A study was conducted to determine the extent to which a person’s opinion is influenced by a group. According to it, an individual was willing to give a wrong answer just to conform to the majority view. This also explains the impact of fake news online, which is said to contribute to a polarised society.

A study found that factors like user homophily and algorithmic filtering have created the cycle of enforcing and reinforcing belief systems. This ensures that we don’t open our minds to diverse opinions. User homophily means users in a social system tend to bond more with ones who are similar to them than to ones who are dissimilar.

We are getting trapped in narrower world views that are seeping into not only voter behaviour but everyday personal interactions. Whatsapp faced severe criticism as lynching incidents flared up by free flow of fake news on the platform.

Twitter along with Facebook came under intense scrutiny of policymakers in the US for its failure to stop the spread of misinformation during the 2016 election. We live in a world where we aren’t only consumers of information but creators as well.

Free service has given access to everyone to post whatever they want and thus create a trend in fake news spreading like wildfire. Everyone is in hurry to LIKE/SHARE/COMMENT rather than checking the authenticity of the news. The most common fake stories revolve around politics and the attempt is to polarise society, particularly during political events. Experts have warned that the Indian elections are at risk too with fake news.

There is no regulator in social media platform as we have in Print or Television media. WhatsApp launched a nationwide campaign called “Share Joy, Not Rumours” to help prevent the spread of rumours and fake news. Facebook launched #Socialforgood campaign to address issues such as cyber bullying, mental wellbeing, and entrepreneurship and was targeted primarily at young users.

Twitter launched #PowerOf18 campaign to encourage youth to contribute to public debate and participate in civic engagement in the upcoming election season. These campaigns are a way to take ownership of what’s happening on these platforms and find ways to weed out negative content.

A better and more effective approach to limit the influence of hoaxes on WhatsApp and other platforms is to increase media literacy. Data leaks at Facebook and Uber in the recent past have proven that the encryption has to be so high. The government should bring out a policy framework on the possible harm due to the internet messaging platforms to engage at a deeper level. The need of the hour is to tackle the gendered aspect of online abuse and uphold the rights of women in India.

Social media has revolutionized the way people communicate and socialize on the web. There is a positive effect on business, politics, socialization as well as some negative effects such as cyberbullying, privacy, and fake news.

“The Power of Social Media is that, it forces Necessary Change.”

It is generally agreed that social media provided crucial source of news during the Arab Spring. It helped in creating awareness about several issues, eg the fight for LGBTQ rights etc. Social media has definitely made us closer to other parts of the world.

WhatsApp is important for rural users, as it helps them cheaply connect to family members far away and send pictures of their products to clients across India. Social media platforms provide a platform to raise their voice against injustice and inequality.

Voices previously excluded from conversations can now find a channel. A few decades ago, if a farmer died due to non-repayment of loans, only the family mourned for the loss. Today if the same happens, the entire nation seems to empathize with the death of such farmers.

Social media have increasingly been adopted by politicians, political activists and social movements as a means to engage, organize and communicate with citizens. Technology is double-edged. There are reasons to cheer as also to despair.

Social media has various negative impacts like privacy issues, information overload and internet fraud.

Researchers have found that hyper-networking leads to negative health behaviour leading to laziness, obesity, depression, drug abuse, isolation or in the worst cases it may even lead to suicide.

Social media has made the world a small space by allowing mass cultural exchange and intercultural communication. India being a secular country is a home for the people of various religious and cultural beliefs.

When these beliefs clash the consequences are unpleasant.

A mere comment or opinion on a certain belief on social media spreads like fire leading to riots and destructive rallies.

Its heavy usage has ill effects on health issues and there is cyber bullying, online harassment and trolling.

The trolling of women has brought to the fore the disturbing reality of online violence and abuse women face in India.
Post 2016, RBI has been mandated to manage inflation and growth in that order of priority.

RBI was constitutionally mandated in 2016 to bring inflation around 4% with a leeway of 2% on both sides.

They have successfully brought down the menace of inflation.

RBI has maintained tighter liquidity and higher real interest rates to control inflation.

The collateral damage has been on growth as liquidity remained tight and the cost of liquidity remains high in the real sense.

The disruption caused by the introduction of GST and demonetisation added to the complexity.

The resignation of Urjit Patel as the RBI governor raise questions on transparency in appointing, removing and resignations of financial sector regulator heads.

Even though RBI serve an extremely important role in the Indian economy, the board or head do not have any constitutional protection like the CAG or the CEC do for their appointments or removal.

It is time that our financial regulatory architecture is strengthened.

Removal of the regulatory heads once appointed for a fixed tenure should be made difficult on the lines of other constitutional functionaries.

This will provide confidence to the institutions and allay the fears of politicisation of regulators.

Some experts feel that what we require at this point of time is the old RBI that is an all-rounder rather than a specialist.

They have to manage multiple roles.

Operational independence of central banks important for carrying out their responsibilities, says IMF.

In a democracy, the final responsibility of all policy decisions must lie with Government.

Therefore there should be mutual cooperation and coordination between RBI and Government in large at public interests for an efficient and sustainable economy.

The RBI was established on April 1, 1935 in accordance with the provisions of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

Though originally privately owned, since nationalisation in 1949, the Reserve Bank is fully owned by the Government of India.

Key appointments in the RBI - Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister appoints the governor and deputy governors.

The RBI Act empowers the government to issue directions to the governor in public interest (Section 7 of the Act).

Urjit Patel’s resignation makes it the second time since 1992 that a RBI governor did not serve out a full term.

The term of office typically runs for 3 years.

Shaktikanta Das is the 25th governor of the Reserve Bank of India from 11 December 2018.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is India’s Central bank. It plays multi-facet role by executing multiple functions such as overseeing monetary policy, issuing currency, managing foreign exchange, working as a bank of government.

RBI played a vital role in ensuring economic and financial stability.

Before inflation targeting was formally introduced in 2016, RBI was doing multiple roles.

They were responsible for growth by managing liquidity as well as interest rates.

They contributed in inflation management by adjusting liquidity and interest rates.

They borrowed money on behalf of the government to keep them functioning.

They also took care of the financial system’s stability by supervising banks and NBFCs.

Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz made a statement that if RBI Governor was the governor of the US Fed then the sub-prime crisis would not have occurred.

The central bank issues and regulates currency notes.

It keeps reserves with a view to securing monetary stability and is called banker to banks.

The RBI plays a vital role in economic growth of the country and maintaining price stability.

Monetary Policy of the Country

The RBI has been tasked to have a monetary policy framework to meet the challenges of the economy and to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.

Inflation control

The RBI has targeted to keep the mid-term inflation at 4 per cent (+/- 2 per cent).

A six-member Monetary Policy Committee, headed by RBI Governor, decides the benchmark repo rate.

