

LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT CAN MAKE ANY WORKER PROGRESSIVELY LESS EMPLOYABLE, EVEN AFTER THE ECONOMY STRENGTHENS. — JANET YELLEN

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The learning journey

Pandemic has slowed down NEP, needs of children cannot be addressed only online



AMEETA MULLA WATTAL

COUNT THE DISTRESS

Unemployment numbers strike cautionary note — growth alone is not enough for recovery

THE RESULTS OF the latest annual report of the Periodic Labour Force Survey are surprising and instructive. The PLFS, conducted by the National Statistical Office, collects data on several metrics to present a comprehensive picture of employment in India, but, given its methodology, the data comes out with a considerable lag. This report pertains to the 12 months between July 2019 and June 2020. As such, it provides a glimpse into the state of unemployment both before the Covid pandemic and immediately after it.

The first thing to note is that the unemployment rate in India and its trend differ considerably depending on whether one chooses to use the "usual status" (unemployment over the past year) method or the "current weekly status (CWS)" (unemployment over the past week) method. According to the former, the unemployment rate declined — even as India's economic growth rate was fast decelerating in this period — while the latter method suggests that unemployment levels remained close to an almost five-decade high. A similar divergence was seen in the other key metric — the labour force participation rate (essentially the percentage of people in the economy seeking work). India has one of the lowest LFPs among comparable economies — almost 20 percentage points lower than the global average. If one looks at the CWS method, which is closer to the global norm, the official data suggests that the unemployment rate was close to 9 per cent while the unemployment rate among the youth (15 to 29 years of age) was 20 per cent, and this was the situation before the Covid disruption. In essence, it shows the extent of distress in the economy immediately before Covid. That, in turn, should put the news of economic recovery in perspective. Even if the economy were to regain the pre-Covid levels in terms of GDP, the extent of economic distress (in terms of unemployment) may not ease to a similar extent.

There is another reason why the unemployment rate may not fall commensurate with the rise in GDP. As can be seen in other large economies such as the US and China — both of which have recovered better (in terms of absolute GDP and GDP growth rate) from the Covid shock than most others — bringing down the unemployment rate may not be easy. That's because the pandemic has fundamentally altered aspects of every economy's functioning, often in ways that are not yet understood. The US, for example, has witnessed a growing mismatch between the skills that companies want and what workers offer. That is what explains the anomaly wherein both wage rate and unemployment rate are up in the US. Similarly, youth unemployment in China has stayed up, threatening consumer demand. Policymakers in India, too, need to be watchful. Growth alone is not enough if it comes without wellbeing (employment). If not addressed, high levels of unemployment will create both economic and social hurdles for growth.

GRIM PROSPECTS

In Birla's letter to cabinet secretary, reminder of a once competitive telecom sector under siege

IN A LETTER to Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba, Kumar Mangalam Birla, chairman of telecommunications company Vi, has reportedly conveyed his willingness to "hand over" his stake in the company to any government or domestic financial entity in order to keep the beleaguered telco functioning. The offer, which essentially signals that the telco's survival now is solely dependent on government action, underlines the dramatic possibility of a once hyper competitive sector transforming into a virtual duopoly dominated by one extremely strong player. With high barriers to entry in the form of spectrum costs, and licence fees, and continuing policy uncertainty unlikely to facilitate or encourage entry of new players, the implications of this shrinking competition on consumers, though they may not be immediately evident, are worrying.

Several disparate events have led the sector to this impasse. The tariff wars, which began in 2016 with the entry of the new player, wreaked havoc on the finances of telecom operators. Their precarious financial position has only been compounded by adverse court orders. In the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dispute, the Supreme Court upheld the government's interpretation, allowing it to include revenue from non-telecom activities like interest income in its calculation of fees, thereby increasing the liability of telcos. On July 23, the Court dismissed the petitions of telcos seeking to recalculate the AGR dues. Vi's total obligations on account are around Rs 60,000 crore.

