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Finance Minister Arun Jaitley is right in saying that populism does not help in the long run. Parties practice it to get numbers to form the government. Ignoring the numbers of finances, however, causes problems



India needs a pro-people, pro-farmer approach for creation of livelihood without hurting the well-being of any segment. Farm loans are largesse that place the hard-earned money of a large segment in peril

SHIVAJI SARKAR

India's economy is in a cyclical phase of loan waivers as the Congress comes back to power in three large States.

Banks with people's deposits, not governments', seem to be easy prey. Nobody is addressing the distress of farmers. Four years back, in 2014, there were loan-waivers and now again it is happening.

There is a problem of perception, too. The new RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das says the government is not just a stakeholder; it runs the economy and manages financial institutions.

Das is correct to the extent that the government manages institutions. That is the task the government has been given by the people. It has to be according to people's wishes and not as anyone in government decides. But, people are rarely even consulted.

The economy is run and managed by the people — entrepreneurs and financial institutions. The government is an institution formed by the people to take care of issues of daily management as a custodian and not owner. The governments that adhered to it, as possibly the one led by Atal Behari Vajpayee did and to some extent the United Front functioned, made people happy.

So governments of all colours have to adhere to the basics and should not be euphoric about numbers. People demand that as custodians of people's money and as managers of institutions, governments protect their wealth and help it grow.

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touch ₹4 lakh crore in the run-up to the general elections in 2019 as other states join the fray.

Let the nation not feel that sudden changes in the RBI have made the stock market buoyant. This had happened in March 1992 as well. It later opened a can of worms — the Harshad Mehta stock scam. The present one may be a real boost but the stock market is not an indicator of the economy. At present, it definitely is not. The reasons for its boost often are behind-the-scenes operation.

The situation is difficult. The rupee, despite occasional gains, remains volatile, the economy unstable, job markets uncertain and investors wary; thus unreal stock movement needs to be seen with a pinch of salt.

For much of this year, the Urjit Patel-led RBI was seen resisting pressure and entreaties from the government, industry and financial firms to ease lending and capital norms for stressed PSBs, particularly those under the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, open a special liquidity window for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) with a precarious asset-liability position and push the flow of credit to small enterprises.

Das has not dwelt on any of these specific issues that caused the strain in the relationship between the Government and the RBI.

Political parties' manifestos of the five States were also silent on these issues. Of course, voters do not understand intricate issues. So populism marked it. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley is right in saying that populism does not help in the

long run.

Parties practice it to get numbers to form the government.

Ignoring the numbers of finances, however, causes problems. The industry, the biggest defaulter in loan

repayment, is also known to have withdrawn the highest quantum of cash, along with many other players, before the elections. Why? Everyone knows.

So except for cosmetic treatment, not much could still be realised and the public sector banks (PSBs) having capital of people's deposits today are in a severe crisis called NPAs. It is true this government did not proffer the bounties. Their predecessor did.

But now once again people have the problem of a cyclical nature of politics. So if this government is finding it difficult, would the next government do it? Or would they again play with people's money to which no government has the right.

The suffering of people is increasing. The RBI is supposed to increase rates to help poor depositors, senior citizens, women and the deprived Jan Dhan account holders, who put their earnings in the coffers of the banks.

The rate rise is required not just to help depositors but to protect the nation's wealth. People's money is not for the large or largest corporate. The farmer and MSMEs — small entrepreneurs — also have a claim to it.

But loan-waiver creates an unwanted culture. As the elections to the States started, those farmers who could repay also are known to have stopped the repayments. The industry is wilfully not doing it. The Government is recapturing banks with taxpayers' money. It is a vortex.

These issues

have to be addressed. Farmers' income through their product sales have to be increased. The farmers are known to lose but the insurance companies are known to earn high profits. This is not welfare. A proper farm policy is a must.

Parties, if they want good governance, have to do away with income tax. Citizens are not supposed to pay unnecessary taxes that deprive them of over four months of their earnings. Bank charges have to be lowered.

A relook before 2019 polls is a must. It is not populism but a national necessity.

The government and Opposition also have to answer why people should pay high road tolls, when they are paying ₹8 per litre as road building and maintenance cess. Toll is loot by organised mafia. It delays highway traffic, causes harassment and large pilferage. The NHAI is on record of not getting paid the toll and IL&FS would not have collapsed with ₹90,000 crore losses had there been honesty in toll collection.

Even GST needs a relook. It is tax on tax in many cases. Inflation as per RBI's latest monetary policy assessment is bound to jump because industrial products have become expensive. Food prices cannot remain low for long. Rate rise is logical.