Government’s banker

RBI acts as a banker for both the central as well as state governments.

It sells and purchase government securities on their behalf.

Regulator of Foreign Exchange

Foreign Exchange Management Act ("FEMA") envisages that RBI will play a key role in management of foreign exchange.

The central bank plays a key role in creating financial awareness among the masses.

It also supervises if the banks and other financial institutions are doing the job assigned to them regarding financial inclusion.
While incentivizing credit flow will help improve activity in the sector, government intervention and directed lending can affect proper credit appraisal. This could not only result in higher NPA levels but also affect the flow of credit in the future.

Raghuram Rajan had recently cautioned: “Both MUDRA loans as well as the Kisan Credit Card, while popular, have to be examined more closely for potential credit risk.”

He also said that the Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs (CGTMSE) run by SIDBI is a growing contingent liability and needs to be examined with urgency.

Public sector banks already have significant NPA levels in the MSME sector and a push by the government can increase the risk.

MSMEs are largely dependent on informal sources of credit at higher interest rates.

Availability of credit from formal sources has been a problem for the sector.

The share of credit to MSMEs has declined as a proportion of overall bank credit in recent years.

MSME credit was also one of the reasons behind the recent rift between the government and the RBI.

They are also not in a position to adopt technology to improve productivity.

The gradual shift of consumer demand towards organised channels is creating additional growth challenges.

The government should work to improve the overall regulatory architecture in order to incentivize smaller firms to scale up.

What is needed is a simplification of processes so that more firms can access formal finance.

Banks should improve their credit appraisal capability to work with firms that are perhaps dealing with a financial institution for the first time.

The progress made in Ease of Doing Business (EODB) rankings is real, but it is time for another exercise that takes a ground-up look at our current regulatory frameworks.

India's next wave of EODB should have three vectors – rationalization (cutting down the number of layers), simplification (cutting down the number of compliances and filings) and digitization (architecting for true paperless, presence-less and cashless).

Simplifying the regulatory architecture will also help in the progress of MSMEs.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has emerged as a highly vibrant and dynamic sector of the Indian economy over the last five decades.

MSMEs are complementary to large industries as ancillary units and this sector contributes enormously to the socio-economic development of the country.

MSMEs are a source of massive job creation mainly for less-skilled job seekers.

Economically, any improvement in the sector’s operating environment will help the Indian economy.

The share of MSMEs in the country’s gross value added is estimated to be about 32%.

It also contributes about 40% to total exports and 45% to manufacturing output.

They help in industrialization of rural & backward areas, thereby, reducing regional imbalances, ensuring more equitable distribution of national income and wealth.

Recently there was a big announcement of support to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME).

Apart from improving ease of doing business, the most important announcements were regarding access and cost of credit.

MSMEs can now get in-principle approval for loans of up to ₹1 crore in 59 minutes.

GST-registered MSMEs will get an interest subvention on fresh or incremental loans.

Interest rate rebates have also been announced for exporters.

India has a large number of tiny firms that work in the informal sector and do not scale up.

More than 90% of MSMEs operate in the informal sector.

These firms largely depend on informal sources of credit at higher interest rates.

It is difficult for these firms to get loans from banks because they do not maintain proper documents and records.

Most firms in the informal sector are unlikely to attract skilled labour.

This has not only affected growth and output, but also employment generation.

This illustrates that the problem is much bigger than the availability of credit.
In the last few years, India has achieved a continuous increase in direct tax revenues, largely from personal income tax.

Recent data released by the Central government agencies shows a nearly 80% growth in the number of returns filed in the last four financial years from FY 2013-14 to FY 2017-18.

India’s direct tax to GDP ratio hit a ten year high of 5.98 percent in the fiscal year 2018.

The number of persons filing income tax returns has also witnessed a massive rise.

Direct taxes are levied on a person’s or a firm’s income or wealth.

The incidence and impact of the direct tax fall on the same person.

Example: Income Tax, Corporation Tax, capital gains tax and Wealth Tax.

Social objective of direct tax is the distribution of income. A person earning more should contribute more in the provision of public service by paying more tax.

The Indian state has historically battled immense fiscal constraints.

Colonial data shows that the revenue collected from British India was very low compared to the revenue generated from other colonies such as Sri Lanka or Malaysia.

The government of independent India also faced a similar situation in its early years.

Even with the diversification of economic activities as people switched to the secondary and tertiary sectors, the problem of low revenue generation persisted.

Demonetisation has ushered in a widened revenue base and a rise in household savings.

The Digitisation drive has led to increase in the information collected digitally by the Tax Department.

The tendencies of producing false information, and tax evasion have been curbed to a great extent.

The ease of getting refund, primarily by medium and small taxpayers has ensured greater compliance.

Most of the poorest people in the world live in countries such as India.

They are classified as middle income countries based on average incomes.

These countries are unlikely to get enough foreign aid.

They do not have the deep fiscal resources to help their poor either directly through redistribution or indirectly through the provision of public goods that will raise their ability to earn extra income.

Countries such as India are thus trapped between the poor countries that get a lot of foreign aid and the wealthy ones with very strong tax collections.
Extradition treaties adopt the "dual criminality" approach, which provides that a fugitive will be extradited for an offence, only if it is a crime in both countries.

The challenge is, it is difficult to establish treaty principles for crimes peculiar to India’s socio-cultural conditions, such as dowry harassment.

Political offences

Offences where death penalty may be imposed

The “double jeopardy” clause de bars punishment for the same crime twice. This is the primary reason why India has been unable to extradite David Headley from the US. Headley, an American terrorist involved in plotting the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, has already been sentenced to imprisonment by US courts, for killing six Americans. However, Headley is yet to be tried by Indian courts for the deaths of nearly 140 Indian nationals in the same attacks.

Where there will be "double jeopardy"

Where there could be actual or potential discrimination on account of religion, race and nationality.

These are generally based on concerns of human rights violations, such as torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

European countries and the United Kingdom have been more amenable to rejecting extradition cases on human rights concerns.

Because of the strong inclination of UK and European courts to consider poor prison conditions as a form of human rights violation, fugitives often raise this as a challenge during extradition hearings.

Leveraging diplomacy and bilateral negotiations to persuade countries to process requests expeditiously, is an important step.

Likewise, India should process extradition requests received from foreign states swiftly and efficiently.

Indian government must conclude extradition treaties with as many countries as possible, and make efforts to enter into more bilateral extradition relations.

Other mechanisms that can facilitate extradition, viz. mutual legal assistance treaties, issuing letters rogatory and information exchange MoUs can be utilised where necessary.

Preventive law and policy measures that can deter the escape of offenders, may also be explored.

The recently passed Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 signifies the government’s efforts to preventive mechanisms.

India also needs to take steps to dispel concerns regarding poor prison conditions and potential human rights violations of the requested person.

