has a low MMR of 19.6, though the sudden rise in births after the recent change from a single child norm to a two child norm is challenging the health system. The lowest global MMR of 3, reported by Sweden, Finland and Iceland is still very far off for low- and middle-income countries.

One of the sharpest recorded rates of decline in MMR has been in Rwanda which started with a huge handicap of poverty and a dysfunctional health system after the terrible genocide of 1994. Yet, by 2013, MMR dropped to 320 from 1,300 in 1990. Rwanda was one of the nine countries that achieved the 75% reduction target set by the MDGs. This was accomplished by the government prioritising reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health. Rwanda invested its limited resources and donor assistance in rebuilding basic systems and services through health workforce and infrastructure development, strong community involvement, a comprehensive community- based health insurance scheme and systems-strengthening through innovative data collection tools. Much of this success was achieved through community health workers and nurse-managed primary health centres.

In India, too, the launch of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in 2005 provided the impetus to investment in, and more effective delivery of, maternal and child health services. The emergence of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) as community health activists sharply increased the number of institutional deliveries to 79%. In public facilities alone, the increase has been dramatic—from 18% in 2005 to 52% in 2016. Strengthening of primary care infrastructure and monetary support, through schemes such as Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK), helped overcome access barriers and spur demand for health services. The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan has improved access to specialist care and tracking of high-risk pregnancies.

Two messages come through clearly from both the Indian and global experience. First, strong primary health care is essential for providing maternal health services that achieve the maximum impact on MMR as well neonatal, infant and child mortality rates. Second, public financing is vital for infrastructure development, health work force skilling and need-based deployment, assurance of essential drugs and supplies and stimulating demand for services. Public financing must prioritise primary health services, ranging from community- and facility-based antenatal services to institutional capacity for normal deliveries and emergency obstetric care. These health system investments must be layered on social determinants like women's nutrition, education and empowerment (including their ability to exercise free choices on marriage, contraception and pregnancy).

Even as the fall in the aggregate national MMR is a cause for satisfaction, the huge gaps in MMR within India warrant attention. The NRHM accorded special priority to 18 states, collectively labelled as the Empowered Action Group, providing enhanced support for improving their performance in maternal and child health. It is striking that 8 states account for 70% of all maternal deaths in India. While Kerala (46), Maharashtra (61) and Tamil Nadu have already gone beyond the SDG target, Assam (231), UP (201) and Rajasthan (199) have a huge gap to bridge. This can only be done by boosting the availability and quality of primary health services under the National Health Mission. Even within states, greater support has to be provided to districts with dismal health indicators and attention must be given to the needs of vulnerable rural, tribal and low-income urban communities.

The lessons from NRHM and the messages from MMR must also serve to shape our response to the expanded agenda of the health system which now has to effectively address the major new public health challenges of non-communicable diseases and mental health disorders. The most effective and equitable way of controlling the health and financial burdens of these chronic diseases is to strengthen primary health services that encompass health promotion, preventive risk reduction measures, early detection and cost-effective care to prevent complications, along with structured protocols for referral to advanced care facilities and follow up care on return.

There is good evidence from many countries, including field research in India, that hypertension and diabetes can be well managed by technology-enabled nurses and community health workers. Landmark trials in India have shown the effectiveness of community-based management of mental health disorders. Doctors in primary care too must play their part in improving preventive, diagnostic, curative, palliative and rehabilitative services. Most importantly, continuity of care for chronic diseases is best provided by primary health services which are located close to home.

This calls for increased public financing of primary health care. India's commitment to universal health coverage, ensconced as a key SDG target, can only be achieved if public funding of health is used to both provide quality assured primary care for the largest number of people and reduce out of pocket spending which is highest in outpatient care. Further, in this 40th anniversary of the Alma Ata declaration on comprehensive primary health care, it would be wise to apply the lessons of our experience with MMR for expanding the agenda of the National Health Mission as promised in the National Health Policy of 2017. Amidst all the media attention on the National Health Protection Scheme that provides financial protection for hospitalisation, we should not lose sight of comprehensive primary health care which is the other component of Ayushman Bharat, Indeed, it is that component that will deliver us Swasth Bharat.