The nation's economy is in crisis. People need succour and protection. 2019 will belong to those who can ensure the relief and safety of banks. Yes, the government has been given the task to direct the economy, not run it, and it has to do that without hurting the people, their deposits or threatening to play with their wealth in banks or RBI. India needs a pro-people, pro-farmer approach for livelihood creation.

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Will Das make history?

TK JAYARAMAN

What was expected happened. The sad part is that it happened too soon. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), has lost a professional economist at the helm. The general feeling is that he should have fought longer and stayed on as the country is going through an "Amrit Manthan". Earlier this month, former President Pranab Mukherji publicly expressed anguish over the decline in governance and the avoidable institutional stress now being felt all over.

Contention between the government and the RBI over issues are now well-known. The government was even eyeing RBI reserves that have been built to preserve credibility and independence of the central bank.

The veiled threat thrown to RBI and the occasional statements by bureaucrats made Patel feel, "Enough is enough". He resigned December 10 and was quickly replaced by a bureaucrat, as the government also felt, "Enough is enough with professionals". In comes a trusted civil servant

The haste with which the government appointed the new RBI Governor within 24 hours showed they preferred a loyal bureaucrat who not only said "yes" to de-monetisation but has been vigorously defending it all along, despite subsequent condemnation by many, including the once sarkari economist and now free bird, Arvind Subramaniam as an ill-thought-out measure, followed by poor implementation and weak monitoring and supervision with lots of irregularities.

The strong reason put forward for the choice of Shaktikanta Das is that the new RBI Governor was among the candidates short-listed well before the appointment of Patel as RBI governor. The government could have waited for the next five months before the May 2019 elections. It should have left the autonomy of RBI hanging in balance and asked the senior-most among the four Deputy Governors to act until the results of the May elections are announced. That would have preserved the dignity of the government.

But now the concern is obvious — winning elections again. The indecent hurry indicates the ruling party is anxious to capture the finals through populist measures and they wanted a loyal person at the helm of affairs in RBI.

In his address at the National Law University, Gujarat, in May, Urjit Patel had reminded the nation that RBI had limited powers. His speech was a reaction to government's indirect criticism of RBI for not exercising adequate oversight of the financial sector. He said the RBI would, like

'Nilkanth' consume poison and face brickbats, and that the central bank would persist in its endeavour to become better with each trial. But by quitting, Patel proved he cannot act as 'Nilkanth' anymore.

The new Governor, in turn, faces an 'Agni Pariksha', a trial by fire. Can he prove himself and come out of it, unscathed? He has less than five months to do that. A government in hurry would not wait. They would like to rush through solution of contentious issues.

Das, loyal all along, cannot take a new incarnation in five months. He would not be able to assert himself, as the Patel himself took time to settle into his new job. He had not been consulted on demonetisation. As he did not say anything critical, his silence was taken for agreement with the government. He needed time to settle down and over time started to express thoughts; he showed he was not a puppet. The monetary policy changes or sticking to interest rate, which was not to the liking of government, showed Patel did not want RBI to be another department in the Ministry of Finance.

Whether Das asserts himself and emerges as independent or otherwise is a question time will answer. If he

makes RBI yet another department of the ministry of finance and if in the event the general elections go against the wishes of the government, Das, too, will make history. He would go down in history as a governor for the shortest time. The new government would change the governor as had happened when KR Puri, who had come from the insurance industry, was appointed RBI governor by then PM Indira Gandhi in August 1975 and was shown the door by the Janata Government that came to power May 2, 1977.

Puri, who was "committed to a needs-based approach" rather than security-based approach for lending, became instantly famous for his first act as Governor: He raised the credit limit of Sanjay Gandhi's project.

Another RBI Governor RN Malhotra, an IAS officer, was asked to leave by then Prime Minister Chandrasekhar after taking over from VP Singh in 1990.

Das with a master's degree in history and a Damocles' sword hanging over his head, has a chance to create history, one way or another. He can emerge as fiercely independent in his short tenure or meekly surrender to the government's whims and fancies, all aimed at retention of power and throwing good governance to the winds.

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NEW BUSINESS FRONTIERS

NALCO launches Strontium Modified Aluminium Billets

Bhubaneswar: A Navratna PSU NALCO added another feather in its cap by producing a new product, Strontium Modified Aluminium Billets CH-91 grade, as a part of its product diversification. Nalco CMD TK Chand congratulated the team for introducing the new product. He said, "NALCO continues to focus its energies in diversification and increasing its product portfolio to develop new markets that has the potential to increase the company's profitability. The Smelter team at Angul has worked hard to introduce Strontium Modified Aluminium Billets." Produced in the Company's Smelter Plant at Angul in Odisha, the first consignment of the new product was despatched to M/S Jindal Aluminium Ltd, Bangalore recently. Chand believes that new product would technically benefit the end-product manufacturer, with decreased energy consumption and improving the overall productivity and output of billets. "With this product, the customers can attain better surface finish with increased metal recovery, he added.