The company has been trying to rope in investors, but in the current policy environment, it is difficult to see any investor stepping in. As Birla noted in his letter, potential foreign investors "want to see clear government intent to have a three-player telecom market (consistent with its public stance) through positive actions on long-standing requests such as clarity on AGR (adjusted gross revenues) liability, adequate moratorium on spectrum payments, and most importantly, a floor pricing regime above the cost of service." This suggests that in the absence of a concerted effort on part of the government, a duopoly is all but certain. This is unfortunate. The government should have intervened early on to prevent things from coming to this pass. Not addressing the issue of predatory pricing and then not reconsidering the approach on the AGR issue have caused great damage to the sector. The effects of Vi going under will be felt not only by consumers, but also by the broader economy.

AND THE WINNER IS

The medal for claiming credit for Olympian achievements they have little to do with goes to the Indian politician

BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL sportsperson is not just sweat, tears and impossible hard work — but a politician (or twenty) racing at full speed to take credit for her victory. Olympics is the best season to spot this curious phenomenon. Exhibit A: Union minister of sports and youth affairs Anurag Thakur, who while gushing about PV Sindhu's Olympic bronze in badminton did not forget to draw a connection between her feat and the efficacy of his government's Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme. There was the small matter of Saikhom Mirabai Chanu's very small image on a banner put up at a ceremony to celebrate her Olympic silver medal in weightlifting. Not to forget the large billboards that came up in Guwahati as news of an assured Olympic medal for boxer Lovlina Borgohain trickled in. Only those uninitiated to the ways of Indian politics might have gasped at a minor detail: It wasn't Borgohain, but Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's face, that was plastered all over the hoardings.

To be fair, this is not the first set of politicians to hitch a publicity ride on sports. Reflected glory has come in handy for more sinister reasons than vanity. Authoritarian regimes like Bahrain have been accused of using glamorous sports like Formula One to "whitewash" human rights abuses at home.

In Indian politics, bhakti of the leader remains the road to salvation and survival for his minions. It is a devotion that is happy to credit "the visionary guidance and able leadership" of Great Leaders for a wide variety of matters unrelated to the core KRA of governance — from the accomplishments of vaccine scientists to the rotations and revolutions of the third rock from the sun. How can an Olympic performance go unclaimed? Sure, winners take it all. And the medal for claiming credit for Olympian achievements they have little to do with goes to the Indian politician.

THE LAUNCH OF the National Education Policy 2020 marked remarkable progress in the area of education and learning. We are now one year into the policy. How much of it has been realised? Have schools focused on the challenges reflected in the policy? Has the vision document entered the community at any level? Aspects of assessments, vocational education, subject selection, child appropriate age- and stage-based programmes at the foundational, preparatory and middle school, among other initiatives, were supposed to be embedded in the educational space.

Various state governments are still reflecting on the possibility of implementing some policies at ground level. National boards have tried during the Covid year to bring in some changes in classroom transaction connected with well-being, inclusive education, joyful learning, a compilation of best teaching practices, assessment models etc. As a result of schools having closed down, the big shifts did not take place in areas of thematic learning or multiple pedagogical approaches.

For the NEP to move forward, we need robust institutional mechanisms to support the policy. A great deal of capacity building is required along with creating enthusiasm among stakeholders. Every stakeholder at the state, district, sub-district, block level has to have ownership and understanding of the concepts. Directorates of education have to be strengthened in order to ensure that the policy permeates to the district and zonal level educational clusters. Unless every teacher at the foundational, primary and middle school level develops a sense of ownership, the transformation will not take place. We have to move schools and staff from fixed to growth mindsets in order for them to make sense of the new changes.

Currently, we are grappling with huge learning gaps. Schools cannot be compared to institutions of higher education; the needs of children are more personalised and cannot be addressed only online. With the extension of school closures and fear of infections, children are losing touch with understanding, comprehension, reading and speaking skills.