Walk the talk on maritime security

To become a major player in the world in the next 20 years, India must create greater capabilities at sea

PREMVIR DAS

With only a 14 per cent share of the latest defence budget, the cash-strapped Indian Navy is not equipped to sail around the Indian Ocean Region, much less the Indo-Pacific. Defence planners must realise that military power now depends to a much greater extent on prowess at sea

Maritime security is the flavour of the season at the highest level. Starting off with his visit to the US when Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed cooperation at sea with President Donald Trump, there have been a spate of interactions and articulations which would tend to suggest that India is poised to become a major maritime nation with preponderant interests in the Indo-Pacific. Security at sea figured high in the PM's discussions with French President Emmanuel Macron and again with the heads of Asean governments in Delhi. So too with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau — maritime affairs were very much on the table.

Most recently, in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, principally in his keynote address at the strategically important Shangrila Dialogue, Mr Modi dwelt on maritime security concerns in the oceans around us. Furthermore, he received US Secretary of Defence James Mattis on board an Indian warship specially positioned at Singapore for his visit. To an ordinary person attentive to this scene, it would appear that India is fast moving from an overwhelmingly continental land power nation to one increasingly cognisant of its interests at sea. The ground reality, however, is somewhat different.

With a ₹2.74 trillion defence budget, the lowest ever as a percentage of GDP, and of which the Navy merits only a 14 per cent share, we are not going to be steaming around in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), much less in the Indo-Pacific. Yes, a ship or two can make the usual trips on friendly visits now and again, and occasionally also carry out some exercises with host navies — even a larger one like the Malabar — but that does not make a great maritime power.

For that to happen, much more investment with change in strategic orientation is needed, and if there is any move in that direction it is immediately neutralised by the articulated strategy of preparedness for a "two-front war" which is being propounded as our key result area. Any such underpinning of capability can never take the Navy's share beyond what it is now, and that puts paid to dreams of translating the PM's talk into anything remotely credible.

Fifteen years ago the Navy's share of the defence budget had touched 18 per cent and it was hoped that 20 per cent was not far away. For that to happen, the fear of being attacked on land, and our territory appropriated by two hostile adversaries, had to be revisited. But this has not come to pass. With the Army's share being what it is, India's armed forces will continue to be what they have been these last six decades and thoughts of maritime prowess mere glib talk. The bottom line is that given existing thought processes, India's ability to field ocean-going platforms cannot be expected to exceed what it is now, leaving aside marginal accretions of relatively minor assets. Therefore, maritime power remains distant.

US attempts to focus on an Indo-Pacific strategy (its erstwhile Command headquartered in Hawaii has now become the Indo-Pacific Command) are understandable; it is a clear response, albeit delayed, to China's moves in the western Pacific, culminating in the setting up by Beijing of full-fledged aircraft operating facilities in the Spratlys, a territory clearly not its own. While increasing its own presence in the region, the US is keen to involve as many littoral nations as possible on its side, of which India is the prize, Japan and Australia already being in the fold.

India's strategy may well envisage a proactive role in that endeavour, but to be a major player it needs to show credible prowess at sea and in the IOR in particular. This it presently does not have and as argued earlier, will not have unless there is a serious reorientation in our thinking and a move away from the fascination with land borders. The fear that our territory is about to be appropriated by hostile neighbours may have had some basis some decades ago, but the situation has changed dramatically in the last several years and we ourselves acknowledge this change in our articulations, but without being able to do much about it. In short, there is a wide gap between what we say and what we are able to do.

India needs to drop its fascination with land borders. It must reorient its thinking and convert itself from a continental power to one cognisant of its interests at sea

For our aspirations to result in anything tangible, India must convert itself from a mere continental power to a substantive maritime nation. If we are to become one of the four or five major players in the world in the next 20 years, we must focus greater attention on creating capabilities at sea. Western powers have historically been maritime nations and even the Chinese have now recognised the reality that a country cannot become a major power unless it is has made credible prowess at sea. This has led China to act aggressively in the East and South China Seas, and concurrently establish its presence in the IOR. Its warship building projects are moving at a fast pace, and building an aircraft carrier in just five years is one example of the way in which it is going about reaching that objective. So, there is not much time to be lost; rhetoric alone will not help.

India's security environment is undergoing rapid change. We now have to see the world as one in which we must become one of three or four major powers and this requires reach and capability, political, economic and military, the last coming to a much greater extent now from prowess at sea.

The entire size and shape of our armed forces needs a critical second look, not because this can lead to any significant change in the next few years, but because without it we cannot be where we must be two decades from now. To its credit, the present government and the PM in particular have set the ball rolling by articulating this realisation, but that alone is not enough. The time has come to start walking the talk.