Union Bank Field GM visits Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Atul Kumar, Field General Manager of Union Bank of India, FGMO, Ranchi, paid a two-day visit to Regional Office Bhubaneswar, which concluded Thursday. During his visit Kumar held a review meeting of the Bhubaneswar Regional office and branches of the region. He deliberated on various facets of banking including digital banking, core business growth, enhanced customer service and acquisition of new customer for sustainable growth. Kumar also emphasized on NPA recovery. He met with the NPA borrowers during a 'Rin Mukti Shivir' campaign held by the bank.



SBI inks MoU with Sambalpur University

Bhubaneswar: State Bank of India and Sambalpur University signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) Wednesday for migration of Pension of university's retired employees. The MoU was signed in the presence of Vice Chancellor of Sambalpur University Professor Deepak Kumar Behera, Registrar Professor Sanjay Kumar Sahu, Deputy General Manager (D&TB) Goutam Roy and AGM (Govt. Business), SBI Priyadarshan. Also, president and Secretary of Sambalpur University Retired Employees Association along with retired pensioners were present at the event. Pension of retired employees of Sambalpur University will be paid by SBI. SBI officials claimed, "The MoU will immensely benefit the pensioners as they will have access to a variety of banking products like loans. The pensioners would also get the benefit of Bank's wide network and they will be able to submit Digital Life Certificate at any branch of SBI."



5,000 CBG plants to be set up in country

Bhubaneswar: In a bid to boost availability of more affordable transport fuels, three oil companies and GAIL Friday announced to set up 5000 Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) plants across the country by 2023. Three Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs—Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) and GAIL, under the leadership of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MOP&NG), has taken the initiative to execute the plan. "Out of the total units, around 500 plants are expected to be set up in Odisha," said Pritish Bharat, SLC Odisha and CGM of Indian oil, Bhubaneswar. Pritish also said that the estimated cost of the project is around ₹1.7 lakh crore. "For each plant, around ₹20 crore will be invested and it will cover about 5-7 acres of area," he said. CBG can be produced by agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid.

Vivo Y83 pro price dropped

Bhubaneswar: The Chinese mobile brand Vivo again slashed the price of its recent model Y83 pro to ₹13,990 Thursday. The company has dropped the price for the second time since it's launched in August. The model Y83 Pro was introduced to Indian market with a price tag of ₹15,990 in August and later the price was dropped to ₹14,990 in November. The Y83 Pro is a mild upgrade over the Y83, which features dual rear cameras instead of a single rear camera on the non-Pro model. The upgrade version has large 6.22-inch display with 19:9 ratios and display notch and other beautification features.

Odisha among top revenue makers: Dash

Bhubaneswar: Odisha is one of the highest revenue generating states of the country. Odisha region has already met 48.4 per cent of target of tax collection fixed for the fiscal. Consequentially the region has collected ₹5,880.9 crore against the target of ₹12,151 crore. This was informed by Prasanna Kumar Dash, member Central Board of Direct taxes (CBDT) at a press meet here Monday, said a department release. Dash further said that the number of tax assesses has also registered a growth of 20 per cent compared to the last year. The number of assesses now stand at 10,27,796, besides 50,000 new assesses will be added by the end of current fiscal, the statement said. He advised the tax officials to reach to smaller towns and work towards ensuring a grievance free range, besides quick disposal of TDS issues and refund matters. Dash also interacted with members of Tax Bar Association and Institute of Chartered Accountant of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar on the occasion, during which he emphasised on the need to provide free legal aid to senior citizens, women poorer sections of the society.

Manappuram Finance opens branch at Soro

Bhubaneswar: Manappuram Finance Ltd expanded presence in Odisha with a branch Wednesday on Station Road at Soro in Balasore. Block chairperson of Soro Municipality Atasi Mohapatra inaugurated the branch. Former Chairman of Soro Municipality Kuni Jena was also present. The company has announced that the branch will provide services such as gold loan, money transfer, two-wheeler loan and insurance to customers. Field Zonal Manager of Manappuram Finance Rajaram M, regional manager Prosenjit Paul, area head Manoj Kumar Jena, and branch head Hemant Kumar Mohanty were also present at the event. Manappuram Finance Limited has a network of over 3,300 branches spread across 28 states of the country.