According to the prime minister, the NEP will help our children to realise their hopes, aspirations and dreams to get them future

The NEP is extremely experiential and palpable; it cannot be brought in through online devices. In the last year and a half, we have been pushed into designing schools for crisis as opposed to designing schools for what we want them to be. Students, teachers and other stakeholders have gone through a great deal of uncertainty and relearning in classrooms. The new technologies that they are grappling with have required training, reworking and experimenting with apps that they never knew existed. This has led to a fragile learning system with implications for the implementation of the NEP and, in fact, education in general.

ready. We require effective strategies to physically equip teachers and students with better tools in the classroom, increase access to laptops and other gadgets, install interactive white boards and provide fast and reliable internet access.

Technology connects people, but it has limitations as far as teaching and learning are concerned. This crisis has made us reflect on the inequality not only in bandwidth, and devices, but also in the fact that the parents do not have the time or ability to support their children in this venture. Schools of brick and mortar cannot be completely dispensed with as places of learning. They are a reflection of community, time, care and values, which technology has not been able to touch.

It is imperative that we lay emphasis on vaccination of the young and old, without which the schools would find it difficult to reopen. Only a fraction of students across the country have moved to online learning exposing the deep inequity in the system, and opening up a digital abyss. Today in India, over 90 per cent of students do not have devices that allow them to access online learning holistically.

The NEP is extremely experiential and palpable; it cannot be brought in through online devices. Schools have to determine their capacity for restructuring, mobilising teachers, strategising the operational needs required to navigate their understanding and implementation of the NEP. In the last year and a half, we have been pushed into designing schools for crisis as opposed to designing schools for what we want them to be.

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The issues that are impacting schools today are rapid, technological changes, societal expectations and changing demographics. In order to implement the NEP, research, evaluation and documentation is essential along with coordination and convergence of the policy

and programmes connected with it. We have still not been able to sensitise the parent community as far as the NEP is concerned because of the challenges that have been thrown up due to a break in basic education.

The state and national boards across the nation will have to start with pilot programmes. Creation of master trainers should be done who will train principals and teachers in urban and rural areas, replicating the model across all schools. This success can resonate through twinning programmes and school clusters with government and state schools.

The important outcome of the pandemic is that due to technological advancement and embedding of social media platforms, a countrywide level of awareness has taken place vis a vis the NEP. Various state and national boards have made efforts for consensus building in order to dispel the cynicism that exists.

The NEP is essentially about learning through observation, listening, exploring, experimenting and asking questions. All of these are hands-on experiences, which require interest, motivation, engagement and a need for children to understand why they are learning. None of the above are really part of online learning. The CBSE has worked very hard to build training modules in order to steer the programmes of the NEP through its active sahodaya school complexes with a task force to oversee implementation.

The hubs of learning have been activated. Innovation ambassador programmes are being created which will help in strengthening the mentoring capacity where teachers are being trained on design thinking, innovations, idea generation, intellectual property rights, product prototype development etc. This will help create robust, smart future schools. However, 22,000 schools of CBSE are not even a drop in the ocean of learning, in spite of their efforts to strengthen systems.

The road of learning that stretches before us is both exciting and filled with challenges. The journey has begun.

The writer is Chairperson and Executive Director Education, DLF Foundation Schools and Scholarship Programmes



AURODEEP NANDI

SHOTS AT REVIVAL

Pace of vaccination and normalising of monetary policy hold the key

WITHIN A span of a few months, India has transitioned from facing a shortage of hospital beds to showing off crowded holiday resorts. Fresh out of a deadly second wave, viral videos of clogged roads to hill stations and packed markets are symptomatic of the rapid recovery in economic activity as the worst of the lockdown restrictions have ended.

Growth indicators so far suggest a "Teflon economy" in the short term — a shallow dent in May's economic activity followed by a recovery in June, back to April's levels. The external, investment and industrial sectors have been relatively resilient, with consumption and services bearing the brunt. Notwithstanding signs of some fatigue in ultra-high frequency indicators in July, damage from the second wave seems largely limited to April-June 2021.

Nevertheless, a K-shaped recovery means light cracks on the top conceal much larger structural faultlines below. The Pew Research Centre estimates that the pandemic has led to India's poor rising by 75 million, while the middle and upper-middle class has shrunk by 39 million. A recent survey by the ILO finds that the worst-hit — MSMEs and their informal workforce — have struggled to access the government's pandemic support programmes. These more structural scars may become blurred in the GDP data in coming quarters as the economy rapidly normalises alongside strong global growth, fiscal activism, and easy financial conditions, but will almost certainly affect the medium-term growth story.