The writer is a former member of the National Security Advisory Board

UAE's VAT law a good model for India's GST

HARPREET SINGH

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) will soon have been in force for a year in India, but it is still seeing the introduction of new compliance requirements, deferment of provisions, statutory deadlines and frequent changes in rates. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) introduced Value Added Tax (VAT) with effect from January 1, 2018 and it is more straightforward and business-friendly, and has simpler provisions and fewer compliance requirements than India's GST.

It could be argued that considering the vast differences in size, economic maturity and diversity of the two countries, it is unfair to compare their tax regimes. Nonetheless, as this article argues, UAE's VAT law has a few progressive provisions that India may consider adopting to benefit businesses.

Concept of tax group

UAE's VAT law provides for a facility whereby group companies under a single management can opt to operate as a tax group. A single registration can be obtained by the tax group instead of separate VAT registrations for each group member. This facility enables group companies to transact with each other without worrying about the tax implications of inter-group transactions, and hence helps the group management to minimise compliances and optimise cash flows.

UAE's Value Added Tax, introduced on January 1, has simpler provisions and fewer compliance requirements than India's GST. India could adopt its progressive provisions to benefit businesses

Keeping in mind the history of centralised registration for service providers, which was prevalent under the erstwhile service tax regime, the concept of grouping could be a welcome move for big business groups in India as well.

Simplified reverse charge mechanism

Like India's GST, UAE VAT law also provides for a reverse charge mechanism (RCM), though in a simplified avatar.

RCM in UAE is applicable where purchases are made from outside UAE and do not cover any domestic purchases (except for specific products). Further, unlike Indian GST, RCM under UAE's VAT law is based on the principle of "non-cash" and thus, it does not require the importer to deposit taxes in cash with the government upon importation of goods. Importers are required to show the tax on importation as input VAT against corresponding output VAT in the VAT return. It is merely an accounting entry and no tax outflow occurs at the time of importation. The tax is actually paid on such imported goods once it is sold in UAE.

The simplified RCM makes more sense, as it does away with the burden of first paying the tax and then claiming the credit for tax paid.

Single tax slab

UAE VAT has introduced a single tax rate slab of five per cent (excluding zero rated supplies and exempted supplies), compared to four tax slabs (five, 12, 18 and 28 per cent) in India. Such a single tax rate leads to simpler compliance requirements for tax payers and saves them from classification disputes that India continues to struggle with.

In India, a single GST rate structure may not be desirable at this nascent stage, as the government needs to maintain tax neutrality and also sustain tax revenue earned under the pre-GST era.

However, moving towards a single tax rate in a gradual manner would be the right thing to do. The government's recent move to bring a majority of the items under the five per cent and 12 per cent tax brackets indicates that if not a single rate, Indian GST can also expect to have a reduced number of tax slabs in future.

Simpler compliance requirements

UAE provides a simpler, more business-friendly tax environment from the compliance perspective. India's GST law requires the issue of several documents, whereas a taxpayer in UAE is required to issue only three types of documents — tax invoice, summary invoice and credit note, as per the applicable business scenario.

In addition, unlike Indian GST, UAE's VAT law has fixed a threshold limit (187,500 Emirati dirhams) even for obtaining voluntary registration (except for non-resident assessees). This restriction on voluntary registration reduces the tax authorities' work burden and, as a result, the taxpayer may expect to get a better level of service.

Similarly, UAE's VAT prescribes a simple one-page return with no requirement for matching of invoices or credits, which is less time-consuming requirement compared to India, where dealers are currently filing two returns (GSTR 3B and GSTR 1).

Business-friendly provisions

Transition from a tax-free regime to VAT is bound to bring anxiety to businessmen in UAE, but several provisions under UAE VAT are business-friendly from an operational standpoint. For example, the law allows tax adjustment of bad debts from output VAT payable in relation to consideration not recovered for the goods or services, subject to fulfilment of certain conditions.

Further, Indian GST allows refund of accumulated credit only in specific cases such as exports and inverted duty structure, whereas UAE's VAT allows refund of accumulated credit in all cases if the tax payer is unable to utilise the credit. This would result in better working capital management for businesses.

To sum up, many provisions in UAE's VAT law can be borrowed and used in India with slight modifications.

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