The minute you think of giving up, think of the reason why you held on so long.
The devil is in the fine print.

Electoral politics can turn out of the budget as out what they are claimed to be— they will never change any policies nor bring transparency.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce ranking us close to the bottom on their insidious IP index, 43rd out of a total of 45 countries.

India is even below Brunei [Q-Sea-?], a nation known more for its rich royalty (not of the IP kind) than innovation/technology, only because it signed up to the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

India’s technological proficiency in pharmaceuticals came through the active breaking of multinational intellectual property.

But that is an old script and we need to move on.
ISRO sets the bar high

- An earth observation Carto + sat-2 series satellite and two other nano satellites were the only Indian satellites launched: the remaining were from the United States, Israel, the UAE, the Netherlands, Kazakhstan and Switzerland.
- 101 foreign satellites launched, 96 were from the U.S. and one each from the other five countries.
- Till now Russia held the record of launching 37 satellites in a single mission, in 2014, while the National Aeronautics and Space Administration of the U.S. launched 29 satellites in one go in 2013.
- Last June, ISRO had come close to NASA’s record by launching 20 satellites in one mission.
- But ISRO views the launch not as a mission to set a world record but as an opportunity to make full use of the capacity of the launch vehicle.
- The launch is particularly significant as ISRO now cements its position as a key player in the lucrative commercial space launch market by providing a cheaper yet highly reliable alternative.
- With the focus on ensuring that no two satellites collided with each other, the satellites were injected in pairs in opposite directions.
- Successive pairs of satellites were launched once the vehicle rotated by a few degrees, thereby changing the separation angle and time of separation to prevent any collision.
ISRO plans to launch more Cartosat-2 series satellites + ISRO nano satellites (INS).

Cartosat-2 is an Earth observation satellite in a sun-synchronous orbit or heliosynchronous orbit and the second of the Cartosat series of satellites.

A Sun-synchronous orbit is a geocentric orbit that combines altitude and inclination in such a way that the satellite passes over any given point of the planet's surface at the same local solar time.

Weighing around 680 kg at launch, its applications will mainly be towards cartography in India. It was launched by the PSLV on January 10, 2007.

With many Indian universities already building and launching nano satellites, the availability of a dedicated nano satellites platform is sure to boost space research in India.
What are Nanosatellites?

- Miniaturized satellites, with a wet mass between 1-10 kg.
- As small as 10x10x10 cm.
The foul air we breathe

- The State of Global Air 2017 study, conducted jointly by the Health Effects Institute + the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation,
- A concise, accessible report - for the latest trends in air quality and its impact on human health around the world.
- Which air pollution affects public health as well as tracking progress toward cleaner air.
- That the concentration of the most significant inhalable pollutant, fine particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometres or less (PM2.5), is growing in India. Mainly due to constructions + vehicles
- The rise in average annual population - weighted PM2.5 levels indicates that the Centre’s initiatives to help States reduce the burning of agricultural biomass and coal in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi have failed.
- The directions- National Green Tribunal [Q-inspiration from-?] to Delhi, which were reviewed last year, could not end open burning of garbage and straw, or curb the urban use of diesel - powered vehicles.
- PM2.5 level estimated in the international report rose from 60 micrograms per cubic metre in 1990 (the acceptable limit) to 74 in 2015, with a steady rise since 2011.
- Weak policy on pollution is leading to the premature death of an estimated 1.1 million Indians annually, and the number is growing, in contrast to China’s record of reducing such mortality.
Several studies show long-term evidence of a steady deterioration in air quality in many countries, and South Asia, dominated by India, is today among the worst places to live.

Although the central role played by burning of crop residues in causing pollution is well-known, and the Indian Agricultural Research Institute proposed steps to convert the waste into useful products such as enriched fodder, biogas, biofuel, compost and so on, little progress has been made.

The government has no one to blame but itself, since it has not been able to supply affordable seeder machinery in sufficient numbers to eliminate the need to remove the straw.