India could consider signing international instruments, such as the UN Convention Against Torture (1984) to establish India’s zero tolerance towards torture and custodial violence.

For addressing investigational delays, it is imperative to improve the capacity and organisational efficiencies of law enforcement agencies so that they may conduct speedy investigation.

India could adopt the good practices of the US Office of International Affairs (OIA). Washington’s primary body to handle extradition requests.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), is India’s nodal government body for extradition matters.

The largest number of fugitives have been extradited from the UAE (19), followed by the US (nine).
The Chabahar port has received a waiver from the U.S. sanctions on Iran for the moment, but these concessions could be withdrawn any time. The possibility of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, will add to security concerns for Afghanistan and impact on the Chabahar route as well.

The reconciliation process with the Taliban is likely to see the regional powers, the U.S. and Russia engaging Pakistan more. This could give Islamabad space to play spoiler in Chabahar, which is seen as a rival port to Pakistan’s Gwadar.

Special cargo corridors have been opened with China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Europe, Russia, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, with more trade diverted through them by Afghanistan.

India’s fears stem from the possibility of Chinese naval presence in the near future in Gwadar. US imposing sanctions on Iran might affect Japan, South Korea and other countries’ interest in developing and investing in Chabahar.

It will be important to operationalise the port quickly and smoothen the route to Afghanistan. Keeping timelines and delivery of New Delhi’s commitments will be key to the port becoming a regional hub for transit trade, steel and petrochemicals.

It will be necessary to encourage Afghan companies to use the route more with Chabahar. India has done well to keep a place in the intricate connectivity network of the region.

Given all the competing interests over Chabahar, it will require sustained and nuanced diplomacy to stay ahead in this game.

Indian firm India Ports Global Limited took over operations at the Shaheed Beheshti port in Chabahar. The representatives of India, Iran and Afghanistan met and finalised the routes for trade and transit corridors between the three countries.

An event has been planned on February 28, 2019 to promote and popularise the potential of Chabahar.

Chabahar, which is located 72 kilometres west of Pakistan’s Gwadar port, holds immense strategic and economic significance for India.

Chabahar is turning out to be a success story in the India-Iran relationship.

The port project is the first overseas venture for an Indian state-owned port.

The Indian takeover of the operations in Chabahar follows re-imposition of sanctions on Iran by the US.

The US recognised the importance of Chabahar and exempted Indian firms involved in the port from sanctions.

India was also one of the eight countries to receive temporary relief on oil imports from Iran.

Tehran should acknowledge that it was India’s participation that has earned Chabahar this relief.

It is also a counter to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Chabahar port is critical to Delhi’s Eurasia strategy & connectivity initiatives in Indo-Pacific region.

Chabahar port opens up a permanent alternative route for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia, given the hurdles in the direct route through Pakistan.

The Chabahar port will also set up India’s road access to four cities in Afghanistan.

It facilitates India’s role in Afghanistan’s development through infrastructure and education projects.

It gives India’s bilateral ties with Iran, a major oil supplier and potential trade market for India, a big fillip.

The Chabahar port will cut transport costs/time for Indian goods by a third.

Chabahar port will reduce Afghanistan’s dependence on Karachi port and, hence, will translate into less Pakistani leverage over Kabul.

Chabahar also provides a link to the planned International North-South Transport Corridor.

This way it also loops in Russia and countries in Central Asia and Europe as beneficiaries.

According to some estimates, the Chabahar route plus INSTC could boost trade to a total of US$ 170 billion from India to Eurasia.

Chabahar is a rare example of a project in the region which is a win-win for all stakeholders.
Our bilateral relations contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which seek to end poverty and create a more inclusive and equitable world.

The Ganga, like Germany’s Rhine river, had faced abuse for decades, with untreated industrial and domestic waste flowing into them, causing major pollution and the extinction of marine life.

Germany pledges a loan of Rs 970 crore to strengthen sewage water treatment infrastructure in Uttarakhand.

India and Germany cooperate closely on energy matters.

In 2006, the Indo-German Energy Forum was set up to promote cooperation in this field.

In 2013, the Maharashtra Power Generation Cooperation Limited, supported by German funds, set up a 125 Megawatt solar photovoltaic power plant in Saki.

German development cooperation has given loans worth Rs 9,300 crore for our strategic Green Energy Corridors project.

This will ensure the supply of clean electricity to millions of Indians while reducing network losses and improving the carbon footprint.

Green mobility is one of the key issues for the future of our countries.

Germany pledged up to Rs 8,900 crore over five years to improve solid and liquid waste management and for Metro in Nagpur, which is the single biggest project of German financial cooperation in India.

Germany has partnered with three smart cities — Bhubaneswar, Kochi and Coimbatore — to provide sustainable urban public transport.

These projects stand for around 150 already successful or promising cooperation projects of India and Germany today.

We need to work towards further strengthening the bilateral relations between the two nations.

With increasing environmental degradation and adverse effects of global warming, we need to actively protect our habitat and cooperate closely on this matter internationally.

Both countries must work as equal partners to tackle global development challenges.

Germany has technological capacity to cater to the needs of the huge Indian market.

Germany must continue to create innovative solutions with India for the future, for the benefit of both of our societies and the world at large.

Bilateral relations between India and Germany are founded on common democratic principles and are marked by a high degree of trust and mutual respect.

India was one of the first nations to recognise the young Federal Republic of Germany in 1951.

Today, Germany is amongst India’s most important partners both bilaterally and in the global context.

After the devastation of World War II — the two countries entered into diplomatic relations almost immediately.

Both countries soon started concrete economic development cooperation, which continues till today.

2018 marks the 60th anniversary of the strategic relationship.

In the early years the joint projects targeted industrial growth, poverty reduction and rural development.

In the 1960s German development cooperation supported the agricultural revolution in the Nilgiris.

The know-how and expertise that Germany shares with India is the main value-add of this cooperation.

IIT Madras and Polio immunisation programme were set up with financial contribution from Germany.

Germany’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) towards India, are in sync with India’s priority sectors and SDG 2030 including solar energy, smart cities, and environment.

Both share common values and constitutional principles, and our relationship has always been based on great mutual respect and understanding.

Today, India is one of the biggest and fastest-growing economies, and Germany is the biggest economy in Europe.

Both are natural partners making a joint effort for prosperity, while ensuring that they safeguard the environment etc.

India is Germany’s biggest development partner with a proven track record of success.

Now, the areas of focus are renewable energy and energy efficiency, sustainable urban development, environment protection and resource management.
There are concerns over the growing number of hate speeches by senior leaders. This will have consequences: the image of the Commission will get eroded.

Political leaders must evolve a code of self-discipline known as the model code of conduct. This must be followed in letter and spirit.

