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## India's Many Cliffs

As the global financial experts and the media remains focused on how the USA manages its fiscal cliff, and the domestic experts and media on select few financial indicators such as the current account deficit, the levels of the stock market indices, and the likely GDP growth rate in this and the next fiscal year, India continues to slide towards the edge of multiple cliffs. It would be too much to expect any nation building vision and resolve from the current political leadership (largely characterized by legions of very mediocre individuals on whom greatness has been thrust upon) across the entire spectrum, with each political party engaged in pushing their own self-interest centered agenda. However the near silence from others who should be very concerned not only for India but even for their own personal interests is very surprising and extremely worrisome. These others should be the industry leaders and their respective chambers of commerce, semi-autonomous and independent think tanks, the financial-media "page-3" equivalent personalities, journalists, and finally, the academics and other intelligentsia at large.

Measuring the health of the nation by just a few parameters that usually include the three listed above (fiscal deficit, GDP growth rate, and stock-market performance) is akin to assessing the health of a patient showing visible signs of severe debility merely by measuring the pulse, blood pressure, and the body temperature.

A broader list of at least 12 other indicators includes (in no particular order of importance) (1) Education (school, college and specialized, and vocational, and the quality and quantity match between current capacity and the current and emerging needs of the country), (2) Healthcare (measured on accessibility, affordability, appropriateness, and accountability parameters), (3) Water (for individual, agricultural, and industrial needs), (4) Energy (availability and affordability for household, industrial, and public services' needs), (5) Food (quantity and affordability across the entire food-basket rather than just a select few items), (6) Land & space (quantity, quality, and affordability for agriculture, industrial, and public requirements e.g. for hospitals, schools and colleges, stadia, public parks, retail, museums, centers of performing and other arts, hotels, offices, etc. etc.), (7) Housing (quantity, quality, and affordability) both in the urban and the rural India across all the socio-economic groupings), (8) Sanitation (universal access and the human waste disposal infrastructure), (9) Waste (industrial and municipal waste handling and disposal), (10) Intra-India transportation (rail, road, air, waterways – reach, capacity, and efficiency), (11) Mass rapid transport system for major cities (reach, capacity, efficiency, and affordability for different socio-economic strata of urban dwellers at least in the 60+ cities having population of a 1 million or more), and finally (12) Internal security (most will agree that India and Indians face a far greater threat on account of internal insurgency and the near collapse of internal law & order, compared to any direct threat from any of the country's neighbors).

While it would require a far deeper study to come up with hard data on the actual "demand-supply" gap across each of these other 12 indicators in the last 100 years and in particular, at specific milestone years e.g. 1947, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011, a relatively simple but highly focused research effort (by the undersigned and team of researchers) gives enough reason to believe that these gaps have actually increased in the last 40 years, and have increased in much greater absolute values (not in percentages) during the last 20 years – the so-called economic liberalization decades for India. While those who measure country's affluence by the number of billionaires, the stratospheric prices of property across India, the numbers of opulent weddings and luxury automobiles, and the placement salaries of the few lucky ones to graduate from the select few premier educational institutions would do well to measure India's global rankings on many other indicators such as those that measure human development, innovation, quality of living, productivity and efficiency of the industry and the economy, foreign direct investment inflows, quality of environment, and many others beyond just the headline GDP rankings in the list of top-10 global economies.

In 1947, India's population was estimated at around 350 million. In 1991, it was around 900 million. In the last 20 years, one more "India" of 1947 has been added in terms of number of inhabitants. In the next 20-25, India is likely to add another 350 or more million to its current population of about 1.25 Billion. With the current and expected demographic distribution, changes in composition of the economy, and changes in peoples consumption and in their expectations and aspirations, India's challenges and needs across all of these 12 other indicators is going to grow exponentially. Linear, incremental thinking and solutions of yesterday (even if they worked) may not work tomorrow. To slow down, and then reverse this catastrophic slide towards these multiple abysses would require truly enlightened thinking and a genuinely visionary and resolute political, bureaucratic, business, academic, and journalistic leadership. When would India see some really serious thinking in this direction? Only time would tell.

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