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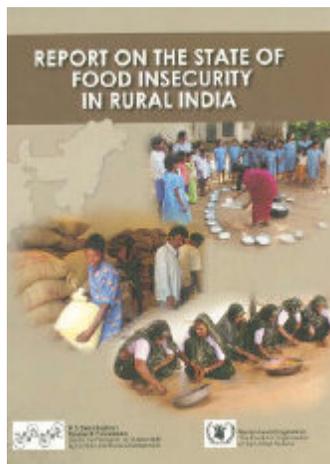
BOOK REVIEW

HINDU 26.1.10 BOOK REVIEW

Whistle-blower on food front

D. NARASIMHA REDDY

The looming threat of food insecurity and steps to tackle it



REPORT ON THE STATE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN RURAL INDIA — World Food Programme: Pub. by M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, 3rd Cross Street, Taramani Industrial Area, Chennai-600113.

In the context of the widely shared concern about the threat of climate change to foodgrain production, particularly in warmer regions such as South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and high food price inflation, this report serves as a whistle-blower to the looming food insecurity in India. It is an update of the Rural Food Insecurity Atlas 2001 brought out by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. Based on seven indicators, a composite index of food and nutrition insecurity is developed. Each indicator is graded into five levels and the results are presented in the form of maps as well as tables for 19 States and for the country as a

whole. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the measures taken by the state with view to provisioning for food security, and their impact.

Rise of anaemia

In spite of taking a relatively low calorific norm of less than 1890 K cal. per capita per day (comparable to average per capita per day consumption of the lowest decile) and a high growth rate of about four per cent in per capita income between 1993-94 and 2004-05, the population under calorific insecurity remained at about 13 per cent. Ironically, the relatively better developed States like Tamil Nadu (23.4 per cent), Karnataka (20.5 per cent) and Maharashtra (19.7 per cent) have a much higher proportion of population in this category than, for instance, Bihar (10 per cent) and Orissa (15.4 per cent). As for access to safe drinking water, the situation has improved over the years. Yet, the deprived population is very high at 27 per cent (2001). Worst is the case of accessibility to toilets within the living premises, with 78 per cent of the households lacking it. Quite disturbing is that, during the reforms-driven high growth period 1998-99 to 2005-06, the incidence of anaemia has actually risen from 53.90 per cent to 58.20 per cent in rural women and from 75.30 per cent to 81.20 per cent in rural children. Stunted children represent yet another aspect of nutritional deficiency that severely affects their performance as they grow, and the incidence for the country as a whole was as high as 40.70 per cent even in 2005-06. The composite index of rural food insecurity shows a girdle of high vulnerability region, from Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa in the East, through Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh to Gujarat in the West.

Less priority

The thrust of the findings is that over the years, especially since the advent of economic reforms, issues related to food and nutritional insecurity have been getting less and less priority at the policy level. The

euphoria over foodgrain self-sufficiency, combined with policy shift towards structural adjustment, resulted in decrease in public investment in areas such as agricultural infrastructure, agricultural research and development, extension services, and development of right technology. This in turn affected growth of productivity especially on small farms, with a far-reaching impact on foodgrain availability in the future. In the name of fiscal constraint, food procurement, storage and distribution needs are sought to be assessed in terms of costs, leaving more room for market players in the food regime, which is having its own toll in the form of high food prices.

The Public Distribution System (PDS), the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) get special attention as measures of state intervention. Tracing the origins of the PDS to the years of scarcity in the 1950s and the '60s as a part of rationing, the report finds that there was a healthy spread of universal PDS in the '80s. But in the '90s there was a set-back. The Targeted PDS was introduced ostensibly to reduce the cost of food subsidy, to check leakages, and to prevent the diversion of grain. None of these objectives was achieved effectively. Worse, it resulted in high cost due to the holding of more stocks and the exclusion of many poor households.

In India, given the regionally adverse concentration of foodgrain production, the report emphasises that food security could be ensured only through improved universal PDS with adequate accessibility to the poor. The effectiveness of the ICDS in improving the nutritional and health status of poor children and the benefits that have flowed from the mid-day meal scheme by way of increased school enrolments are well recognised. Yet, resource allocation continues to be meagre. The fact

that the Supreme Court had to intervene in activating these schemes is a sharp reflection of the state's weak commitment.

Recommendations

The report goes on to make a number of recommendations to increase the availability of foodgrains. They include more public investment to enhance farm productivity, offering proper support prices for all foodgrains, and addressing concerns on the food and nutrition front through a lifecycle approach that envisages the strengthening of the ICDS (for pre-school children), the MDMS (for the school-going children) and the universal PDS. It emphasises that, for a sustainable food security system, the availability of sufficient stocks and an effective control over their release and distribution are essential requirements. This is of immediate relevance. One hopes that the state heeds the advice, realises the limitations of monetary measures, and acts on removing the structural constraints on the food front.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Keep an eye on public borrowing

Mythili Bhusnurmath

If the impending Great Depression has been averted and has taken the shape of a more-manageable Great Recession, the reason, in large part, is due

to the phenomenal fiscal and monetary easing the world witnessed in the past few months. Countries such as Iceland with debt-GDP of 300% and Japan (200%) might be a bit of an exception; but there's no disputing that the sharp run-up in public sector debt is likely to prove one of the most enduring legacies of the 2007-09 financial crises in the US and elsewhere. Since 2007, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development government deficits have risen by 7% of GDP to just over 8%. Debt, excluding contingent liabilities, has risen by about 25% of GDP to just over 100%.

Fears over sovereign risk have risen sharply in the past few months as investors have become increasingly alarmed over rising budget deficits and record levels of government bond issuance needed to repay public debt. As a result, the cost of insuring against the risk of debt default by European nations is now higher than for top investment-grade companies. Outsized deficits and epic bank bailouts may be useful in fighting a downturn, but what is the long-run macroeconomic impact of high levels of government debt?