In a country producing about 500 million tonnes of crop residues annually, the issue needs to be addressed in mission mode.

Easy access to cheap solar cookers and biogas plants will also cut open burning, and help the rural economy.

On the health front, it is a matter of concern that in the most polluted cities, even moderate physical activity could prove harmful.

India’s clean-up priorities need to shift gear urgently, covering both farm and city.
The devil is in the fine print

- His announcement on electoral reforms in his Budget speech - Electoral reforms announced in the Budget are not what they are claimed to be — they will neither cleanse our politics nor bring transparency.

- Electoral funding reforms that the Election Commission and democratic reform activists have been asking for a long time.

All the four elements - of the scheme announced by the Finance Minister to “cleanse the system of funding of political parties”.

- 1)- First, he claimed to follow the Election Commission in proposing a ceiling of 2,000 on the amount of cash donation that a political party can receive from one person in a year.

- 2)- Second, he announced that political parties would be “entitled to receive” donations by cheque or digital mode from their donors.

- 3)- Third, he proposed a new scheme of Electoral Bonds.

- 4)- Fourth, he said that every political party would have to file its Income Tax return within the prescribed time limit in order to enjoy exemption from payment of income tax.

- He insisted that this scheme will bring about “greater transparency and accountability in political funding, while preventing future generation of black money”.
Now, the second and the fourth components of this scheme are redundant, as these are no different from what the existing law provides for - It does not require a new law

We needed a new law to mandate that the parties would be “required” to receive donations by cheque or digitally. The Finance Minister did not propose any such thing.

Similarly, the existing law requires political parties to file their income tax returns to enjoy tax exemption.

The Finance Bill now proposes a new proviso in Section 13A clause (d) of the Income Tax Act 1961 that explicitly says that the return should be filed within the stipulated time limit.

So far, all major parties have routinely flouted this requirement - Big national parties file their return months after the due date and many parties don’t file the return at all - No one gets penalised for this non-compliance.
Limiting cash donations

✓ The proposal about limiting cash donations to 2,000 has been widely misunderstood and therefore welcomed as a first step in the right direction - The existing limit of 20,000 on anonymous donation as per Section 23 of (RPA) has been left untouched.

✓ The Minister has merely proposed a new, additional, clause that limits cash donation from one source to 2,000 in one year

1) Notice that there was and is no requirement to disclose a contribution by cheque or digital transfer up to 20,000.

2) There was and is no limit to how much a party can receive from anonymous donations.

3) More importantly, there was and is no limit to how much overall a party can receive in cash from all sources put together.

✓ Following the Law Commission’s recommendations, the EC had proposed that no party should be allowed to receive more than 20 crore or 20% of its overall donations from anonymous sources - The Minister did not pay heed to this

✓ The fact is that most political funds remain in the pockets of party leaders.

✓ A small amount becomes party funds - A tiny fraction of party funds is placed in the bank accounts of the party to meet some expenses.
Trouble with electoral bonds

- Although the detailed rules are yet to be framed, the basic outline of the scheme is clear.
- Anyone who wants to donate to a political party - purchase bonds from authorised banks.
- This purchase will have to be in ‘white money’ against cheque and digital payments only. Once purchased, these bonds will be like bearer bonds.
- These bonds shall be redeemable only in the designated account of a registered political party within a prescribed period.
- So, the donor’s bank would know about who bought how much of Electoral Bonds, but not the name of the party which received it.
- The party’s bank would know the amount deposited through Bonds, but not the identity of the donor.
- The Income Tax authorities and the EC would not know anything: reporting of donor, beneficiary - no one except the fund giver and the fund receiver would know about this exchange done in white money with full tax exemption.
- Let us think of a classic quid pro quo - A government favours a business house in a mining or spectrum or oil deal to the tune of 5,000 crore.
- Once introduced, these bonds will mask whatever little transparency exists in the current system.
- Instead of the usual practice of converting black money into white, these bonds will push white money into a grey, if not black.
Planning for the people

- Indian cities are poorly planned and governed
- Section of the urban population lives outside “planned” neighbourhoods- Nevertheless, the state religiously performs the ritual of master planning every 10 or 20 years.
- Bengaluru is now in the midst of drawing up its master plan that will guide the city’s development till 2031.
- India’s urban planning system is seen as
  1) an undemocratic,
  3) non-participative and
  3) top-down exercise in which bureaucrats- limited influence in regulating urban development.