Recently Jammu & Kashmir governor unexpectedly dissolved the state legislative assembly. In the present context, when Governors have become too political, the powers of the Governor should be clearly defined, according to the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission.

They should invite the party with the largest numbers to form the government, failing which they should invite the combination of parties claiming the largest numbers.

In the famous Bommai judgment, the Supreme Court had clearly held that the question of majority can only be tested on the floor of the House, not in a Raj Bhavan.

Cash donations have been replaced by banking transactions. Electoral bonds have made the whole transaction secretive and opaque.

Only the government knows who gave how much to which party. S.Y. Quraishi has suggested a National Electoral Fund to which all donors can contribute.

State funding of political parties as proposed by Indrajit Gupt Committee will ensure a level playing field for all the parties.

The Election Commission of India has detected hundreds of cases where politicians paid newspapers or TV channels to carry favourable reports.

ECI holds that paid news plays a very vitiating role in the context of free and fair elections.

ECI suggested that paid news be made an electoral offence under the RPA. A Law Commission report from 2015 also recommends amending the RPA to this effect.

Preserving India’s democratic values depends on cracking down on candidates who mislead the electorate through paid news.

Political parties are divided on the issue of holding simultaneous elections. The argument in favour of simultaneous elections is the idea of “one nation, one election”.

The argument against Simultaneous Elections is that it is against the constitutional fabric and it would be impractical.

An analysis by IDFC Institute shows that on average, there is a 77% chance that the Indian voter will vote for the same party for both the State and Centre when elections are held simultaneously.

Law Commission of India recommended simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative.

The Election Commission has also extended its in-principle support for the simultaneous elections.

Any changes must require both a constitutional amendment and judicial approval that they do not violate the “basic structure” of the Constitution.

India is the world’s largest democracy and Indian elections are a magnanimous democratic exercise.

Elections expresses the will of the people as well as the authority decided to be the driver of the society for a specified period of time.

But still there are several critical issues concerning elections in India.

Political parties continue to voice their concerns about malfunctioning of electronic voting machines (EVMs).

Out of 20 lakh machines in operation, a few hundred or thousand may malfunction.

As soon as defects are detected, the machines have to be replaced within half an hour, for which reserved machines are kept in place.

Recently, an EVM was found abandoned on a national highway in Rajasthan and another was found in an MLA’s house. Any lapse invites strict action against the staff, including suspension and even an FIR.

Data from the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) indicate that 179 out of the 543 elected MPs in the present Lok Sabha have some kind of criminal case pending against them.

Former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi expressed disappointment with the Supreme Court for refusing to bar politicians with serious criminal charges from contesting elections.

For the last 20 years, the Election Commission has been demanding that people who face criminal cases of a serious nature, which are pending, should be debarred from contesting elections.

Even the Law Commission has demanded this.

Politicians argue that you are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Another argument is that in politics, quite often the Opposition files false cases against opponents to defeat them judicially.

There are four lakh prisoners in Indian jails today—71% are undertrials.

Four of their fundamental rights are taken away: the right to liberty, freedom of movement, freedom of occupation, and freedom of dignity. And the legal right to vote as well.

If, under the presumption of innocence, their fundamental rights are taken away, then critics question about taking away the right to contest, which is not even a fundamental right.

Often the public blames the Election Commission for its ineffectiveness in keeping criminals out.

Disqualifying any candidate from contesting is the function of law. So Parliament must legislate on the matter.
We normally think about judicial independence as independence from the government. The Constitution is designed to ensure that judges can do their work “independent” of government influence. Fixed salaries, security of tenure, and an appointments process through the Supreme Court’s judgments — is insulated from executive control.

However, it also requires that judges perform their constitutional role independent of personal biases, political and moral beliefs, and partisan ideologies.

Adjudication is a political task, and the judge’s political vision will inform her work. Judges are bound to maintain primary fidelity to the law and the Constitution. Law and adjudication must remain autonomous from partisan politics.

Supreme Court may not be knowing the practical difficulties of implementing the decisions. The separation of power between Judiciary, executive and legislature is blurred.

Unrestrained judicial activism does a disservice to governance in the country and damages its economic growth prospects.

The Supreme Court is increasingly, and controversially, asserting control over the executive and legislature. Mahatma Gandhi who advocated that the means used for achieving a particular result must also be as acceptable as the result itself.

Judicial activism or the mere pursuit of ends without regard to the means, has become the dominant approach in judicial thinking.

Politicians remain “accountable” to the people in at least some sense, because they depend upon them in order to continue in office after five years. Judges who are insulated from any external control are accountable only to themselves.

Accountability only to oneself, however, is a very weak form of constraint.

The temptation to overstep is always immense, more so when such immense power has been placed in one’s own hands.

Legal culture plays a critical role in establishing judicial accountability. The legal culture must be created and nurtured by judges, lawyers, legal academics, the press, and the citizenry.

The people of India and their representatives should explore ways of addressing judicial activism in the country.

However, no man idea be, courts should be wary of making rules on their own, as it would amount to transgressing into the policy domain.

Equilibrium in the exercise of authority must be maintained at all times with the powers of the legislature and executive subject to judicial review.

Each organ of our democracy must function within its own sphere and must not over what is assigned to the others.

The only check possible in the exercise of powers by the judiciary is self-imposed discipline and self-restraint by the judiciary itself.

The faith and confidence of people in the judiciary must always be maintained. The judiciary must provide accessible, affordable, and quick justice to the people.

Judicial activism must also function within the limits of the judicial process because the courts are the only forum for those wronged by administrative excesses and executive arbitrariness.

The judicial activism is use of judicial power to articulate and enforce what is beneficial for the society in general and people at large.

Judicial activism gives jurists the right to strike down any legislation or rule against the precedent if it goes against the Constitution.

The Golak Nath case is an example of judicial activism.

In Kesavananda Bharati case the Supreme Court held that by Article 368 of the Constitution, Parliament has amending powers but does not extend to alter the basic structure of the Constitution.

Initially Supreme Court was a conservative institution.

In the 1980s, there was a rapid expansion of judicial power.

It allowed “public interest” cases to be filed on behalf of those who were unable to access the courts.

By the 1990s and the 2000s, under the label of “judicial activism”, the court began to engage in a host of administrative activities.

It included managing welfare schemes to “ beautifying cities” to overseeing anti-corruption initiatives.

The constitutional court had become a Supreme “Administrative” Court.

The Supreme Court had made the playing of national anthem in cinema halls before screening of movies optional, modifying its earlier order.

Supreme Court in Arjun Gopal Vs Union of India case fixed timings for bursting crackers during Diwali and prohibited the use of non-green fireworks in NCR.

Supreme Court in M.C. Mehta v. Union of India case, directed that no BS-IV vehicle should be sold after March 31, 2020 and only BS-VI vehicles should be sold after that.