However, in the near term, there are two impending macro pivots to navigate. First, is

Much as the current monetary policy stance maintains that the economy is ill-equipped to handle policy normalisation, it is a matter of when rather than if. As growth strengthens and the RBI's inflation targeting credibility comes under greater scrutiny, a policy pivot would become increasingly likely. In our baseline projection, we expect a 40 basis point reverse repo rate hike in Q4, and then cumulative 75 basis points hikes in 2022.

the vaccine pivot. The "ultimate unlocking" of the economy remains contingent on a critical mass getting vaccinated, which on materialising should trigger a revival in consumer and business sentiment. The vaccine pivot is also an effective insurance policy against a possible third wave — a risk to near-term growth. The lacklustre pace of vaccination in July and fresh information on the vaccine pipeline suggest that there are risks of a delay in the pivot taking place in August, and to our baseline projection of around 50 per cent of the population being vaccinated by end-2021. However, the uptick in the pace of vaccination over the last few days and higher seroprevalence reported in some states are welcome news.

The second pivot is that of policy. When inflation is under control, then flush liquidity and ultra-accommodative monetary policy will help kill two birds with one stone — ensuring easy financial conditions, and helping control borrowing costs of the government's expansive borrowing programme. However, this strategy is not costless. It effectively uses the central bank's credibility in controlling inflation as "collateral". So when inflation flares up and remains sticky, this arithmetic becomes increasingly complicated.

The RBI's consistent message recently has been to view the current inflation surge as a "temporary hump". However, CPI inflation is tracking 5-6 per cent on an already high base of 6.6 per cent in 2020, amid elevated inflation expectations, ongoing supply-side shocks and imminent demand-side ones. We believe these factors should have ordinarily led to

monetary policy alarm bells ringing. But as Governor Shaktikanta Das recently commented, "It is not like any other year, when inflation goes up, you start tightening the monetary policy".

But maybe that year is coming to a close, although not at the August policy meeting later this week. Despite our expectation of the RBI revising up its CPI inflation projection higher by 40 basis points, the message is likely to be that this is not a monetary policy game-changer. Instead, we expect a message on the lines of inflation remaining supply-side driven, the economic recovery still requiring policy support, and bond yields still needing to be kept under control.

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The broader, and probably trickier issue for central banks, governments, and indeed the public is how to live with "long Covid". Even with widespread vaccinations, future pandemic waves may well be unavoidable. Fiscal, monetary and administrative policies cannot remain in a suspended emergency.

The writer is India Economist and Vice President at Nomura

AUGUST 4, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

PROGRESS ON ASSAM

THE CENTRE AND the Assam agitation leaders had made substantial progress towards a solution of the foreign nationals' issue as they adjourned their two-day informal talks in Shillong. The venue of the next round is yet to be decided. The date will be finalised at the next meeting of the AASU-AAGSP executive committees. However, the agitation leadership has decided to go ahead with the programme of resuming the agitation beginning with a protest day on August 13, followed by a bandh in the state on August 14. The government is willing to advance the cut-off year from the proposed 1967 to 1966 to facilitate a settlement of the foreign nationals' issue.

UP'S FLOOD WOES

THE ROHINI RIVER, on the rampage in Gorakhpur, has breached four bunds inundating 200 villages. Relief and rescue operations have been launched on a large scale in the affected areas and 500 persons have been rescued so far. The Gorakhpur-Pharenda road has been flooded affecting vehicular traffic. The Ghagra, flowing above the danger level along its course from Balia to Barabanki, has marooned 15 villages and inundated 400 others in Faizabad district.

PAK'S AD RULE

A MINISTERIAL ANNOUNCEMENT that the

government would not permit the mass media to use women for commercial purposes has sent shock waves through Pakistan's advertising world and caused an upsurge in the rank of feminists. Stop use of women as sex objects but why punish them for the sins of TV producers, ask women's rights activists. Women's organisations held a joint meeting in Karachi expressing concern over the move.