Urban planning and local democracy

- Even though the 74th Constitutional Amendment sought to empower urban local governments to enable them to function as “institutions of self-government”, they still have limited influence over how the city is planned.
- Urban planning, regulation of land use, and planning for economic and social development are functions listed under the 12th Schedule [Q-11th -?] of the Constitution and hence States are expected to devolve these tasks to the Municipal Corporation.
For metropolitan cities with a population of over 10 lakh, the 74th Amendment mandates the creation of Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPCs) which will integrate the plans prepared by local bodies within the metropolitan area.

For every city with a population of over three lakh, the Constitution also mandates the setting up of Ward Committees to carry out municipal functions within the ward.

However, more than two decades after the passing of the 74th Amendment, we find that these institutional frameworks for decentralised governance are yet to take full shape in most cities.

An urban planning system, which is in line with the spirit of the 74th Amendment, would require that instead of development authorities — agencies only answerable to the State government.

Beyond static master plans

India’s current urban planning regime is that it is still based on the outmoded practice of static, land use-based master plans—modified in the U.K.

Under this planning regime, master plans are principally restricted to zoning which segregates areas into various categories: residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, etc.

Our planning legislations do not require the master plan to design the transport, water and energy networks of the city—these elements of the plan are not statutorily binding.

What makes these sectoral plans even more difficult to implement is the fact that these functions are typically under the jurisdiction of multiple parastatal (political authority) agencies.
It is important to explore alternative approaches to urban planning.

In an environment where municipal functions are carried out by multiple agencies, it is important to develop new institutional mechanisms for the intersectoral coordination and implementation of plans.

Instead of freezing plans for 10 or 20 years, there should be mechanisms providing for the periodic review of plans.

An inflexible urban planning system which is ostensibly based on rationalistic and scientific criteria, and therefore “apolitical”, is prone to be more exclusionary.

Hence, we should explore new frameworks for urban planning that respect the spirit of local democracy envisaged under the 74th Amendment, integrate multiple sectors within the plan, provide for multi-scale planning processes, and view the plan as a dynamic, living document.
Cartography is the study and practice of making maps.

A cryogenic rocket engine is a rocket engine that uses a cryogenic fuel or oxidizer, that is, its fuel or oxidizer (or both) are gases liquefied and stored at very low temperatures. Notably, these engines were one of the main factors of NASA's success in reaching the Moon by the Saturn V rocket.

National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 (NGT) is an Act of the Parliament of India which enables creation of a special tribunal to handle the expeditious disposal of the cases pertaining to environmental issues. It draws inspiration from the India's constitutional provision of Article 21, which assures the citizens of India the right to a healthy environment.

Premature deaths are deaths that occur before a person reaches an expected age, for instance, age 75. Many of these deaths are considered to be preventable.

A bearer bond is a bond or debt security issued by a business entity such as a corporation, or a government. As a bearer instrument, it differs from the more common types of investment securities in that it is unregistered – no records are kept of the owner, or the transactions involving ownership.

Brunei is a tiny nation on the island of Borneo, in 2 distinct sections surrounded by Malaysia and the South China Sea. It's known for its beaches and biodiverse rainforest, much of it protected within reserves. The capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, is home to the opulent Jame’Asr Hassanil Bolkiah mosque and its 29 golden domes.

Eleventh Schedule It was added by 73rd amendment and has list of subjects under the Panchayat Raj institutions or rural local government.