Supreme Court in Rajesh Sharma vs State of Uttar Pradesh case, felt that Section 498A of IPC was being misused and came out with some measures to curb the misuse of the Sec 498A.

A Judge mandated that every student in Tamil Nadu must study Tirukural.

He said India should have declared itself a Hindu country, like Pakistan declared itself a Islamic nation.

The present NRC process is defective as many foreigners become Indians and original Indians are left out which is very sad.

“Anybody opposing... Indian laws and the Constitution cannot be considered... citizens of the country.”

This shows that judges have inserted themselves into fraught political controversies.

This shows that the Supreme Court in entering into the Legislative and Executive Domain.
According to a study, nearly 90% of surface water in India—rivers, lakes, canals, etc.—are highly polluted. This is mostly due to untreated domestic sewage flowing into these water bodies from urban areas and, in the case of some rivers, due to untreated effluent from factories.

Today these water bodies are encroached, full of sewage and garbage. As a result, instead of rainwater, it is the sewage and effluents that are filling up urban waterbodies. Today urban lakes have turned into hazards that get choked even with low rainfall and overflow into the blocked canals during high rainfall causing floods in the city.

Misuse of these water bodies by local communities for their cultural or religious festivals such as the immersion of idols. Unplanned tourism activities without systematic planning and regulation is another major threat to urban waterbodies. Dal Lake in Srinagar, Tso Morari and Pongsho Lakes in Ladakh where the unplanned and unregulated tourism has posed long-term negative impacts.

Entry of nutrients through raw sewage has become the part of lake system and cause various destructive changes in the waterbody such as growth of aquatic weeds in lakes and ponds.

Of the Bangalore city’s 125 lakes covered in a study by the Centre for Ecological Studies at IISc, only four were found to be in a fair state. While 25 were either dying or dead with dumping of solid/liquid waste of such a scale that they had little or no water. But the problem isn’t just of Bangaluru’s or Karnataka’s inaction.

The NGT’s Karnataka order should spur others states into acting on pollution in their jurisdiction. The green tribunal incentivised the states to act against polluters in a “polluter pays” model. Hefty fines, for lax state and local governments as well as private sector polluters, will go a long way in ensuring action against pollution.

The ecosystem services provided by a waterbody must be valued in terms of quantification of its benefits. Without making the citizens aware of the importance and benefits of lakes and wetlands in their lives, it is extremely difficult to implement laws effectively. Stakeholder participation and capacity building must be used as an important instrument for better management of urban waterbodies.

Lakes are important part of urban ecosystem.

At present, in India, lakes and wetlands are in extremely bad shape and are in varying degrees of environmental degradation.

The National Green Tribunal recently imposed a Rs 50-crore fine on the Karnataka government and a Rs 25 crore on the city’s municipal government (BBMP) for negligence that led to the city’s lakes sporting flotillas of toxic froth—and even catching fire in the case of Bellandur.

Apart from the fine, the Karnataka government will have to put Rs 500 crore in an escrow account for clean-up of three lakes and furnish Rs 100 crore performance guarantee with regard to meeting deadlines on clean-up execution.

In March 2017, the BBMP had sanctioned illegal construction around a lake, in violation of an earlier NGT order.

Projects were being “sanctioned by the state government without ensuring preventive, restorative and controlling measures”.

State and the local governments’ failure to act has led to rampant encroachment.

98% of lakes suffer from encroachment that has choked off recharging.

Unchecked flow of untreated waste water (90% of the lakes suffer from this).

Lakes perform significant environmental, social and economic functions.

They range from being a source of drinking water, recharging groundwater, acting as sponges to control flooding, supporting biodiversity and providing livelihoods.

Water in lakes is an easily available source of water for the needs of many sectors of economy such as agriculture, domestic and industrial.

These waterbodies play a very vital role in maintaining environmental sustainability particularly in urban environments especially when the cities are facing the challenges of unplanned rapid urbanization.
India’s rural development policies should increasingly focus on developing markets, infrastructure and institutions that can help sectors such as livestock and construction growth.

The livestock sector can offer significant opportunities for bolstering non-farm income. The current breeding policy needs to be revamped.

A national breeding policy is also needed to upgrade the best performing indigenous breeds. Buffalo breeding ought to be given more attention, while poultry breeding should be focussed on conservation.

State governments should be encouraged to participate in national breeding policy implementation. Consensus must be built among breeders to develop indigenous breeds.

Animal health care should become a priority, with greater investment in preventive health care.

The government needs to create better incentive structures for investment in livestock in the States that are lagging while harmonising rules, regulations and regulatory authorities across States.

State governments should sponsor research and assessment of the market. Small and marginal farmers have high dependence on the livestock sector.

Hence, measures to boost livestock sector growth and productivity will have a significant impact in alleviating rural distress.

Agricultural labourers routinely seek construction-related daily wage labour to bolster their income. Improving the conditions of migrant workers in the construction sector requires a multi-pronged approach.

We have to enable migrant workers to get deserved access to various government (Central and State) schemes, despite the lack of identity proof.

Registration of workers with the Welfare Board should be made mandatory and be the responsibility of the contractor and the builder.

In order to improve the condition of women, strict anti-harassment laws should be implemented. Creche facilities at construction sites should be provided to also ensure that children are not neglected.

Utilisation of a construction cess has to be improved if we are to make any difference to the lives of our construction workers.

Workers should also be provided with training and skilling in their areas of interest, as it could lead to higher earnings and credit-worthiness.

Improvement in employment in the manufacturing and services sectors will be critical in improving rural income. Improving education facilities and skill development programmes in rural areas will play an important role.

Sectors like transport and storage have recorded reasonable growth in the rural area. However, there is need to further increase the contribution of the services sector to rural output.

A strong push to sectors like food processing, warehousing and logistics will help push up farmer incomes, reduce the wastage of perishable agriculture commodities and provide employment to rural workers.

Our policies should help create sustainable, long-term, rural, non-farm employment options which can aid the rural poor in overcoming barriers to economic prosperity.

Agricultural diversification has been playing a prominent role in drawing up India’s economic development trajectory.

The government has an objective of doubling farmers’ income by 2022.

However farming distress is worsening and it is becoming difficult to double farmers’ income. Therefore the role of non-farm diversification is vital to double farmers’ income.

For raising farmer income we need to embrace non-farm diversification.

It is difficult for marginal farmers for living from just agricultural income.

Rural India’s economic situation continues to worsen.

The government sought to double farmer income by raising minimum support prices.

Such initiatives would apply only to 48% of rural India, with non-agricultural households being left behind.

A recent survey by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development shows that the average monthly income of rural households is ₹6,059, with agricultural households deriving only 43% of their income from agriculture.

Non-farm diversification is an important pathway for empowering landless labourers and marginal farmers, as development economist Daniel Coppard recommended in a 2001 report.

It will help to overcome land constraint to income growth, while allowing farmers to cope with exogenous shocks through additional income.

It even allows them to reinvest in productivity enhancing agricultural technologies.

A growing rural non-farm economy can absorb surplus labour, slowdown rural-urban migration, reduce rural-urban disparities and promote farm-non-farm linkages.

The shift of working members from farm to non-farm sector helps them in improving their consumption expenditure significantly, and inter alia in escaping poverty.

Evidence from many developing countries suggest that diversification of rural economy towards non-farm activities has considerable potential to augment income and reduce poverty.
11.7% of India’s 5,100 pilots are women, against a global average of 3%.

A few years ago, more than half of India’s banking sector (by asset size) had female chiefs.

Under MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), launched in 2005, women’s participation is almost 50%.

If more women did work, India’s national income would rise dramatically.

One estimate is that GDP would go up by 20% if women matched men in workforce participation.

Enhances a woman’s control over household decision-making.

Providing greater impetus to women entrepreneurs would be critical for India’s growth.

Women entrepreneurs help drive innovation and job creation, besides assisting in addressing the world’s most critical challenges.

The global share of women in the workforce is 40%, which means India is well below average.

The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in Sweden is 88%.

One key ingredient of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s economic revival strategies was to increase female LFPR.

Abe made it a priority to build almost half a million government-funded crèches to help young mothers rejoin the workforce.

The female LFPR during Abe’s term has gone up by almost 5% in Japan.

In Bangladesh, more than 90% of the garment workers are women, far ahead of India.

Women need the 3C’s: Confidence, Capabilities, access to Capital. Men need to understand that women are their equals.

Government policies should focus on behavioural changes that make female employment more acceptable in the society.

Government schemes must target the fundamental cultural and social forces that shape patriarchy.

Communication programmes on gender equality in secondary education to help students imbibe equitable gender norms.

Acknowledging child care as the responsibility of both parents.

As for the workforce, much needs to be done, beyond maternity benefit entitlements and other quotas.

A useful and easily implementable idea would be to give income tax benefits to women. It would be a bold and effective step to increasing India’s female workforce participation.

For political empowerment of women, their representation in Parliament and in decision making roles in public sphere is one of the key indicators of empowerment.

Gig Economy provides women flexible work options to pursue their career while not missing important milestones in their family lives.

At 27%, India’s female labour force participation rate is among the lowest in the world and has declined significantly over the last two decades, according to data from the International Labour Organization.

A new ICRIER study suggests that the root issue beneath this worrying trend is patriarchy.

A rise in literacy levels among women has failed to translate into an increase in the number of working women according to a new research.

This is due to a combination of socio-economic factors.

It includes importance of education for improving marital prospects.

Social norms also ensure that higher prestige or social status is associated with families which keep their women out of the workforce.

Many women who join the workforce are unable to rejoin after having a child.

The growth in formal sector jobs has not kept pace with the supply of educated women, which may have led to “crowding out of females” from the workforce.

Labour Bureau’s employment figures show that there is a rise in the percentage of women out of labour force between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016 across all levels of education and age.

This is an indicator that despite one’s educational attainment there has been a decline in the incentive for women to participate in the labour force.

Women with higher education tend to get married into households with higher incomes, which can also inhibit their labour force participation owing to sociocultural reasons.

According to the World Economic Forum’s ‘Global Gender Gap Report 2018’, India is ranked at 108th position out of 149 countries.

The issue of participation of women not just in the workforce, but also in legislatures, police, armed forces and the judiciary, is a complex but very critical issue.

While lower-tier governments have achieved gender parity through reservation of legislative seats, a similar Bill for Parliament has been pending for decades.

Economic Survey 2016 stressed on the need to increase women participation in labour force. It said that lower women engagement adversely affects the growth potential of the economy.

The survey observed that women workers are the most disadvantaged in the labour market.

It said, women constitute a very high proportion among the low skilled informal worker category, and are engaged in low-productivity and low paying work.

India had the largest gender gap in median earnings of full time employees in 2015, in comparison to countries like South Africa, Brazil, and Chile.
Women face lack of funds, their inability to improve their nutritional intake or even to eat properly during pregnancy.

As women are unable to work for wages during her pregnancy, it reduces the family’s income.

However, owing to economic and social distress many women continue to work to earn a living for their family right up to the last days of their pregnancy.

Many have to borrow money to meet the expenses during delivery or pregnancy.

It is also common for the families to sell assets or migrate to cover these costs.

Furthermore, women resume working soon after childbirth, even though their bodies might not permit it.

This prevent their bodies from fully recovering on one hand, and also impeding their ability to exclusively breastfeed their young infant in the first six months.

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 which increased women’s leave entitlements from 12 to 26 weeks does not apply to women working in informal sector.

The interior parts have poor healthcare infrastructure and transportation facility to attend the emergency need of the pregnant women.

The hospitals in rural areas are not equipped with adequate trained staff and other required facilities for safe delivery.

The women of Dalit, Adivasi communities and PVTG in interior parts face social discrimination by service providers.

Under-nutrition continues to adversely affect majority of women in India.

In India, every third woman is undernourished and every second woman is anemic.

An undernourished mother almost inevitably gives birth to a low birth weight baby.

When poor nutrition starts in-utero, it extends throughout the life cycle since the changes are largely irreversible.

There has been a demand for universal maternity benefit that includes wage compensation, nutrition, healthcare and creche facilities for all women, more particularly for women of the poor and marginalized sections who are suffering due to low wage, poverty and malnutrition.

We need more comprehensive and gender-balanced measures.

Childcare should not be treated solely as women’s responsibility.

We need serious efforts including media campaigns, to change social norms favouring childcare by fathers.

The government’s maternity benefit programme must be implemented better and comply with the Food Security Act.

Maternity benefits should be raised to ₹6,000 per child at least, for all pregnancies and not just the first living child.

If women receive timely maternity benefits under the PMMVY, she could use the money to take care of her health and eat nutritious food.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) (Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) recently touched the one year mark.

As per the latest data released by the Centre for Digital Financial Inclusion (CDFI), the government has transferred over ₹1,600 crore to eligible mothers under PMMVY.

What was launched as Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) in 2010 has been rechristened as Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) to help pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first live birth.

PMMVY is a conditional cash transfer scheme and provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss which happens during childbirth and childcare.

The programme provides a cash incentive of ₹5,000 in three instalments to pregnant women and lactating mothers for the first child through Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT).

Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013, every pregnant woman is entitled to maternity benefits of ₹6,000, unless she is already receiving similar benefits as a government employee or under other laws.

PMMVY violates the NFSA in several ways.

The benefits have been reduced from ₹6,000 to ₹5,000 per child.