IRAN BOMB BLAST

Bombs exploded near the presidential office in Tehran and at a market in the western part of the country, killing at least 20 people. The incident happened hours after Mohammad Ali Rajai was sworn in as Iran's president.



A rupee wish for India@100

We need to set the wholesome and achievable goal of the rupee becoming a global reserve currency by 2047. The journey is the reward



MANISH SABHARWAL AND N S VISHWANATHAN

INDIA WILL CELEBRATE 100 years of Independence in 2047. We have magnificently created the world's largest democracy on the infertile soil of the world's most hierarchical society. But can the next 25 years combine this vibrant democracy with mass prosperity? We make the case that this prosperity is possible and best accomplished by the goal of making the rupee a global reserve currency by India@100.

Picking goals for countries is complex. Overcoming the "five giants of want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness" needs education, health, infrastructure, low inflation, financial inclusion, high GDP per capita, etc. while navigating wicked trade-offs between current and future generations. In *Obliquity*, economist John Kay suggests that the best strategy for complex systems that change with engagement is accomplishing goals indirectly. Becoming a global reserve currency is a wholesome goal because it indirectly aligns fiscal, monetary, and economic policy. And it's a legitimate goal because democracies like ours recognise success to be the outcome of fair voting; reserve currency status involves voting by impartial wallets.

Official foreign exchange reserves of about \$12 trillion across 150 countries are currently stored in eight currencies: 55 per cent in US dollars, 30 per cent in euros, and 15 per cent in six other currencies. This concentration is inevitable given exploding trade, rising capital flows, and the less acknowledged motivation of protecting your reserves from your currency's volatility. A reserve currency has to serve as a medium of exchange, a store of value, and a unit of account. The main property of a reserve currency country is trust and the main upside is the "exorbitant privilege" of lower real interest rates.

Getting countries to store their reserves in the rupee needs luck and skill. Our luck arises from a multipolar world (America now accounts for less than 25 per cent of global GDP), the need for diversification (central bank reserves in dollars have fallen to 55 per cent from 71 per cent in 1999), new US thinking about indebtedness (in the last 13 years, their debt increased by \$20 trillion equivalent to 90 per cent of GDP), central bank credibility (lower-for-longer creates a quantitative easing addiction), demographics (25 per cent of the world's new workers in the next 10 years will be Indian), the UK's secular decline, a global shift of economic gravity to Asia, and the challenges of trusting China. Our economic skills have a strong opening balance: India has never defaulted and the 1991 reforms have been accelerated by big reforms like GST, IBC, inflation targeting, education, labour, and agriculture.

The base camp for this ambition is full capital account convertibility, as suggested by the Tarapore Committee in 1997. The rupee is substantially convertible for foreigners. A 2030 deadline for finishing the agenda could be a nice interim milestone. Dollar investors in the last decade not ex-



CR Sasikumar

periencing the usual big bite out of rupee returns is useful for advocating trading partners to start rupee invoicing, raising corporate rupee borrowing offshore and onshore, accelerating our CBDC (central bank digital bank currency) plans, and taking our UPI payment technology to the world (the dollar gets heft from global networks like Visa, MasterCard and Swift)

The policy agenda is clear. Fiscal policy must raise our tax to GDP ratio, raise the share of direct taxes in total taxes, and keep our public debt to GDP ratio under 100 per cent. Monetary policy must control inflation while moderating central bank balance sheet size. Economic policy must raise the productivity of our regions, sectors, firms, and individuals to reach goals in formalisation (400 million workplace social security payers), urbanisation (250 cities with more than a million people), financialisation (100 per cent credit to GDP ratio), industrialisation (less than 15 per cent farm employment), internationalisation (higher share of global trade) and skilling. These goals must be complemented by reinforcing institutions that signal rule of law; cooperative federalism, press freedom, civil service effectiveness, and judicial independence.