In a recent National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) paper, Carmen M Reinhart and Kenneth S Rogoff look at new data on 44 countries spanning about 200 years and covering a wide range of political systems, institutions, exchange rate arrangements and historic

circumstances to assess the long-term consequences of such debt.

Not surprisingly, they find that contrary to widespread belief that a return to robust growth will see debt burdens shrink, countries seldom ‘grow’ their way out of deep debt burdens. In reality, high government debt extracts a toll in terms of both lower growth and higher inflation. Over the past two centuries, debt in excess of 90% has typically been associated with mean growth of 1.7% versus 3.7% when debt is low (under 30% of GDP) and over 3% for moderately-indebted countries with a debt-to-GDP ratio of between 30% and 90% of GDP.

The same result is seen for emerging markets. During the period 1900-2009, for example, median and average GDP growth hovered around 4-4.5% for levels of debt below 90% of GDP but median growth fell markedly to 2.9% for high debt (above 90%). The decline is even greater for the average growth rate, which fell to 1%.

Debt thresholds are importantly country-specific; nonetheless, the paper finds that as debt levels rise towards historical limits, risk premia begin to rise sharply, presenting highly-indebted governments with difficult tradeoffs. As a result, even countries that are committed to fully repaying their debts are forced to dramatically tighten fiscal policy in order to appear credible to investors and, thereby, reduce risk premia.

However, there the similarity with advanced economies ends. When it comes to inflation, while advanced countries as a group show no apparent link between inflation and public debt levels — though some like the US have experienced higher inflation when debt-GDP is high — emerging markets with higher debt levels show significantly higher levels of inflation. In fact, the median inflation rate more than doubles

— from less than 7% to 16% — as debt rises from a low (0 to 30%) range to above 90%.

The authors add a couple of caveats. First, the relationship between government debt and real GDP growth is weak for debt-GDP ratios below a threshold of 90% of GDP. Second, emerging markets face lower thresholds for external debt (public and private). When external debt reaches 60% of GDP, annual growth declines by about 2%; for higher levels, growth rates are roughly cut in half.

Either way, with or without the caveats, there's no getting away from the grim warning.

(Growth in a time of debt: NBER Working Paper No. 15639, January 2010, Carmen M Reinhart, University of Maryland, and Kenneth S Rogoff, Harvard University)

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ECONOMY WILL RECOVER

Arjun Sengupta

Dec.28 The Indian economy should recover from the recession caused by the global meltdown. India's exposure to the world economy is quite limited. It is mainly through the exports market and partly through foreign investment flows either as equity or debt capital that financed private investment. The extent of the dependence, however, is quite low. The recession in the exports market affects only few sectors, such as textile and labour-intensive manufactures and some industrial raw materials and engineering goods with limited feedback on other intermediate products. The effect of recession on final demand, mostly from domestic market, remains limited when there is a downturn, although expansion in demand often is significant in pushing up domestic production.

The fluctuations in capital flows may, however, have much larger impact, especially when an increasing amount of private investment has been financed by foreign borrowing. Now that the international capital market is reviving and the rate of return in the Indian industries remains reasonably high, the revival of the international capital market will act as an impetus for Indian investment. The existence of a large domestic market provided a basic cushion for the Indian economy to the negative effect of global recession. But as the world demands start picking up the market response would go beyond the domestic interdependence to further increase the growth impulses in the Indian economy.

I, therefore, feel that the Indian economy will get back its high growth trajectory in 2010 unless some unforeseen development takes place.

Several reforms may improve the matters, but they are not that important to keep the growth momentum. The investors should not lose their confidence in the continuation of the growth outcomes, which would result if there is no reversal of policies.

But does the revival of the economic growth answer all the major concerns of Indian development? By now, almost two decades of high economic growth after the economic reforms of 1991 have taught us a lesson that high rate of growth may be necessary, but is insufficient to produce the inclusive development that has been the principal goal of the Indian policy. Inclusive development does not mean that all sections of the economy should experience some development. Sustained high growth for some years will, in due course, impact most sectors through increasing demand and supply and general increase in productivity. Inclusive development implies increasing equity, improving the livelihood conditions of the poor and more than the average growth of the economy. Nobody in our country today would ask for growth for the sake of growth. It should improve the welfare of the people reducing the disparity in income and opportunity, poverty and destitution, lack of health and education. The least advantaged must improve their welfare more than the national average.

A number of studies have shown that high performance of economic growth in India has not made much impact on the income and welfare disparities. India is now divided — the poor and the vulnerable and the rich luxury consumer.

I think the challenge to the Indian economy next year and in the years to follow would be — how to change the dismal dichotomy between two Indias? This division not only makes mockery of tom-tomming our high growth rate as the index of prosperity, it is also fraught with the danger of widespread violence and anarchy forcing the policymakers to reverse

the reform process with investors eventually losing their confidence in our economic prospects. If that happens, it will take very little time for the high growth performance of the country to collapse. It is high time that we change the emphasis of our economic policy and plan for an inclusive development that removes the prevailing disparities.

The United Progressive Alliance government has worked out major programmes, which can tilt the balance in favour of the poor, if faithfully implemented. Five programmes — National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Bharat Nirman, rural infrastructure including roads, irrigation, sanitation, and electricity, Savarashiksha Abhyan and Rural Health Mission — would take us a long way towards changing the nature of our economic development. If the government added to this the employment creating programmes in our informal economy, providing the 92 per cent of our unorganised workers access to enterprise, credit, technology, and marketing, it would place us firmly on the path of development bringing equity and social justice to the high level of economic growth.

We have, however, learnt a major lesson from our attempt to implement these programmes — they are not dependent only on provision of finance or public expenditure. With economic growth, the volume of revenue realisation has increased over the last five years, which has allowed us to increase public expenditure on these projects. But we have failed to work out effective delivery of these programmes, without leakage and inefficiency and with accountability and transparency. We no doubt need financial provision, but more importantly we need organised public action, making the stakeholders responsible for delivering the programmes and being accountable through a proper process of evaluation and scrutiny and mid-course correction when necessary. In other words, we need a different approach to governance

where accountability should be established, whether by the panchayati raj institutions or local level organisations. We need a new model of governance.

