

Time to act: On latest estimates of economy

The economy needs a meaningful policy response with steps to spur consumption

The latest estimates on economic output and growth, while not a surprise, reaffirm the fact that the ongoing six-quarter slump is still in search of a bottom. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanded by 4.5% from a year earlier in the July-September quarter, marking the slowest pace of expansion in six-and-a-half years. If one were to strip out government final consumption expenditure, which jumped by 15.6%, real GDP growth would have been an even more anemic 3.1%. Of serious concern should be the stagnation in investment, reflected in the mere 1% growth in gross fixed capital formation. While the government's decision in September to cut the corporate tax rate was clearly aimed at spurring the private sector, the indications till now are far from encouraging. Clearly, with consumption spending, the mainstay of demand, yet to regain traction, companies are likely opting to retain any gains from a lower tax outgo as cash for a rainy day rather than raise capacity or make new investments. While the National Statistical Office's data on private final consumption expenditure suggests a slight pick-up to a 5.1% expansion, from the preceding quarter's 3.1%, it is still only about half the year-earlier period's 9.8% rate. Also, the sustainability of the uptick in consumption spending remains a moot point given that several other pointers, including tepid retail sales during the Deepavali festival season, offer little room for cheer.

An analysis of the Gross Value Added (GVA) reveals that six of the eight sectors posted decelerations from the fiscal first quarter. And even though agriculture, forestry and fishing grew by 2.1% in the second quarter, nudging up from 2% in the April-June period, the pace was underwhelming when seen both in the context of the 5.1% pace posted a year earlier and the above average monsoon rains in 2019. Significantly, manufacturing shrank by 1%, in marked contrast to the year-earlier period's 6.9% growth, again pointing to the widespread demand drought. A separate release from the government, showing output at the eight infrastructure industries that constitute the core sector contracted by 5.8% in October belies all the brave talk on the part of government officials that the momentum would revive in the third quarter. While six of the eight segments reported year-on-year declines, of particular worry is the 12.4% contraction in electricity output, hinting as it does at a lack of demand for power at the nation's factories. It is high time officials helming the economy put aside the bravado and bluster and acknowledge the seriousness of the structural elements behind the slowdown by initiating meaningful policy reforms, even while taking steps to spur consumption through innovative fiscal measures.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **spur** (verb) – stimulate, encourage, motivate.
- **slump** (noun) – economic decline, drop/depression, recession/slow down.
- **Gross domestic product (GDP)** (noun) – a measure of economic activity in a country. It is the total value of a country's annual output of goods and service.
- **strip out** (phrasal verb) – to remove particular costs.
- **private consumption or consumption expenditure** (noun) – the spending by households (consumers) on goods and services, excluding new housing.

- **anaemic** (adjective) – feeble, weak, poor.
- **stagnation** (noun) – a state or period of inactivity; lack of growth/development.
- **far from** (phrase) – not, not at all, nowhere near.
- **mainstay** (noun) – central component, centrepiece, chief support, backbone.
- **traction** (noun) – the quality of being attractive; an idea which gains popularity or acceptance.
- **outgo** (noun) – outlay, spending (of money).
- **preceding** (adjective) – previous, prior, earlier.
- **sustainability** (noun) – maintainability of something at a certain rate/level.
- **uptick** (noun) – a small increase.
- **moot** (adjective) – debatable, arguable, questionable.
- **pointer** (noun) – indication, hint, signal.
- **tepid** (adjective) – unenthusiastic, uninterested, lukewarm.
- **room** (noun) – scope, opportunity, chance.
- **gross value added (GVA)** (noun) – it is a measure of total output and income in the economy. It provides the rupee value for the amount of goods and services produced in an economy after deducting the cost of inputs and raw materials that have gone into the production of those goods and services. It also gives sector-specific picture like what is the growth in an area, industry or sector of an economy. On the other hand, GDP or gross domestic product is a measure of economic activity in a country. It is the total value of a country's annual output of goods and service.
- **fiscal** (adjective) – financial.
- **nudge** (verb) – encourage, prompt, stimulate.
- **underwhelming** (adjective) – unsatisfactory, not exciting, disappointing.
- **shrank** past of **shrink** (verb) – lessen, reduce, decrease.
- **point to** (verb) – indicate, suggest, signal/signify.
- **drought** (noun) – lack, non-existence, unavailability, deficiency.
- **contract** (verb) – decrease, diminish, reduce.
- **belie** (verb) – misrepresent, falsify, contradict.
- **revive** (verb) – renew, reintroduce, strengthen.
- **contraction** (noun) – decline, decrease, reduction.
- **it is high time** (phrase) – it is past the time when something should have been done/happened.
- **helm** (verb) – steer, lead, navigate.
- **put aside** (phrasal verb) – disregard/forget, set aside, ignore.
- **bravado** (noun) – boldness, bold manner, bombast/daredevil.
- **bluster** (noun) – threats, domineering, aggressive talk (with little effect).