Being a reserve currency, like life, is a beauty contest — to win you don't have to be perfect, just better than your competitors. Our competitor is China. The 2 per cent renminbi share in global reserves — despite a 25 per cent increase last year — doesn't reflect their status as the world's second-largest economy and biggest trading nation. While India has no interest in becoming China, it's useful to understand competitors and reflect on the three reasons why the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) last month got so much more global attention than the 100th anniversary of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1985.

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much more global attention than the 100th anniversary of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1985. First is the CCP's skill and need for propaganda. Second is the INC in 1985 — it wasn't the original party, it was no longer a meritocracy, and its global soft power was damaged by the Emergency. But the most important reason is China's wealth and power — per capita GDP rising 80 times in the last 40 years has lifted 800 million Chinese out of poverty.

But this astounding success seems to be making China overconfident. Recent policy — border disputes with neighbours, asphyxiating Hong Kong, withdrawing the Ant IPO, and savaging the Didi IPO — calls into question the long rope China has received since Henry Kissinger flew secretly to Beijing from Pakistan in 1971. US investors who have bought "shares" in the roughly 250 Chinese companies listed on US exchanges with a \$2 trillion peak market capitalisation don't actually own equity. They own pieces of a Cayman "variable interest entity", which has a contract with the parent company. Under Chinese law, foreigners can't own Chinese shares directly. Like most things in opaque China, it's one of those things that "works great until it doesn't".

Chinese overconfidence creates an opportunity for India. Prosperity for all Indians by India@100 — a precondition for a country where the mind is without fear and the head is held high — needs bold reforms in the next 25 years. These reforms are best measured by the wholesome and achievable goal of the rupee becoming a global reserve currency by 2047. The journey is the reward.

Sabharwal is co-founder, Teamlease Services and Vishwanathan is a former Central Banker

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Lack of food is not, of course, the only indicator of chronic poverty and societal unfairness. Inequalities in housing, education and employment have also all been exacerbated by the pandemic, in interconnected ways." — THE GUARDIAN

A just energy transition

Switch to renewables will require focus on livelihoods. A people-centric approach must be backed by good policy design



JAMSHYD N GODREJ AND FATH BIROL

ENERGY TRANSITIONS ARE gaining momentum worldwide, and India is no exception. The country has achieved the remarkable double leapfrog of connecting nearly all households to electricity while also creating one of the world's largest markets for renewable energy. But ensuring that the opportunities of India's transition are shared fairly throughout society — and workers and communities are not left to face the challenges alone — is not an easy task, given the country's population and diversity. To achieve the trifecta of jobs, growth and sustainability, India must strive to put people at the centre of its energy transformation.

With an ever-growing list of countries announcing net-zero emissions targets, the global energy system is set to undergo a transformation in the coming decades. According to an IEA analysis, 90 per cent of new electricity generation capacity around the world now comes from renewables.

In India, that energy transformation is well underway. It is among the world's top five countries in terms of renewable power capacity. Its ambitious target to increase India's renewable energy capacity to 450 gigawatts (GW) by 2030 would help move it closer to achieving the country's broader climate goals. By then, low-carbon energy sources could account for more than 60 per cent of India's total power capacity, well above what it originally committed to under the Paris Agreement. India is also showing global clean energy leadership through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, which has more than 70 member countries.

Boosting clean energy investments brings immediate gains, including job creation and new economic opportunities. According to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), the deployment of 450 GW of renewables would employ more than half a million workers. But not everyone benefits immediately or equally. Emerging and developing economies are starting from different baselines than advanced economies and they must tailor their pathways to ensure their transitions are inclusive.

In India's case, new jobs would need to be found over time for the coal miners affected by the changes, as well as for people who work in the fossil fuel power plants that will close down. Many will need retraining for work in other sectors. Credible severance packages and insurance cushions would also help make the transition easier to navigate. Policymakers must earmark special "transition funds" to help coal-dependent regions, some of which are among India's poorest, to remodel their economies and develop new industries.

should then be invested in clean energy solutions, especially in underdeveloped regions and marginalised communities.