They are now restricted to the first living child.

According to a recent analysis, PMMVY excludes more than half of all pregnancies because first-order births account for only 43% of all births in India.

The application process is cumbersome and exclusionary.

The compulsory linking of the applicant’s bank account with Aadhaar often causes problems.

The PMMVY provides little assistance to women who lose their baby, because the successive payments are made only if the corresponding conditionalities are met.
India has made efforts to counter the trend of slowing decline in malnutrition rates. The Poshan Abhiyan—National Nutrition Mission—aimed at reducing malnutrition in women and children was launched in March 2018.

India also became one of 59 countries to impose a sugar tax on sweetened beverages. The Goods and Services Tax on soft drinks was increased from 32% to 40% in 2017.

However, to speed up progress on both reducing all forms of malnutrition by 2025 and achieving zero hunger by 2030, India can learn from successes elsewhere.

A combination of public policies, agricultural research and economic growth has led to reduction in malnutrition in several countries.

The GNR 2018 cited progress made by China, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Brazil in reducing hunger and malnutrition.

The national framework to improve nutrition for children must be upgraded on priority.

Social institutions must work to improve nutrition and children’s welfare in free societies.

The absence of hunger enables people to develop their capabilities.

Governments should acknowledge the linkages and commit themselves to improved nutritional policies.

ICDS must be subjected to a rigorous review in states where it has not worked well and targeted interventions for supplementary nutrition must be made.

Among the factors affecting the quantity and quality of nutrition are maternal education, age at marriage, antenatal care, children’s diet and household size.

Even political commitment, administrative efficiency, literacy and women’s empowerment also play a vital role.

Now that mapping of malnutrition at the district level is available, it is incumbent on State governments to address these determining factors.

Prioritizing and investing in data to identify key areas of action.

India should invest more of its economic prosperity in its welfare system, without binding itself in restrictive budgetary formulations.

Research suggests that $1 spent on nutritional interventions in India could generate $34.1 to $38.6 in public economic returns.

The latest report on stunting and wasting should make the Centre understand the problem better and work with the States to give India’s children a healthy future.

The health, longevity and well-being of Indians has improved since Independence.

High levels of economic growth over the past two-and-half-decades have made more funds available to spend on the social sector.

However, WHO’s Global Nutrition Report 2018 points out a wide variation in stunting levels in different parts of the country.

A third of the world’s stunted children under five—an estimated 46.6 million who have low height for age—live in India.

With 46.6 million children who are stunted, India tops the list of countries followed by Nigeria (13.9 million) and Pakistan (10.7 million).

District-level data show high and very high levels of stunting mainly in central and northern India.

Stunting is caused by long-term insufficient nutrient-intake and frequent infections.

A quarter of the children display wasting (that is, low weight for height) as well.

The households with the lowest incomes had the highest number of wasting and stunting among children aged under five years.

Wasting is a strong predictor of mortality among children under five. It is usually the result of acute significant food shortage and/or disease.

Wasting accounts for a larger share of deaths than undernutrition in India.

India also figures among the set of countries that has more than a million overweight children.

Only 21% of packaged foods in India were rated as being healthy.

One of the primary reasons for children being undernourished is that often their mothers are undernourished.

Women without education or without much voice in their families often fail to ensure adequate diets for their children.

Malnutrition in a girl, combined with early marriage, has a cascading effect of health complexities across generations.

Poverty, dietary issues, poor sanitation and low social status of women.

Inadequate iron intake can lead to iron deficiency anaemia (IDA) which leads to permanently impaired cognitive abilities.

Malnutrition is responsible for more ill-health than any other cause.

Beyond health, slow progress on malnutrition is also impacting the social and economic development of countries.

The health consequences of being overweight and obese contribute to an estimated four million deaths globally.

The problem of malnutrition remains severe across all regions and none of the countries are on course to meet all nine global nutrition targets.

It is estimated that malnutrition in all its forms could cost society up to US$3.5 trillion per year, with overweight and obesity alone costing US$500 billion per year.
Sand mining and hydropower development in the Ganga has reduced its flow at most places. The source of the Ganga’s perenniality, the Himalayas, are increasingly becoming dry, hollowed out, and made fragile. Under Namami Gange programme, maintaining an ecological flow is not abided by the project owners. Building barrages and diverting flow of the river. Dredging to make way for inland waterways. Hydroelectric projects that impact the flow. Massive deforestation destroying the overall ecology. No proper assessment of impacts of the above interventions on the river. This has resulted in further deterioration of the Ganga. The state of deteriorating Ganga is also mentioned by CAG. Parliamentary Committee on Ministry of Water Resources, the World Bank, the Central Pollution Control Board, and National Green Tribunal.

Unsustainable sand mining, encroachments into the river and extraction of groundwater and other resources at increasing rates continues. Ganga is the most sacred river in the country, with a unique cultural and spiritual significance. The Ganga basin generates approximately 40% of the country’s GDP and is a valuable environmental and economic resource. The river is currently reeling from decades of negligence and ill-treatment. It includes untreated sewage and industrial waste dumping to restricted flows and rampant underground water withdrawal.

The Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) on National Waterway-1 is being implemented with the financial and technical support of the World Bank. The Project entails development of fairway between Varanasi and Haldia (Phase-I). The project will contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country. The project involves channelising the bricked river, massive dredging, frequent desilting, and barring to increase its depth artificially. Significant pollution risks are being ignored. Also ignored is the destruction of the habitats of the aquatic life and livelihoods of the fisherfolk and boatmen. Endangered species like the Ganges river dolphins are being pushed towards extinction.

PepsiCo consignment in Varanasi

PepsiCo moved containers from Kolkata to Varanasi on Ganga. Ganga does not have the carrying capacity for the navigation of 1,500 tonne vessels.

Uttar Pradesh Government has launched Ganga Harithee Yojana (also known as Ganga Greenery scheme) in 27 districts of the state located on the bank of river Ganga. The scheme aims at enhancing green cover in catchment areas of river Ganga and control land erosion.

The draft National River Ganga Bill 2018 has proposed the setting up of an armed ‘Ganga Protection Corps’ with the powers to arrest offenders who pollute it. This is to keep the river clean and help in its rejuvenation.

Setting up decentralised Sewage Treatment Plants and opt for eco-friendly treatment options (like the one INIATH has set up on Assi Ganga river in Varanasi and proved its efficacy). These steps would facilitate reuse of treated waste water. Reduce sugarcane cultivation, water-saving and yield-enhancing System of Rice Intensification (SRI), and acknowledge that groundwater is India’s water lifeline. Make river governance democratic, with clearly defined norms of transparency, participation and accountability. Such proactive measures should apply to all rivers and river basins.

The Corps will be raised by the ministry of home affairs as demanded by the National Ganga Council.