Planning for development in India, from now on, should be done from the point of view of equilibrating demand and supply and generating investment and capacity expansion of specific sectors where there are bottlenecks. The methods of carrying out those exercises will have to be much more decentralised going to the grassroots level. A simple top-down approach will not work because the top does not have and cannot have all the information necessary for implementing the programmes.

Apart from decentralisation, this new model of governance involves a new model of accountability and transparency holding the different agents responsible for carrying out specific functions. Where agents fail in discharging the responsibilities, there should be a mechanism of correction as well as reprimanding and punishing. The government machinery at the district, state, and Central levels must fully engage in identifying their responsibilities. They would derive their legitimacy from carrying out that exercise of governance and there should be a method of changing them if they fail. I very much hope that year 2010 would mark the beginning of a process of reforming our system of governance, so that we can achieve our cherished goal of economic growth with equity.

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EDUCATION

HINDU 26.1.10 EDUCATION

Overhaul, don't scrap, deemed university system

R. Sethuraman

To eliminate a time-tested policy without diagnosing the reason for its sickness will be counterproductive of achieving qualitative growth in higher education.

The intention of the Union Human Resource Development Minister to improve the quality of higher education is in the right direction.

However, his recent announcement on the proposed National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) Bill to scrap the concept of deemed universities should be made applicable only to new institutions that aspire for this status. To apply the bill to the existing universities will mean hijacking a sound concept that has supported the growth of the higher education system.

There are good deemed universities offering innovative degree programmes, engaging in quality research leading to publications, and providing high-quality teaching. The government's role must be to identify and encourage such deemed universities and similar institutions by conferring the deemed university status. To eliminate a time-tested policy without diagnosing the reason for its sickness will be counterproductive of the main objective of achieving qualitative growth in higher education.

The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) devoted a chapter in its report to deemed universities and said the government should consider a method of creating university charters similar to what obtains in

many countries, where universities are set up not through acts of legislature but through charters granted by the head of the state. “This course may also be adopted in our country, at any rate, with regard to the new Universities, which are established by the conversion of existing Institutions.” Thus was born the concept of deemed university under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956.

It was in the best interest of higher education that the Commission encouraged the creation of deemed universities. It insisted on firsthand appraisal of competence, spirit and achievement and not on arbitrary rules and regulations during the time of conferment of the status. Between 1956 and 2004, 92 institutions were granted the deemed university status. Between 2004 and 2009 an additional 36 institutions, excluding NITs, were notified as deemed universities. This five-year-period saw an explosive growth (by 40 per cent) in their number.

The virus that spread during 2004-09 was in the manner the status was conferred — ignoring the conceptual purpose of deemed universities and the relevant provisions in the statutory bodies. Were not institutions that did not have adequate facilities, required faculty and were not engaged in research granted conditional deemed university status in the hope that they would make good the deficit after becoming university? Can a driver’s licence be issued conditionally, hoping that the licensee will learn to drive within one month? Off-campus centres and sister institutions run by a parent deemed university were brought within its ambit — a case of backdoor entry.

It is undeniable that the *ad hoc*, arbitrary and non-transparent process between 2004-09 has damaged the system. This is the right time to set right these anomalies and ensure that the deemed university system is put on the right track. But removing the very concept of deemed

university as envisaged in the proposed bill will only perpetuate inefficiencies. The proposed bill will only put the system back in a closely regulated and regimental framework with little scope for innovation and academic independence. Just as there are bad deemed universities, there are equally bad government universities.

Why should a good concept be messed up by the creators and then scrapped because it was messed up? Misuse and abuse of power (by some government and private participants) has rattled the boat. The government must steer the boat through troubled waters without destroying it. It is easy to destroy but difficult to create.

(The writer is Vice-Chancellor of SASTRA University, Thanjavur)

ENVIRONMENT

Himalayan meltdown

Bibek Debroy

Glaciers in the Himalaya are receding faster than in any other part of the world and, if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 and perhaps sooner is very high if the earth keeps warming at the current rate. Its total area will likely shrink from the present 500,000 to 100,000 (square) km by the year 2035 (WWF, 2005).” This is paragraph 10.6.2 from Working Group II’s report (“Impacts, Adoption and Vulnerability”) in the IPCC’s 2007 Fourth Assessment Report on climate change.

The IPCC is a respected organisation. The press release for 2007 Nobel Peace Prize said: “Through the scientific reports it has issued over the past two decades, the IPCC has created an ever-broader informed consensus about the connection between human activities and global warming. Thousands of scientists and officials from over one hundred countries have collaborated to achieve greater certainty as to the scale of the warming.” The IPCC ostensibly has tight procedures for preparation, review, acceptance, adoption, approval and publication of reports. On January 20, the IPCC issued a statement that said: “In drafting the paragraph in question, the clear and well-established standards of evidence, required by the IPCC procedures, were not applied properly.”

That’s not good enough. What was this WWF source and should the IPCC, which prides itself on peer-reviewed scientific evidence, have used it? This is a report by the WWF’s Nepal programme, titled “An Overview of Glaciers, Glacier Retreat, and Subsequent Impacts in Nepal, India and China.” In the India section, it said: “In 1999, a report by the Working Group on

Himalayan Glaciology (WGHG) of the International Commission for Snow and Ice (ICSI) stated: ‘Glaciers in the Himalayas are receding faster than in any other part of the world and, if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 is very high.’” There is more about glaciers vanishing within 40 years (citing the New Scientist), but 2035 figures in the quote given, and the buck passes further to WGHG and ICSI. Subsequently, the WWF said: “This statement was used in good faith but it is now clear that this was erroneous and should be disregarded.” To quote Alice, it gets “curiouser and curiouser”. The ICSI report in question was published in 1999 and authored by Syed Hasnain of JNU. It is titled, “Report on Himalayan Glaciology” and says absolutely nothing about Himalayan glaciers or 2035. However, there is Kotlyakov and Down to Earth.