A just transition should focus on how clean energy can support rural livelihoods and increase communities' resilience in the aftermath of the pandemic shock. It can do this through a focus on how to share the benefits of clean energy technologies with micro-entrepreneurs and small businesses. In rural India, clean energy innovations for farms and businesses offer a market opportunity worth more than \$50 billion. The energy transition in rural India can be driven by dedicated policies to promote renewables, incentivise investment in decentralised low-carbon power sources like rooftop solar, and train and build the capacity of clean energy entrepreneurs.

While India's energy transition will create many new jobs, the limited participation of women in the growing green workforce must be addressed. According to a 2019 study by CEEW and the IEA, women account for nearly 32 per cent of the renewables workforce globally but only around 11 per cent of the rooftop solar workforce in India. As a priority, renewable energy companies must promote policies to ensure gender parity in their workforce. These could include investments in suitable facilities for women at project sites, designing guidelines for flexible working arrangements, and creating programmes to prepare more women for leadership roles.

In the short term, stimulus spending in the labour-intensive construction sector could accelerate progress on the Affordable Housing Mission. Incorporating energy efficiency and green construction methods into these projects could ensure millions of homes enjoy thermal comfort, and help make energy efficiency a core part of building designs. Many local jobs could also be promoted by the Make in India Initiative, particularly if it is focused on manufacturing energy-efficient appliances, battery technologies and components for renewable energy systems.

Finally, engaging the youth is critical to ensure that the energy transition is sustainable, inclusive and enduring. It is the emerging generation of innovators and entrepreneurs that will provide the technical and social solutions of the future. Young entrepreneurs in India have already shown their impact by expanding the footprint of renewables and disrupting traditional energy models.

Some of these key themes are being explored by the 30 members of the Global Commission on People-Centred Clean Energy Transitions, which the IEA launched in January. The Global Commission will make recommendations in advance of the COP-26 Climate Change Conference in November on how to empower citizens and communities to both seize the opportunities and navigate the disruptions of the energy transition.

India's energy transition is already an inspiration for many emerging economies. A people-centric approach, backed by good policy design, will not only help India build a clean and inclusive energy future, but could also provide a model for other countries and communities worldwide.

Godrej is Chairperson of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and a member of IEA's Global Commission on People-Centred Clean Energy Transitions. Birol is Executive Director of the International Energy Agency (IEA)

Trigger-happy injustice

Open political support to Assam police shootings undermines due process



SANTANA KHANIKAR

THE LATEST TREND of Assam Police personnel shooting alleged offenders in various parts of the state and the defence of such incidents by both the police establishment and the chief minister displays a dangerous politics. According to news reports, since mid-May, after the new BJP government led by Himanta Biswa Sarma came into power, at least 24 people were shot at by the police; five of them died. Each was allegedly in police custody when they were shot at, and most of their alleged crimes were robbery, drug peddling, cattle theft, etc. In some cases, the police themselves admitted that they discovered past criminal cases against the dead only afterwards.

The police killings of petty offenders or accused has often been perceived by human rights defenders and scholars as an integral part of the dark practices of an institution still under a colonial hangover in its structure and functioning. Civil rights organisations like PUDR started reporting cases of torture and killing in police custody in the early 1980s. Since then, scholars have studied torture and death in police custody and connected it variously to the inherent dilemmas of a liberal democratic state, where police violence is often practised on the ground but hidden by the state (Jinee Lokaneeta, 2012), the contingent or jaggaari nature of police functioning where the police work under pressure from political and community leaders while dealing with lack of re-

sources and transparency (Beatrice Jauregui, 2017). I have looked at how police violence, whether in the context of managing crime or fighting political resistance, feed on discourses of "othering" on the one hand, and promises of "protection" in the absence of other "efficient" institutions (Khanikar, 2018). All these works note how the de facto practices of policing in the country move away from rights and guarantees of the Constitution, and often violate various sections of the IPC. Lokaneeta, in her recent book, argues that such violence is hidden by a scaffolding of rule of law in post-colonial India. Legal technicalities, procedures, paperwork, etc. hide the violence of real policing, apart from taking recourse to denials and blaming rogue lower-level personnel.