Glimmer of hope: On fresh SIT report on 1984 riots

Fresh SIT report on 1984 riots may pave the way for reopening scuttled probes

A confidential report by a court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) may contain answers to the question of whether there will be any significant improvement in the country's poor record in securing justice for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom. It is a matter of shame that successful prosecutions have been few and far between, and each time a new probe is ordered or a fresh report submitted, it is

seen as major progress. The SIT was formed by the Supreme Court a year ago to examine the record in 186 cases relating to the carnage that took place in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination. Another SIT had earlier scrutinised 293 cases, and closed 199 of them. A two-member team of retired apex court judges scrutinised these 199 cases, along with 42 other matters that had been closed earlier. The supervisory committee gave its views on these 241 cases and the Bench headed by the then Chief Justice of India, Dipak Misra, was informed that 186 cases merited further investigation. A fresh three-member team, headed by retired Delhi High Court judge, S.N. Dhingra, was asked to examine these 186 cases. Last week, the team submitted its report. Regardless of how many cases out of these result in prosecution, there is little doubt that the development offers a glimmer of hope to the victims of 1984. The country cannot forget that as many as 3,325 people from the Sikh community, including 2,733 in Delhi alone, were killed in the pogrom.

It is not easy to secure convictions in instances of communal riots and sectarian violence, especially those that involve thousands of offenders gripped by mob frenzy. Further, in 1984, there was little effort in the early days to bring to book the high political functionaries of the Congress who were suspected to have instigated the riots. However, in the last 12 months, there have been at least two rare instances of success. In November 2018, two men were convicted of murder in a case that was closed many years ago and resurrected by the government's erstwhile special probe team. One of them was sentenced to death, and the other to life. A month later, Congress leader Sajjan Kumar was sentenced to life by the Delhi High Court after being acquitted by the trial court five years earlier. Otherwise, the 35-year-long quest for justice is largely a story of failure due to political influence, scuttled investigation and shoddy prosecution. The country has seen other large-scale riots and pogroms after 1984, but has not been able to ensure substantive justice. The time may have come to consider the Delhi High Court's suggestion in its verdict on Sajjan Kumar that there could be separate legislation to deal with mass murders that amount to genocide or crimes against humanity.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **glimmer** (noun) – (a faint) sign, trace/ray, hint (of light/hope).
- **pave the way for** (phrase) – prepare for, clear/open the way for, usher in.
- **scuttle** (verb) – (intentionally) cause something to fail.
- **pogrom** (noun) – massacre/mass killing, carnage, persecution/destruction.
- **prosecution** (noun) – legal action/trial, legal proceeding, litigation.
- **few and far between** (phrase) – insufficient, negligible, in short supply.
- **carnage** (noun) – massacre, mass murder, mass destruction.
- **aftermath** (noun) – consequence, result/outcome, repercussion.
- **assassination** (noun) – murder, killing (especially of the persons of political power).
- **scrutinise** (verb) – examine carefully, inspect; investigate.
- **merit** (verb) – deserve, earn, justify.
- **conviction** (noun) – sentence, judgement, verdict.
- **sectarian** (adjective) – denoting a sect (a group of people); factional, partisan.
- **grip** (verb) – distract, divert, engage/mesmerize.
- **mob** (noun) – a large, disorganized and often violent crowd of people.
- **frenzy** (noun) – madness, mania, wildness.
- **bring to book** (phrase) – criticize, reprove, rebuke, punish officially.
- **functionary** (noun) – official, administrator, bureaucrat.
- **instigate** (verb) – incite, prompt/egg on, stimulate.

- **convict** (verb) – declare/find/pronounce guilty.
- **resurrect** (verb) – revive, restore, regenerate/revitalize.
- **erstwhile** (adjective) – old, previous, former, then.
- **acquit** (verb) – free/clear from a criminal charge, exonerate, declare innocent.
- **shoddy** (adjective) – poor-quality/inferior, careless, improper.
- **substantive** (adjective) – important & meaningful.
- **amount to** (verb) – be regarded, be classified as; be the equivalent of.
- **genocide** (noun) – mass murder, massacre, racial killing.
- **humanity** (noun) – humankind, the human race, people.