Vedanta Ltd., Jharsuguda observes 30th anniversary of World AIDS Day

Bhubaneswar: The CSR department of Vedanta Ltd., Jharsuguda kick-started a week long campaign to spread awareness on HIV/AIDS to mark the 30th anniversary of the World AIDS Day. The CSR department reached out to employees, partner organizations and community with IEC materials, awareness sessions, road shows, etc. Working on this year's theme "Know Your Status" as declared by UNAIDS and WHO. According to a statement of the company the CSR team distributed red ribbons and informative materials at the plant premises, to create awareness among all employees and others. Post that, the campaign spread outdoors to include community members, school and college students and truckers and mobile workforce. Besides, the CSR team also reached out to people residing in villages such as Dalki, Banjari, Orampara, Budla, Burkhamunda, Bhagipali, Katikela, Parmanpur and Siriapali.



RBL Bank opens first branch in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: RBL Bank, one of India's fastest growing private sector banks, Thursday opened its first branch in Odisha at Jaidev Vihar in city. Odisha Chief Secretary Aditya Prakash Padhi inaugurated the outlet. New branch made the bank to have as many as 269 branches across 20 states and union territories. With this new branch, RBL Bank branch will cater services to both retail and institutional customers through its comprehensive portfolio of banking services including current and savings accounts, credit cards, fixed deposits and locker facilities. Head of Geography, Branch and Business Banking Surinder Chawla said "Our first new branch in Bhubaneswar is part of a strategic initiative to deliver wide-range of banking services to a cross-section of people in this historically and culturally important city." Chawla claimed that the Bank also plans to expand its network in Odisha by opening two more branches at Jajpur Road and Paradeep soon.



Allahabad Bank holds 'Mohalla/Village Contact Programme'

Bhubaneswar: In order to attain universal financial inclusion for all and to ensure economic empowerment of the underprivileged Allahabad Bank has pioneered 'Mohalla/Village Contact Programme'. One such programme was held in Cuttack, in which half a dozen branches, viz. Naya Sarak branch, Industrial Estate branch, Cantonment Road branch, Chowdhary Bazar branch, Jagatpur branch Chowdhary branch of Cuttack participated, said a bank's release. The programme was inaugurated by Arun Kumar Pandey GM (IT) HQ Kolkata, in which 560 beneficiaries of women self help groups and other customers participated. Murali Krishna, DGM and Zonal head, Bhubaneswar; PK Das, AGM, Zonal office; PK Jena, Asst Sahoo, Debdutta Pratihari, Bikram Sahoo, Saswati Das, Sasmita Mahapatra were also present on the occasion. Kedar Pandit, Sr Manager Zonal office Bhubaneswar conducted the programme, while Debdutta Pratihari proposed the vote of thanks.

Brand Factory's 'Free Shopping Weekend'

Bhubaneswar: Brand Factory by Future Lifestyle Fashion announced 'Free Shopping Weekend (FSW)' which went on from December 12-16 on 200 plus original brands. Brand Factory gave exciting offers for customers to shop worth ₹5,000 and pay only ₹2,000 and gift vouchers for ₹1,200, apparel worth ₹500 and ₹300 cash-back in Future Pay wallet. Customers could shop from over 200 plus original national and international brands such as Lee Cooper, Levis, ONLY, Adidas, Reebok, Skechers, Fila, PEPE, US Polo, Crocodile, Lavie and Caprese. CEO of Brand Factory Suresh Sadhwani said, "We have had an overwhelming response in the past two seasons and it has motivated us to make this year even bigger and better."

Uber Eats starts city operation Dec 15

Bhubaneswar: Uber Eats, the world's largest food delivery network, launched operations here from December 15. Uber Eats General Manager Banshi Kotecha said, "We're happy to announce the launch of Uber Eats' services in Bhubaneswar, which marks our foray in Odisha. In the launch phase in Bhubaneswar, Uber Eats has partnered with over 150 of the most popular restaurants of the city. The service will be available in key neighbourhoods such as Chandrasekharpur, Ashok Nagar, Shahid Nagar and Khandagiri." Kotecha believes Uber Eats' best in class technology and robust delivery network will contribute to the growth of local food businesses in the city.



Bhubaneswar: Nalco added another feather to its cap with the Panchapatmali Bauxite Mines bagging awards in multiple categories at the 36th Annual Metallic Ferrous Mines Safety Week celebration held Tuesday at Sukinda. NALCO received awards in multiple categories, including general working (South Block Mines), Mechanical maintenance (C&N block), Safety & Compliance (C&N block), Safety Stall renovation (C&N block) and on cleanliness (South Block Mines). Besides the group award, employees of the company's Mines division at Damanjodi also won individual prizes in Mishri Lal Memorial competition. PL Mohanta was recognised Best Supervisor and T Aminon bagged an award for the Best HEMM Operator. Nalco CMD Tapan Kumar Chand congratulated the team and said, "NALCO's Panchapatmali Bauxite Mines is recognised the world over for its productivity, safety and state of the art technology. Presently, NALCO's Bauxite Mines is the second lowest cost producer of Bauxite in the world and we are making all out effort to make our Mines the lowest cost producer."