The recent spate of police violence in Assam, however, doesn't seem to be taking recourse to any of these masking techniques. There is no attempt at hiding or passing the buck. Chief Minister Sarma openly said that the state police has been given orders to shoot at the legs of "criminals", though not at their heads or chests. When asked if police shoot-outs have become a pattern in the state, the CM responded by saying that police shoot-outs should be a pattern, using the word "criminals" while referring to the alleged offenders. He justified such shoot-outs in the name of "public good". The police's predictable defence in most of the cases involves either an attempt to flee or

seizure of guns, where none of the police personnel ever gets injured but only the one in custody gets shot.

Though the NHRC has sent letters to the state police, the open support of the BJP government for such custodial violence makes justice hard to attain, if not impossible. The gains, however little, achieved through decades of work of civil liberties groups, and milestone judgments like DK Basu are reversed through the open endorsement of custodial violence by an elected government. It also belies the very promise of a liberal democratic society, of respect towards every individual as of equal worth, assumption of innocence until proven guilty, and of a reformatory, not punitive, criminal justice system.

Extreme police action is not unknown to Assam. In a political context chequered with protest movements and their suppression, police and paramilitary state violence is a part of daily life for many in the state. Narratives of the brutality of the police, Indian army and CRPF operations in search of ULFA activists are part of village lore that children grow up with. The late '90s and early 2000s were the times of the "secret killers". More recently, there have been various incidents of police violence. The torture of three women in Darrang district in 2019, one of them pregnant, was widely reported and critiqued, and a police sub-inspector and woman constable were suspended and investigated on

charges of torture.

But in all these previous instances of police violence, there have either been attempts to hide them or fabricate them as something else, or blame was placed upon lower-level personnel. The recent examples of police violence in the state, however, project a different ideology of policing and governance in the state. DGP Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta in a recent press meet regarding Covid-19-related restrictions talked about how the police would be forced to beat up people if they are found on roads, and followed it with actual beatings as well as more "innovative" harassment techniques like picking up morning walkers and leaving them stranded far away from their home. This openly vigilante nature of routine police practices gels well with the incidents of shoot-outs because, in both kinds of practice, the police are given an official sanction to act in authoritarian ways.

In the context of George Floyd protests in the US, and in the context of India after the custodial killings of Jayaraj and Bennix in Tamil Nadu, while police abolition movements are advocating alternative ways of ensuring public safety, government justification of such lawless police forces looks like a death knell for democracy and civil rights.

The writer is assistant professor, JNU, and author of *State, Violence, and Legitimacy in India (OUP)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMPOWER OPPOSITION

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Setting new house rules' (IE, August 3). The 2001 conference outcomes have been discussed for some time now but the suggestions have struggled to come into practice. The reason is that our democracy, based on the Westminster model, isn't designed to empower the opposition. We depend on the political maturity of our citizens to elect a government and an opposition comes as fait accompli. There is a historical precedent to show that any party in absolute power is bound to get corrupted over time unless there is an opposition to stall it. There is a genuine need now more than ever to empower the opposition by having its share and say constitutionally mandated.

Udit Sarkar, Kolkata

ABANDONED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The green warrant' (IE, August 2). The Supreme Court is always the last resort for the people. Where should the Khori Gaon dwellers go now to relieve their plight? The eviction of nearly a lakh people with no other shelter during this perilous monsoon deluge and an anticipated Covid-19 third wave is deplorable. Who will take the responsibility, if this costs people their lives?

Melvin Thomas, Bhopal

N-DEAL CONUNDRUM

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'China

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tried to use Left to scuttle n-deal: Ex Foreign Secy Vijay Gokhale' (IE, August 3). The revelation by former Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale that China tried to use the Left to scuttle the Manmohan Singh government's nuclear deal with the United States cannot be wished away as it came straight from the horse's mouth. Similarly, the comments of Prakash Karat, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (M), on the deal — that it has increased military and strategic cooperation between the two countries and not the supply nuclear power for India — should not be rubbished. What was feared by the Left has actually happened.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur