

To stop lynchings...

... North India must attract investments

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Lynching — like the incident that took place in my native state of Jharkhand — is not an aberration, or a random act; it represents decadence. It is not easy for a mob to lynch a man to death. Beyond disregard for life, lynching requires a group that is idle enough to participate in such an activity, and shares a belief that the consequences of committing such an act won't be severe. So even a single act of mob lynching is a shameful mark on a region's culture, institutions, and socio-economic life.

Socio-economic growth in North India is essential for future growth of the Indian economy. The region has diverged from the rest of India and particularly South India — a modernising and growing region. It looks more like the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) — a growthless region marred by unemployment and extremism. IMF has warned that MENA region's unemployment can further destabilise the region. If the trajectory of North India remains as it is, where frustrated unemployed graduates are looking for entry-level clerical jobs, it could become a hotbed for organised extremism as well, where fear of lynching becomes a way of life.

How do we deal with the problem? We need to inject hope in the region's idle youngsters. We need trade and urbanisation, so that people, especially youngsters, lead engaged lives, and improve chances of finding gainful employment. For such urban and commercial growth to occur, the region needs to become investor friendly. The region shall benefit from developing twin cities like Kanpur-Lucknow; Allahabad-Varanasi or Dhanbad-Bokaro, and empowering their local governments so that such cities can grow to become large urban agglomerations supporting the regional economy and become magnets of

capital and talent.

North India also needs better rule of law. It has one of the lowest per capita levels of police force, which hampers law and order. It is a non-partisan idea to hire more police forces in the region so that no man or woman fears being abused walking down the streets.

Some north Indian cities need to be turned into special economic zones which can then attract more investors and jobs. Given the low-income levels in the region, creating more manufacturing jobs in the region should be a priority, where the rising consumption economy in India can be fulfilled by local manufacturing in the region, not Chinese imports. The region can gain inspiration from Bangladesh, that has done a fantastic job in establishing a budding manufacturing economy, with admirable progress in human development.

The region and the country in general also needs a new approach to skill development. For the future of India, the role of ITI-type vocational institutions is crucial. We need to link high schools and diploma institutes to regional industries where students are taught employable skills. With digital transformation, we also need to reimagine universities like IIMs not as degree-granting ivory towers, but as open public spaces where citizens can walk in (digitally) and learn self-paced and certified skills.

To tackle the problem of lynching is to tackle the problem of lack of growth. Growth and economic development are intertwined with diversity and cosmopolitanism, and we need cities where investors feel comfortable in investing their capital, and where young people can learn skills necessary to gain employment. South India is thriving with this model, and now it is time for the north to do so as well.



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