On the Climate Science Watch website, Rick Piltz has pointed to a Down to Earth piece published in April 1999 and titled, “Glaciers Beating Retreat”. This stated: “‘Glaciers in the Himalaya are receding faster than in any other part of the world and, if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 is very high,’ says the International Commission for Snow and Ice (ICSI) in its recent study on Asian glaciers. ‘But if the Earth keeps getting warmer at the current rate, it might happen much sooner,’ says Syed Iqbal Hasnain of the School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Hasnain is also the chairperson of the Working Group on

Himalayan Glaciology (WGHG), constituted in 1995 by the ICSI. ‘The glacier will be decaying at rapid, catastrophic rates. Its total area will shrink from the present 500,000 to 100,000 square km by the year 2035,’ says former ICSI president V.M. Kotlyakov in the report ‘Variations of snow and ice in the past and present on a global and regional scale’.”

So the buck now passes to Kotlyakov. In 1996, the report “Variations in Snow and Ice in the past and at present on a Global and Regional Scale” was published by UNESCO and edited by V. Kotlyakov. As has been reported in media, this report said nothing about 2035. Instead, the year

mentioned was 2350. “The extrapolar glaciation of the Earth will be decaying at rapid, catastrophic rates — its total area will shrink from 500,000 to 100,000 km² by the year 2350.” What occurred is now being interpreted as a typo, an inadvertent replacement of 2350 by 2035.

Pointing to similarity in language between the Down to Earth report and the IPCC publication, Rick Piltz argues authors of the IPCC report based themselves on that article and didn't even bother to read WWF, ICSI or Kotlyakov. So much for tight procedures. An organisation that proclaims scientific evidence as its bulwark relies on journalistic accounts. Had it been otherwise, surely sources like ICSI or Kotlyakov would have been checked and verified and cited in references. The reference instead is to the WWF. Thus, the question is more than a mere typo. Admittedly, the IPCC's combined report has almost 3000 pages and the Working Group II report itself has almost 1000 pages and, so far, no one has yet pinpointed another such Himalayan blunder. Nor does the 2035/2350 bloomer dilute the substance of the IPCC's work and the importance of climate change.

Nevertheless, two questions arise. First, notwithstanding proclaimed stringent procedures, the IPCC's procedures leave a lot to be desired. Otherwise, scrutinised by such a battery of scientists, such a blunder ought not to have occurred.

The second question is more serious. Suggestions are now floating around that the error was deliberate rather than inadvertent given that we know there are interests in favour of alarmist positions on climate change. Sunday Mail's David Rose spoke to Murari Lal, lead author of the offending Asia section of the IPCC report, and this is what Lal reportedly said: “We thought that if we can highlight it, it will impact policy makers and politicians and encourage them to take some concrete action.” In Rose's words, rather than Murari Lal's, Lal admitted IPCC knew there was no robust evidence for the 2035 claim. If true, this is an explicit activist agenda, not one associated with objective science. It's because of this the IPCC has a lot of explaining to do, not because of a possible typo. Indeed, questions have also been raised about quality of

scientific evidence linking climate change to melting of glaciers. Extrapolating further, questions have been raised about evidence on climate change itself. Had it not been for the 2035 claim, developing countries would have faced less pressure in Copenhagen. Did the IPCC consciously cater to creating such pressure?

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Ozone hole's healing may worsen global warming

Sindya N. Bhanoo

That the hole in the Earth's ozone layer is slowly mending is considered a big victory for environmental policymakers. But in a new report, scientists say there is a downside: Its repair may contribute to global warming.

It turns out that the hole led to the formation of moist, brighter-than-usual clouds that shielded the Antarctic region from the warming induced by greenhouse gas emissions over the last two decades, scientists write in Wednesday's issue of *Geophysical Research Letters*.

"The recovery of the hole will reverse that," said Ken Carslaw, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Leeds and a co-author of the paper. "Essentially, it will accelerate warming in certain parts of the Southern Hemisphere."

The hole in the layer, discovered above Antarctica in the mid-1980s, caused wide alarm because ozone plays a crucial role in protecting life on Earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation.

The hole was largely attributed to the human use of chlorofluorocarbons, chemical compounds found in refrigerants and aerosol cans that dissipate ozone. Under an international protocol adopted in 1987, many countries phased out the compounds, helping the ozone to start reconstituting itself over the Antarctic.

For their research, the authors of the new study relied on meteorological data recorded between 1980 and 2000, including global wind speeds recorded by the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts.

The data show that the hole in the ozone layer generated high-speed winds that caused sea salt to be swept up into the atmosphere to form moist clouds. The clouds reflect more of the Sun's powerful rays and help fend off warming in the Antarctic atmosphere, the scientists write.

The sea spray influx resulted in an increase in cloud droplet concentration of about 46 per cent in some regions of the Southern Hemisphere, Mr. Carslaw said.

But Judith Perlwitz, a University of Colorado professor and a research scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said that although the paper's data were sound, she questioned the conclusions.

Even as the ozone layer recovers, greenhouse gas emissions are expected to expand, she said.

She predicted that the rise in temperatures would cause wind speeds to increase over time and have the same cloud-forming effect that the ozone hole now has.

Ms. Perlwitz also pointed out that the ozone hole was not expected to fully recover to pre-1980 levels until at least 2060, according to the World Meteorological Organisation's most recent report on the issue.

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HINDU 25.1.10 ENVIRONMENT

Towards sustainable water management

T.N. Narasimhan

An international private-social group foresees India's water demand exceeding availability by a factor of two by 2030. Time is now for India to take on the daunting task of formulating a unifying national water policy.

The 2030 Water Resources Group is a consortium of private-social sector organisations formed in 2008 to provide insights into emerging world-wide water issues. In a report, “Charting our water future” issued in 2009, the group provides a candid, fact-based integrated assessment of the global water situation over the next two decades.