Doping to win: On Russia's ban from global sporting events

Some athletes do cheat, but when they do so with official sanction it is an epic crisis

Monday's decision by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to ban Russia from global sporting events for a four-year period is arguably the biggest sporting crisis the country has faced till date. The anti-doping watchdog's move will hurt Russia the most at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics where the nation's flag, name and anthem will not be allowed. Russia will inevitably approach the Court of Arbitration for Sport with an appeal, for which it has three weeks, but if the sentence is upheld it could bar the nation from participation in several high-profile global sporting events including the 2022 football World Cup in Qatar. The saga has its roots in the scandal that erupted on the eve of the 2016 Rio Olympics, when whistle-blower reports nailed Russia for running one of the most sophisticated doping programmes. The allegations centered around the active collusion of Russian anti-doping experts, the sports ministry and members of the country's intelligence service in replacing dope-tainted urine samples with clean ones during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. In September 2018, as part of the resolution of that case, Russia reluctantly agreed to open up its database to corroborate the findings of the reports. WADA has now ruled that the country manipulated this very database in order to cover up large-scale violations.

However, as stiff as the latest sanctions seem, there is considerable doubt among anti-doping crusaders whether the measures go far enough. Even ahead of the Rio games, WADA had recommended that Russia be expelled, but the International Olympic Committee (IOC), under President Thomas Bach, had left the decision to individual sports' governing bodies, and, subsequently, athletes who were cleared of doping were allowed to compete as neutrals. A similar episode had played out during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Games, where Russia was again banned but individual athletes competed. The IOC's hand may be forced this time around by the sheer magnitude of the findings, but there remains a similar possibility of Russian competitors still participating. It may be worth noting that despite Sochi, Russia still played host to marquee events such as the 2015 World Aquatics Championships and the 2018 FIFA World Cup and is again slated to host the swimming event in 2025. In a sense, both the IOC and WADA have had to straddle the thin line between two powerful but opposing arguments — of punishing Russia, the country, for its misdemeanours while at the same time preserving

natural justice for athletes who are clean. But, increasingly it feels like a situation where even honest sports persons may end up paying the price for the machinations of their corrupt administrators.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **sanction** (noun) – support, backing, approval.
- **epic** (adjective) – huge, very large.
- **arguably** (adverb) – possibly, probably, perhaps, maybe.
- **watchdog** (noun) – inspector/supervisor, observer, ombudsman.
- **most** (adverb) – to the greatest extent; extremely.
- **inevitably** (adverb) – necessarily, unavoidably, definitely.
- **arbitration** (noun) – conciliation, mediation, intervention/negotiation.
- **uphold** (verb) – justify, vindicate, validate.
- **bar** (verb) – block, ban, forbid/prohibit.
- **high-profile** (adjective) – most important, unavoidable, attracting much public attention.
- **saga** (noun) – lengthy story/history; chain/series of events.
- **scandal** (noun) – impropriety, misconduct, wrongdoing.
- **erupt** (verb) – break out, start suddenly, flare up.
- **on the eve of** (phrase) – before a time or (important) event; early.
- **whistle-blower** (noun) – one who reveals others' illegal activities in public or to the government/authority.
- **nail** (verb) – expose, reveal, identify.
- **sophisticated** (adjective) – advanced, highly developed, innovatory.
- **allegation** (noun) – charge, accusation, indictment.
- **collusion** (noun) – collaboration, scheming, intrigue.
- **intelligence** (noun) – (military & political) information, data, details.
- **dope-tainted** (adjective) – affected/polluted/contaminated by dope.
- **reluctantly** (adverb) – hesitantly, unwillingly.
- **corroborate** (verb) – confirm, verify, validate.
- **manipulate** (verb) – misrepresent, falsify, distort.
- **cover up** (phrasal verb) – conceal, hide, camouflage (an illicit activity).
- **sanctions** (noun) – penalty, punishment, deterrent.
- **crusader** (noun) – campaigner, fighter, champion/reformer.
- **go far** (phrase) – be successful, do well for oneself, achieve a great deal.
- **expel** (verb) – bar, ban, debar/push out.
- **sheer** (adjective) – utter, complete/thorough, consummate/out and out.
- **magnitude** (noun) – importance/significance, distinction, intensity/power.
- **Sochi** (noun) – a Russian city on the Black Sea, is known as a summer beach resort, and was host of the 2014 Winter Olympics.
- **marquee** (adjective) – greatest, leading, foremost.
- **slate** (verb) – schedule, plan, organize.
- **host** (verb) – present, organize.
- **straddle** (verb) – extend across, be situated on both sides of.
- **misdemeanour** (noun) – wrongdoing, evil deed, crime act.
- **pay the price** (phrase) – experience the bad/unpleasant result of something.
- **machinations** (noun) – schemes/plots, intrigues, conspiracies.