The bill aims to rejuvenate Ganga to its “pristine stage and ensure its uninterrupted flow”.

The offences and penalties punishable include spoiling or defacing ghats or stairs or throwing any “offensive matter” in the river. Other offences include stone quarrying, commercial fishing without permission, deforestation of hill slopes, withdrawing groundwater for organised consumption or industrial needs.

The bill also includes a provision to initiate a Centre for the management, regulation and development of Ganga as the river is of unique importance. The Centre will take control of the management, regulation and development of Ganga.
Surveillance is essential to ensure national security and pre-empt terrorist threats. It is in the very nature of surveillance that it must take place outside the public eye.

The regime is justified as it strikes a pragmatic balance between the competing values of privacy and security.

Heavily bureaucratised and minimally accountable regime of surveillance does not enhance security, but does have significant privacy costs.

For example, while examining the U.S. National Security Agency’s programme of mass surveillance, an American court found that out of more than 50 instances where terrorist attacks had been prevented, not even a single successful pre-emption was based on material collected from the NSA’s surveillance regime.

Such a system often has counterproductive effects. A government that is not checked in any meaningful way will tend to go overboard with surveillance.

In the process it can gather so much material that actually vital information can get lost.

In its 2017 judgment, the apex court had asked the government to always carefully and sensitively balance individual privacy and the legitimate concerns of the state.

Any impingement on the right to privacy must be proportionate.

The government’s action must be the least restrictive method, i.e., protecting national security — by a smaller infringement upon fundamental rights.

There must be parliamentary oversight over the agencies that conduct surveillance.

All surveillance requests must go before a judicial authority, which can apply an independent legal mind to the merits of the request.

Every surveillance request must mandatorily specify a probable cause for suspicion.

To implement the suggestions above will require a comprehensive reform of the surveillance framework in India.

In India, we have the Supreme Court’s privacy judgment, which has taken a firm stand on the side of rights.

Citizens’ initiatives such as the Indian Privacy Code have also proposed legislative models for surveillance reform.

We now need the parliamentary will to take this forward.

The right to privacy is not absolute.

Recently the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order authorising 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt ‘any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer.’

The notification was described as an incremental step towards a surveillance state.

According to the order, any person in charge of the computer resource will be bound to extend all facilities and technical assistance to the agencies and failing to do will invite seven-year imprisonment and fine.

The MHA gave the authorisation under 69 (1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

The act says that the Central government can direct any agency after it is satisfied that it is necessary to do so in the ‘interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above or for investigation of any offence.”

Only data in motion could be intercepted earlier.

But now data revived, stored and generated can also be intercepted as powers of seizure have been given.

The sweeping powers given to agencies to snoop phone calls and computers without any checks and balances is extremely worrisome. This is likely to be misused.

Two statutes control the field: telephone surveillance is sanctioned under the 1885 Telegraph Act (and its rules), while electronic surveillance is authorised under the 2000 Information Technology Act (and its rules).

The procedural structure in both cases is broadly similar, and flows from a 1997 Supreme Court judgment.

Surveillance requests have to be signed off by an official who is at least at the level of a Joint Secretary.

Current regime is bureaucratised.

Decisions about surveillance are taken by the executive branch (including the review process), with no parliamentary or judicial supervision.

The fact that an individual will almost never know that she is being surveilled.

The surveillance regime is vague and ambiguous.

Under Section 69 of the IT Act, the grounds of surveillance have been lifted from Article 19(2) of the Constitution, and pasted into the law.

The regime is opaque.

There is almost no information available about the bases on which surveillance decisions are taken, and how the legal standards are applied.
India lost nearly 75 billion hours of labour in 2017 as a result of rising temperatures. This made sustained work increasingly difficult and negatively affecting workers’ output. The agriculture sector experienced the largest increase in labour loss. The “climate-related impacts” on the workforce and economy could be significant for India, with 18 percent of the country’s GDP tied to the agricultural sector. An urgent review of occupational health standards and labour laws must be carried out.

India’s dependency on fossil fuels is contributing to high levels of ambient air pollution containing PM 2.5. Land-based transport is “responsible for a substantial number” of PM 2.5 related deaths. However, these emissions can be addressed through improvements to travel infrastructure.

Cites should tackle the population’s transport needs through public infrastructure, limiting the rise in car-users and keeping vehicular pollution at bay. Raising awareness of such pollution-related issues, their associated health risks and climate change overall is the key. Increasing regional, non-english media coverage of climate change and health issues across states can further help to stimulate a “state-by-state policy response”.

Carrying out comprehensive city-level traffic surveys to guide urban infrastructure while promoting safe walking and cycling to reduce the emission load. It is of prime importance for India to reduce its carbon emissions and air pollution levels, specifically targeting the use of coal, oil and natural gas.

Advance implementation of local Heat Action Plans, plus effective inter-agency coordination is a vital response which the government can deploy in order to protect vulnerable groups. This will require identification of “heat hot spots”, analysis of meteorological data and allocation of resources to crisis-prone areas.

Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has adopted a heat action plan which necessitates measures such as building heat shelters, ensuring availability of water and removing neonatal ICU from the top floor of hospitals. It has helped bring down the impact of heatwave of vulnerable population. Similar action plan should be developed by other states also.

Climate change is here and affecting our health, with extreme heat in particular also having effects on productivity, food supply and disease transmission, a new global report finds. Between 1901 and 2007, India’s mean temperature increased by more than 0.5 degree Celsius.

India experienced an additional 40 million heatwave exposure events in 2016 as compared to 2012, raising concerns over a “dangerous surge” in negative health impacts. Over the last two decades, there has been a “marked increase” in the duration of heatwaves in India, as well as the numbers of Indians exposed to heatwaves. The country will likely be among the worst affected by climate change given its “weaker health systems and poorer infrastructure.”

These are the findings of a study called Lancet Countdown: Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change.

Heatwaves and Heat Stress

Heat exposure can lead to heat stress — illnesses which occur as a result of the body’s inability to prevent its temperature rising from beyond a normal range. Severe heat stroke can lead to multiple organ failure, seizures, and death.

Children, the elderly and those with pre-existing morbidities are particularly vulnerable.

Since 1990, every region of the globe has become steadily more vulnerable to extreme increases of heat.

Increased exposure to heat can cause

- A decrease in labour output
- Burden health systems ill-equipped to cope with the effects of heat stress
- Promote the spread of diseases like cholera and dengue fever across endemic areas
- Climate change threats to undermine the public health gains of previous decades

With each additional tonne of carbon dioxide emitted costs India $86 — almost double the expense borne by the USA ($48) and Saudi Arabia ($47), according to a study. IPCC warned that if the global community are not able to limit a temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, climate-related risks to livelihoods, food security, health, water supply and human security will further intensify.