Globally, current withdrawals of about 4,500 cubic km exceed the availability of about 4,200 cubic km. By 2030, the demand is expected to increase to about 6,900 cubic km, with a slight drop in availability to 4,100 cubic km. Thus, by 2030, a global deficit of 40 per cent is forecast. For India, the annual demand is expected to increase to almost 1,500 cubic km, against a projected availability of 744 cubic km; a deficit of 50 per cent. The report admits unavoidable uncertainties in these estimates. As an independent check, an alternative perspective merits consideration.

India's average annual precipitation is about 1,170 mm, and the land area is 3.28 million sq. km. Thus, the volume of annual precipitation input is 3,840 cubic km. The projected availability of 744 cubic km

constitutes about 19 per cent of this amount. In comparison, California, known for its spectacular hydraulic-engineering structures, diverts about 18 per cent of its annual rainfall. For a variety of reasons, California is already contemplating a 20 per cent reduction in water use over the coming decade. Conservatively, if we assume that India may harness 15 per cent of rainfall with careful management, an annual availability of about 600 cubic km is perhaps a reasonable figure to comprehend the scope of India's water crisis.

Looking to the future, the report stresses that closing the gap between supply and demand will be very difficult. Rather than claiming to provide solutions to all water problems, the authors cautiously consider the report a starting point for meaningful dialogue among all stakeholders for action towards credible solutions. In this spirit, we may examine the implications of their findings to India's water situation.

In the broadest sense, two questions arise: What do the findings portend for India's economic growth? How should India respond to the impending crisis?

Concerning economic growth, even a modest 6 per cent annual growth implies a real tripling of the economy by 2030. Is this achievable, if the annual availability is limited to about 600 cubic km? What rate of economic growth should India reasonably plan for?

The question how India should respond is of fundamental importance. India's greatest challenge is to set in place an equitable, efficient system of governance for sharing a finite resource among all segments of society, simultaneously preserving the integrity of

the resource for future generations.

At the time of independence, the annual availability of water in abundant quantities was taken for granted, and India's Constitution declared water to be a State subject, with the Union government playing a role in inter-State issues. The Constitution does not explicitly recognise water's unique attributes as a finite resource, widely variable in space and time, and vital for the sustenance of all living things.

At the beginning of the 21st century, when confronted with the imperative of sharing this vital resource among all segments of society according to the values of justice and equality assured in the preamble, one finds a conspicuous lack of philosophical authority necessary to make decisions on the allocation, prioritisation, protection, regulation, and management of water resources. This want of a philosophical basis is manifest in a lack of a national water policy. If so, what might be an appropriate philosophical approach?

India is about as large as Europe without Russia. Both have long histories of human habitation. India comprises 28 States and 7 Union Territories. Europe is a union of 27 independent nations. In 2000, the European Union issued the far-reaching Water Framework Directive with the goal of achieving sustainable management of water. The Directive requires all member-states to establish water laws conforming to common hydrological principles applied over river basins, with the active participation of citizens. The Directive's philosophical foundation is set forth in the preamble: "Water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such."

In 1976, a committee on Earth Resources, Time, and Man of the

International Union of Geological Sciences observed: “Mankind is on the threshold of a transition from a brief interlude of exponential growth to a much longer period characterised by rates of change so slow as to be regarded essentially as a period of non-growth. Although the impending period of transition to very low growth rates poses no insuperable physical or biological difficulties, those aspects of our current economic and social thinking which are based on the premise that current rates of growth can be sustained indefinitely must be revised. Failing to respond promptly and rationally to these impending changes could lead to a global ecological crisis in which human beings will be the main victims.” This observation clearly anticipates the findings of the 2030 Water Resources Group.

Even with the best available technologies, the finiteness and unpredictable variability of water resource systems place severe limits on human aspirations for prosperity. At present, India is in a difficult position of not only accepting this reality but also having to take concrete steps to adapting to the reality.

A related development. A November 2009 report, “A framework for India’s water policy” of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, discusses India’s water endowments and the human challenges confronting sustainable water management.

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LAW

The recovery of India

Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Constitutions not only allocate authority, define the limits of power or enunciate values. They also constitute our sense of history and shape a sense of self. They often mark a new beginning and define future horizons. Despite the centrality of the Constitution to our social and political life, it has been ill served by our historical imagination. In a very mundane sense, with a handful of exceptions, there is no serious or deep historiography associated with our Constitution, one that can put it in proper historical and philosophical perspective.

But this is in part because the promulgation of India's Constitution was made possible by a sensibility that few contemporary historians can recover. The simplest way of characterising this lack is that while the Constitution was an extraordinary work of synthesis, our historical imagination is given to divisiveness. There is no more striking example of this than the way in which members of the Constituent Assembly have been divided up and appropriated rather than seen in relation to each other. Ambedkar, Patel, Nehru, Prasad and a host of others are now icons in partisan ideological battles, as if to describe Ambedkar as a Dalit, or Patel as proto-BJP, or Nehru as a Congressman exhausts all that needs to be said about them. The greatness of each one of them consists not just in the distinctive points of view they brought

together, but their extraordinary ability to work together despite so many differences. The Congress itself facilitated the entry of so many people with an anti-Congress past into key roles in the assembly. It takes a wilful historical amnesia to forget the fact that the men and women of the assembly worked with an extraordinary consciousness that they needed and, in some senses, completed each other. We have taken this

sensibility too much for granted. Just look at Nepal to see what happens when this is absent in constitutional deliberations.

But this ability to work with difference was also complemented by another quality that is rarer still: the ability to acknowledge true value. Part of this was facilitated by the sheer intellectualism of so many of the members. Their collective philosophical depth, historical knowledge, legal and forensic acumen and sheer command over language is enviable. It ensured that the grounds of discussion remained intellectual. But what was also remarkable was their ability to acknowledge greatness in others. It was this quality that allowed Nehru and Patel, despite deep differences in outlook and temperament, to acknowledge each other. Their greatest act of statesmanship was to not let their differences produce a debilitating polarisation, one that could have wrecked India. They could combine both loyalty and frankness. Even as partial a biographer of Nehru's as S. Gopal conceded that what prevented the rupture was their "mutual regard and Patel's stoic decency". But its foundation was a powerful sense that you did not have to agree with someone to acknowledge their greatness. Nothing has marred historiography more than its penchant for simple-minded litmus tests that condemns or appropriates individuals at the altar of slogans.