Instant reward: On Karnataka defection politics

Karnataka gets political stability, even though it was achieved via dubious means

Instant reward, not punishment, is what people willed for **Karnataka** lawmakers who defected from the Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular) to the BJP and sought a fresh mandate in by-elections held on December 5. Their defection and subsequent resignation from the legislature led to the collapse of the Congress-JD(S) coalition government in Karnataka, paving the way for the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in July, led by B.S. Yediyurappa. With the BJP winning 12 of the 15 seats to which by-elections were held, the party now has 117 MLAs and a comfortable majority in the Assembly. The party had fallen short of a majority in the 2018 election that threw up a hung legislature. The post-poll alliance of the JD(S) and the Congress was a legitimate move to end the impasse, but it was destined to be unstable. The JD(S) strength was less than half of the Congress strength, but its leader H.D. Kumaraswamy became the Chief Minister. The BJP, particularly Mr. Yediyurappa, turned the resentment in the Congress camp to his advantage. In a replay of similar sequence of events in the past, MLAs resigned, as if on cue. Sixteen of those MLAs were promptly admitted to the BJP, and 13 were fielded as its candidates. The Chief Minister hinted on Monday that at least 11 of the 12 winners would be given ministerial berths.

The Central leadership of the BJP had appeared to be keeping an arm's-length from the developments in Karnataka at the beginning but it was quick to own up to the victory on Monday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself terming it as a popular rejection of the Congress. He accused the Congress of subverting the 2018 mandate. The BJP had won 104 seats in the 224-strong Assembly in 2018 and its majority today has been won through a devious route. What rankles is the fact that there is now a Karnataka model of achieving a majority by engineering an adequate number of by-elections through highly questionable means. In the present instance, it is legitimised by the voters but that is no reason to overlook the undermining of democratic processes. The BJP must be happy that its strategy succeeded but it must also reflect on the cost to democracy this might entail. Now that it has a clear mandate, the BJP must focus on governance and walk the extra mile to reassure the public on its commitment to democratic behaviour. The State's capital Bangalore is also a key centre of Indian economy and political stability there has a larger import for the country. The setback could trigger changes in the Congress also. Party chief Dinesh Gundu Rao and Leader of Opposition Siddaramaiah have resigned their respective posts. The party should reflect deeply on its character and strategy as an alternative to the BJP. Political opposition without a foundational ideological basis cannot be the answer.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **defection** (noun) – desertion, absconding, decamping.
- **dubious** (adjective) – suspicious, questionable, unreliable.
- **will** (verb) – intend, desire, wish.
- **defect** (verb) – change allegiances, desert, change sides.
- **pave the way for** (phrase) – prepare for, clear/open the way for, usher in.
- **fall short of** (phrase) – be deficient/inadequate/insufficient; fail to meet/reach.
- **throw up** (phrasal verb) – produce something.
- **legitimate** (adjective) – permissible, allowable, admissible.
- **impasse** (noun) – deadlock, stalemate, stand-off.
- **destine to** (verb) – certain to meet (a particular fate).
- **turn something to one's advantage** (phrase) – benefit from, capitalize on, utilize/exploit.
- **resentment** (noun) – bitterness, indignation, enmity, hatred/hate.

- **as if** (phrase) – used to explain how a situation seems to be.
- **cue** (phrase) – sign, indication, signal.
- **promptly** (adverb) – quickly, swiftly, rapidly.
- **keep something at arm's length** (phrase) – avoid, keep/stay away from.
- **own up** (phrasal verb) – confess, admit to, accept responsibility.
- **subvert** (verb) – undermine, weaken, impair, damage.
- **devious** (adjective) – double-dealing, dishonest, tricky.
- **rankle** (verb) – annoy, upset/irritate; continue to be painful/fester.
- **engineer** (verb) – bring about, cause, arrange, pull off (something skilfully).
- **means** (noun) – method, way, procedure.
- **legitimise** (verb) – validate, legitimate, permit/endorse.
- **overlook** (verb) – miss, fail to notice; disregard, neglect/ignore.
- **undermine** (verb) – weaken, spoil, damage.
- **reflect on** (phrasal verb) – think about, contemplate, consider/mull over.
- **cost** (noun) – sacrifice, loss.
- **entail** (verb) – cause, result in, produce.
- **go/walk the extra mile** (phrase) – put a special effort to attain something.
- **setback** (noun) – problem, difficulty, issue.
- **trigger** (verb) – give rise to, bring about, prompt.
- **ideological** (adjective) – relating to a system of ideas.