The third sensibility so many leaders of the Constituent Assembly carried was a creative form of self-doubt. They were all far more self-conscious that they were taking decisions under conditions of great uncertainty. Was it that easy to know what the consequences of a particular position were going to be? And to an extent they understood their mutual vulnerabilities. Nehru's answer to Patel's worry that Nehru was losing confidence in him was that he was losing confidence in himself. And anyone who has read the tortured last pages of *The Discovery of India* will understand how much Nehru meant it. Much of the cheap condescension of posterity heaped upon these figures would vanish if we could show as much self-awareness and a sense of vulnerability that our founding generation did. Many of them made mistakes of judgment. But you have more confidence that they were

more likely to acknowledge that, than most of those who comment upon them.

Even a cursory reading of the '50s will give you a vivid sense of men and women struggling to make sense of their own responsibilities. And despite the fact that we had inherited a state from the British, so much of what we were undertaking was experimental. It is, for instance, fair to worry that the courts in the '50s were conservative. On the other hand what did it mean for a court in a parliamentary system to carve its own authority, without being impotent on the one hand, or overreaching on the other? How do these complex negotiations take place? Our retrospective judgments have more than likely impeded our ability to understand the true depth of many of these dilemmas.

The fourth sensibility which we have lost sight of is the importance of form. We are all instinctive Marxists in the sense that we think of institutions, forms, laws as so many contrivances to consolidate power. To a certain extent this is the case. But this was a generation with a deep sense that forms and institutions are not merely instrumental to an immediate goal, they are the enabling framework that allows a society the possibilities of self-renewal. Forms also allow trust to be built; they give a signal that power, even when it seeks to do good, is not being exercised in a way that is arbitrary. This is why they took the assembly and its deliberations seriously.

The fifth feature of their sensibility is a sense of judgment. This is a very intangible political quality. Part of this is the ability to deliberate in a way that takes on board all the relevant considerations, and does not make politics hostage to a single mission. Part of this is ability to judge one's own power and place in relation to others and the public at large. This gives a better sense of when to compromise and when to press a point, when to curb one's ego and when to project power.

The Constitution was made possible by a sensibility that was liberal at its core. Not liberal in the eviscerated ideological sense, but in the deeper virtues from which it sprang: an ability to combine individuality with mutual regard, intellectualism with a democratic sensibility,

conviction with a sense of fallibility, ambition with a commitment to institutions, and hopes for a future with due regard for the past and present. Much as we have internalised the benefits of the Constitution we risk losing sight of the dispositions needed to sustain it.

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POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Line of Least Resistance

Jagmohan

The report of the Kashmir Working Group, headed by Justice Saghir Ahmed, has once again brought the issue of autonomy to the limelight. This group was set up in pursuance of the decision announced by the Prime Minister of India at the Round Table Conference held in Srinagar on May 24-25, 2006.

The report, submitted in December 2009, is thick in volume but thin in content. After giving a detailed narration of the past events which are already known in knowledgeable circles, the report contents itself by saying: "The question of autonomy and its demand can be examined in the light of the 'Kashmir Accord' or in some other manner or on the basis of some formula as the present Prime Minister may deem fit and appropriate so as to restore the autonomy to the extent possible". It makes no specific recommendation with regard to withdrawal or otherwise of any Union law or provision of the Indian Constitution which had been earlier extended to the state and which is alleged to have eroded the autonomy of the state.

The predicament of Justice Saghir Ahmed is understandable. If he had examined each and every "extension", he would have found that all the extensions, made from time to time, were justified not only on legal and constitutional grounds but also on the grounds of establishing a smooth "working-relationship" between the Union and the state. He would have also found that none of these extensions has in any way undermined the personality or identity of Kashmir, or what is loosely called "Kashmiriyat". Such findings would certainly not have endeared Justice

Saghir Ahmed to all those elements who have for long been exploiting the constitutional illiteracy of the Kashmiri masses to secure their narrow political ends. He has, therefore, chosen to follow the line of least resistance, evade the real issues and make no concrete observations, suggestions or recommendations. His report would provide hardly any guidance for practical action, either to the Union or state government.

Regrettably, over the years, attempts have been made by vested interests to present a misleading picture of the historical backdrop, hide facts and propagate that the autonomy earlier promised has been denied to the state. These attempts have not succeeded. But they have caused misgivings amongst the common Kashmiris. It is time the Union government takes energetic steps to remove these misgivings and gives extensive publicity to the true facts and background of the case.

The actual position is that the Delhi Agreement, which was arrived at in 1952, after detailed discussions between Sheikh Abdullah and Jawaharlal Nehru, itself provided for establishing a working relationship between the state and Union, and this could be done by extending to the state certain laws and Articles of the Indian Constitution. For example, financial arrangements had to be made by abolishing custom barriers and providing Central assistance to the state whose own resources were wholly inadequate. At present, in addition to special packages granted from time to time, the entire planned expenditure and a substantial part of non-planned expenditure of the state are met by the Central government. The state is also treated as a "special category state". Whereas most of the states get central financial assistance in the ratio of 30 per cent grant and 70 per cent loan, Jammu and Kashmir receives 90 per cent grant and only 10 per cent loan.

This shows how deeply the state is linked financially with the Centre. What would happen if this link is severed? None of the protagonists of so-called autonomy cares to answer this question. The State Autonomy Committee, set up by the government and whose report was received in April 1999, merely contented itself by saying that "the matter needed to be discussed".

If funds continue to flow to Kashmir from the Union, as at present, and the state is allowed, as is being advocated in certain quarters, to have an exclusive say on subjects other than defence, external affairs and communications, it could enact Islamic civil and criminal laws and even set up Sharia courts, on the same lines as has been done in Pakistan, and make it virtually a theocratic entity. Would not such a scenario violate the very Preamble of our Constitution and also amount to secularism financing a theocracy propelled by forces of fundamentalism?

The problem of J&K has not been insufficiency but surfeit of powers. During 1977-82, for example, Sheikh Abdullah established a sort of elective dictatorship in the state. He practically acted like the monarch of all that he surveyed. No one even checked him from doing what was, on the face of it, wrong. His recruitment of the erstwhile die-hard workers of the Plebiscite Front, the Al Fatah and such other subversive organisations in sensitive departments, was, obviously, fraught with grave risks to the security and stability of the state. And yet, he could go ahead unhindered. The Resettlement Act, 1982, legislated during Sheikh Abdullah's regime and formally enacted during Dr Farooq Abdullah's time, showed what a vast area of power was available to the state government.

The crucial questions that need to be asked of those singing the autonomy ode are: Do they want more autonomy to enact legislation like the one referred to above? In what way is any welfare or development

work held up for want of powers? Where is any law or executive order or judicial pronouncement that has undermined the personality or identity of Kashmir or altered its culture or spiritual landscape?

It needs to be underlined that J&K is the only state of the Indian Union which has its own Constitution. Even the governor of the state is appointed under this Constitution. The special position of the state extends to many other spheres. While the citizens of J&K are citizens of India and have six members of Parliament as their representatives, the citizens of India are not ipso facto citizens of J&K. They cannot hold property in the state. They have no right to vote in elections to the Assembly, or the municipalities, or the panchayats.

In the light of the foregoing analysis, it should be quite clear that Justice Saghir Ahmed would have rendered a valuable service to the nation if he had brought the above facts and background of the autonomy issue to the notice of the people and provided an informed platform for a precise and pointed public discussion. By doing so, he would have helped in removing the constitutional illiteracy that currently prevails with regard to various matters connected with the subject.

Jagmohan is a former governor of J&K and a former Union minister

TERRORISM

The next attack

Shekhar Gupta

Responding to an IPS probationer's question as to what was the reason we had been able to prevent any terror attacks in the year after 26/11, Home Minister P. Chidambaram, in his somewhat game-changing speech at the annual conference of the Intelligence Bureau last month, had said with such honesty: "Luck, pure luck." We, he said, had to be lucky every day, while the terrorist had to be lucky just once. Of course, he added, the government had been able to avert at least a dozen attacks — without giving any further details, as you would expect.

But, is that all there is to probably the longest period of respite in a long time? Could mere luck and coincidence, and better preparedness, have been responsible for this? It is important to raise and debate these questions now, when an intriguing mood is evident in the security and political establishment — a strange mix of complacency and a growing apprehension of the "inevitable" next attack.

When you are dealing with an enemy who has by now emerged as a master practitioner of the idea of "strategic patience", which means he has the patience to wait long enough for the target to ease up on the vigil before striking again, you need to keep thinking hard in the periods of relative peace.

While luck and better preparedness have made a huge difference, a question to be asked is, could this lull indeed be because the Pakistanis, particularly their military-ISI establishment, have really seen the downside in another attack so soon and put the clamps on India-specific groups? There are many arguments and some evidence to support this theory. First, the pressure from the Americans and the global community by and large has been immense. The capture of Kasab and now the

Headley revelations have left no fig leaf or plausible deniability for Pakistan. In this environment nobody buys even the “root causes” or “non-state actors beyond our control” theory. If anything, developments and revelations over the past year have demonstrated that groups that target India are fundamentally distinct from those that fight the Americans in Afghanistan and the Pakistanis in their own tribal regions. These networks are almost entirely located deep inside Pakistan’s mainland, mostly Punjab — and therefore the Pakistan establishment has much greater “connection”, if not always control, over them than over the groups further west.

The implication is that even if they no longer fully control the anti-India jihadis, the Pakistanis still retain the capability of being able to exercise restraint over them, either through better vigilance or persuasion or a bit of both. In fact, as Steve Coll, the Pulitzer Prize-winning former managing editor of The Washington Post and author of landmark Af-Pak books like *The Ghost Wars* and *The Bin Laden Family*, told me on NDTV’s *Walk the Talk* to be telecast later on Saturday evening, if the ISI is really determined to make sure the Lashkars are not able to carry out another major attack in India, they can most likely do so.

The Pakistanis may do it for now. But what will their thinking be as months pass? Evidence from that region comes mainly through local and Western media reports which are usually more reliable than Western diplomatic sources. You can pick bits and pieces to draw up a fairly convincing picture of the Pakistani strategy, at least in the short and medium term.

For simplicity you can call it the strategy of “double nuancing” the war on terror. Pakistan sees terrorists it confronts as three distinct groups. It by now has a distinctly nuanced way of dealing with each. Two of these function on or beyond its western peripheries: the Pakistani and the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan is willing to fight its own, indigenous Taliban like a clear enemy. They threaten the Pakistani state, and even more specifically, its army. Almost all attacks within Pakistan, particularly

against military targets, have been carried out by this group. So it is being fought by the Pakistani army with all its might.

The first “nuance” lies in how the Pakistanis deal with the Afghan Taliban. They are seen as only “half an enemy”, and most likely, as “half an opportunity”. Enemy because of their tangled linkages with the more indigenous Pakistani jihad industry, and an opportunity because their resistance now holds the promise of being able to line out the Americans to a stage where Obama may look to get out after declaring some sort of a victory. Of course that can only be “arranged” through the ISI’s good offices. They can broker some kind of a peace accord between “friendly” Taliban factions and the Americans to install a “government” in Kabul that promises to keep Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan and is generally controlled by the Pakistanis. That, an Afghanistan under their own sway, is the Pakistani military-strategic establishment’s old fantasy. Obama’s perceived lack of spine will persuade the votaries of that old “strategic depth” theory to believe their opportunity has arrived.