Trampling on grassroots: On T.N. local body polls

It is a travesty of law that local body polls have been delayed by three years in Tamil Nadu

Three years after they fell due in 2016, rural local bodies in Tamil Nadu will witness elections in the last week of this month. And, barring any further judicial intervention, urban local bodies are also likely to have elected representatives early next year. It is a travesty of the law that these elections have been delayed. Cities, towns and villages have been under the rule of unelected officials for too long. Under a Supreme Court order, polls for all local bodies will have to be held, except in those districts that have been divided recently to create new ones. It is the first time since local self-government became the third tier of governance under the Constitution that polls have not been held on time in T.N. — timely elections were held every five years since 1996. Administrative lapses and political litigation over ward delimitation in various local bodies in accordance with the latest population figures in the 2011 Census resulted in the unprecedented delay. Originally announced on time in 2016, the notification was cancelled by the Madras High Court, citing irregularities in it. Since then, the issue of delimitation, the announcement of new districts and occasional litigation have contributed to the delay in setting in motion elections to the vital tiers of grassroots democracy.

There have been frequent changes in the mode of electing mayors of city corporations and chairpersons of municipalities. Originally, direct elections were held, but it was changed to indirect mode in 2006. The present regime has changed its mind twice. In 2016, the Jayalalithaa regime opted for indirect elections, that is, only ward councillors would be elected by the people and these representatives, in turn, would elect mayors and municipal chairpersons. The current Edappadi K. Palaniswami government reversed the decision and chose the direct election mode. Recently, it once again changed its mind and restored

the system of indirect election, citing "better accountability and collective responsibility". It claimed that there was scope for conflict between a directly elected head and the councillors, and that this would be eliminated if councillors themselves elected the mayor or chairperson. Beyond all the legal and technical reasons, and political squabbles over the timing of elections, the attitude of the two main parties towards the importance of local bodies has been quite lukewarm. While the posts of the heads of various local bodies are seen as prestigious, there is much politicisation when it comes to devolving funds and letting the various tiers work independently. District panchayats, in particular, are seen as being frequently undermined, as most parties consider them as a redundant third tier among panchayati raj institutions. While the polls are fought bitterly, the State is still some distance away from including local self-government bodies as partners in its development.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **trampling** (noun) – disregarding, treating disrespectfully/with contempt; taking for granted. (trample means walking on someone/something to damage/spoil).
- **grassroots** (plural noun) – the most basic level of an organisation.
- **travesty** (noun) – misrepresentation, distortion/perversion, poor imitation.
- **fall due** (adjective) – to reach its due date for renewal.
- **barring** (preposition) – except for, with the exception of, discounting.
- **tier** (noun) – row, rank, line.
- **lapse** (noun) – failure, mistake, blunder/oversight.
- **litigation** (noun) – legal process, legal proceeding, legal action.
- **delimitation** (noun) – an act of fixing boundary or limits.
- **in accordance with** (phrase) – in agreement with, in conformity with, in line with.
- **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
- **irregularity** (noun) – anomaly, abnormality, misconduct.
- **reverse** (verb) – rule against, revoke, cancel.
- **accountability** (noun) – responsibility, liability, answerability.
- **squabble** (noun) – argument, fight, dispute.
- **attitude** (noun) – standpoint, approach, point of view.
- **lukewarm** (adjective) – unenthusiastic, indifferent, half-hearted.
- **politicisation** (noun) – a state/condition/situation of something which is influenced/controlled by politics.
- **devolve** (verb) – delegate, pass down, transfer/assign.
- **undermine** (verb) – weaken, spoil, damage.
- **redundant** (adjective) – unnecessary/useless, not required, inessential.
- **bitterly** (adverb) – harshly, resentfully, dissatisfiedly, aggrievedly.

☞ "THE EXPERT IN ANYTHING WAS ONCE A BEGINNER." ☞