The second “nuance” is actually more stark and unambiguous. It is the line the Pakistani establishment draws between the two Taliban groups on the one hand and its own India-specific jihadi groups on the other. These groups have in the past been raised, nurtured and controlled by the ISI and, in some ways, have functioned like a regiment of the Pakistan army in mufti.

For 15 years now, the Pakistani military has seen them as a strategic asset, a force multiplier to put India off-balance in the event of war breaking out. So while they are conscious of the downside of another attack on India they will be loath to dismantle them. There is too much invested there, and to a short-sighted, tactical, military intelligence mind driven more by hatred of India rather than Pakistan’s long-term national interest, it looks as if they have delivered value for all investment.

That is why we have to view the current phase of respite with a great deal of caution and sobriety. This is no time for smug complacency or laziness. We have had peace not only because of luck and vigilance at

our end but also because somebody has chosen to put his foot on the valve at the other end. When he may feel persuaded to lift that foot is a factor that must figure in our own calculations.

By my reckoning it could be when and if the Americans seem to be getting military success in Afghanistan and the Afghan Taliban start escaping into Pakistani territories and American pressure there increases, through more drone attacks or hot pursuit. We have no time to waste, or occasion to celebrate yet.

Post Script

At such a strategic turning point trust us educated Indians to get all tangled up in issues of such profound significance as the quality of drafting a mere joint statement. My view on that may not matter but I can tell you a story. Two decades ago I landed in Beijing to cover the Tiananmen Square massacre. I had been parachuted into Beijing almost directly from Peshawar where I was doing a story on the then “good jihadis”, among them one Hamid Karzai, staff officer to “Afghan Revolutionary Provisional Government” President Sibghatullah Mojaddidi. The world media was full of alarmist stories on the Chinese government having lost control and of the many army units having revolted and some even marching on Beijing. That was also the buzz in Jianguomenwai, the “foreigners ghetto” where most diplomats and foreign correspondents lived. Until I met the deputy chief of mission at the Indian Embassy. He told me to ignore all this as sensationalist rubbish. This is all over already, he said, in a day or so they will be washing the roads and there will no sign left of what happened. No army is in revolt. He seemed in a minority of one among the so-called China experts at that time and don’t we know how right he turned out to be. His name is Shivshankar Menon; he takes over as National Security Advisor in what we can describe in a twisted Chinese metaphor as the most interesting of times. Watch what he does in this job to judge his skills as a diplomat and a strategist, not where a comma or period was placed on a certain joint declaration.

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URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Hopes pinned on urban development policy

Shashikala Sitaram

The urban local bodies continue to depend on the state and Centre for funds.

Karnataka Urban Development Minister Suresh Kumar is in the limelight for initiating the first-ever urban development policy in the country. The carefully drafted policy document is being discussed at various forums, inviting public consultations before it is finalised. That the spirit of the 74th Constitutional Amendment would be upheld and the urban local bodies will be strengthened to become urban local self-governing bodies is the affirmation given by the minister.

The Amendment, noted as the landmark legislation ushering in urban decentralisation, was passed in 1992. Many of the concepts of the draft policy reinstate the constitutional amendment — forming of district planning committees, metropolitan planning committees, ward samithis, neighbourhood committees and the like.

The stress is on formulating city mobility programmes in first class cities. The pedestrian, who is often forgotten in the urban infrastructure programmes would now be kept in focus. There is also a proposal to abolish the urban development authorities and bring them under the umbrella of urban local bodies.

Directly elected mayor

The draft document recommends a rethinking on election of mayor. There should be either a directly elected mayor or mayor-in-council, with a five-year-term and with executive powers. This falls in line with the recommendation earlier made by the Kasturirangan Committee, which highlighted the need for direct elections to the mayor's post in Bangalore City Corporation. But this has not been found appetising by politicians. And with reason! The to-be-formed council in Bangalore will have 268 members — 198 ward members, 20 nominated corporators, 27 MLAs, 11 MLCs and 12 MPs. It would be bigger than the state assembly with 224 members.

The policy document recommends transfer of all the 18 functions listed in the 12th Schedule of the Constitution to local bodies, in a systematic manner. So far, very few functions like street lights, water supply, solid waste management are being performed by the local bodies. Why has there been a delay of more than 15 years is a question that is worth asking. The often sighted reason for this is the lack of capacities of the municipalities to perform the functions. Most of the municipalities are understaffed.

With the functions, will the functionaries from various departments be transferred to the municipalities? The policy document needs to address, in great detail, the specificities of the staff and the line of control. The approach of the state has always been one of perpetuating the bureaucratic control, this would work against the principles with which the present changes are being envisaged. In Kerala the confidential report of the commissioner or chief officer of the municipality and the other staff is being written by the mayor.

The urban local bodies have continued to depend on the state and Centre for funds. Very little resources are being mobilised as 'their own'. Ironically, it is only for these resources that the local bodies can plan,

make budgets and spend according to their need and discretion. The funds from the state and Centre come with specifications. The local bodies end up performing the job of ‘post man’.

Even the untied amounts released ‘from above’ are to be spent following the guidelines, an issue opposed by some of the presidents — who participated in the seminar.

A basic tenet of the 74th Amendment has been the conduct of regular elections, once every five years to urban local bodies. But the election to the Bangalore City Corporation is proposed to be held on February 21, 2010, after a gap of three and a half years. The last time the council met was on November 23, 2006. There have been umpteen announcements and postponements, with strictures being passed by the high court on the state election commission for the delay. The EC could do little to avoid the delay as the state took time for delimiting and reserving seats. This was necessary in view of the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike becoming Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, with an area increase from 226 sq km to 800 sq km and increase in wards from 100 to 198. In Gujarat, Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal, the election commission has been empowered with the work of delimitation. The draft policy would do well to look at and deal with various interconnected issues.

The word local self-government itself has been used differently in different documents. Local government, local bodies, local self-governing bodies are often used interchangeably. One should realise that these are not jugglery of words but have serious connotation for the very way in which the entire concept of governance is viewed and implemented.