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# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

ECONOMIC TIMES 26.2.10 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## **Union Budget 2010: 6 out of 10 to Budget**

Swaminathan Aiyer

**The idea that Pranab Mukherjee is on a responsible fiscal policy path has greatly enthused foreign investors? I think that is the main reason why you saw the stock market shoot up. How are the stock markets looking?**

Yeah, all idea that had the question is what does he felt to do, okay (1:00) the radical Budget it dubs the reform proposals it hardly anything. On financial sector reform there was idea on will he increase the insurance FDI limit to 49%? He said nothing.

There has been talk about trying to reduce the public sector share in PSU banks but nothing about increase in the voting share of foreign investors in banks. There was a proposal that service tax should be extended to the railways, he has said that he is showing some memorandum on that. But I doubt very much whether railways will be on that, otherwise he would have mentioned it.

He has avoided giving any specific sums of money for spending on implementing the Right to Education Act or Food Security Act. He just said we will pull it up for discussion and instead of doing something about the woeful lack of justice and financial sector reform. There are new commissions to go into financial sector reform and judicial reform. So there are various areas he could have done much more and he has not

done much more. So it's a middle of the road Budget. My marks would be 6 out of 10.

ECONOMIC TIMES 27.2.10 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### **Budget 2010: Moving back to multiple, arbitrary rates**

TK Arun

Unifying the rate of value-added tax on goods and services at 10% is a welcome piece of reform. So is widening the base of service tax — now, promotion of a wildly commercial venture like the IPL will attract service tax. But Mr Pranab Mukherjee has killed the spirit of simplification and uniformity that has been guiding the path of tax reform.

The Budget speech is replete with echoes of the bad old days when industrialists lobbied the government and its ministers, in the run-up to the Budget, to get individually tailored duty regimes for their respective sectors. Concessional rates of import duty, exemption from service tax, lower rates of excise duty — these enemies of tax rationalisation run amok in Budget 2010-11.

Low, uniform rates of duty constitute reform. Concessional rates that vary from year to year spell patronage and arbitrariness. From the time Yashwant Sinha began the process of slashing the number of tax rates in 1998, till last year, steady convergence to a steadily lower rate has been

the rule with indirect taxes. That has given way to a rash of commodity and sector-specific duties in the new Budget. This needs to be reversed.

TIMES OF INDIA 27.2.10 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## **Fuelling The Growth Story**

Sudipto Mundle

Barring the histrionics of a strident opposition increasingly lost in the wilderness, virtually all sections have welcomed the budget. All sections, that is, of the visible and vocal minority. As for the silent majority, they are well silent, but more on that later. The BSE stock price index went up 300 points even before the finance minister finished his speech. Pranab babu has done all the expected things the market had factored in plus some, hence the gain. With the economy growing at 7.2 per cent, he has started winding down the fiscal stimulus in a calibrated manner. How is this to be accomplished?

Tax revenues are to go up to Rs 5,34,000 crore and non-tax revenues are to go up from Rs 1,12,000 crore to Rs 1,48,000 crore, mainly on account of 3G spectrum sales. This will raise total revenues to 9.8 per cent of a projected GDP of Rs 69,35,000 crore in 2010-11, up from 9.3 per cent of GDP in the revised estimates for 2009-10. Capital receipts other than loan recoveries (mainly sale of public sector equity) will yield Rs 40,000 crore or 0.58 per cent of GDP as compared to 0.42 per cent last year. Thus additional revenue and non-debt capital receipts will reduce the fiscal deficit by 0.7 per cent of GDP. On the expenditure side, capital expenditure will rise to Rs 1,50,000 crore or 2.16 per cent of GDP, an

extra 0.3 per cent of GDP compared to 1.86 per cent last year. However, revenue expenditure will be compressed to Rs 9,59,000 crore or 13.83 per cent of GDP compared to 14.66 per cent last year, yielding an additional reduction in the fiscal deficit of 0.5 per cent, i.e., a total compression of the fiscal deficit by 1.2 per cent from 6.7 per cent last year to the targeted 5.5 per cent this year.

Tax revenues will rise despite significant relief in income tax rates for personal incomes below Rs 8 lakh and a reduction in the surcharge on corporate income taxes. On balance the reliefs will entail a revenue loss of Rs 26,000 crore on the direct taxes side. This will be more than offset by a revenue gain of Rs 46,500 crore in indirect taxes. The indirect tax take will go up mainly on account of the expected partial rollback of excise duty reductions, a one per cent clean energy cess on domestic and imported coal, etc. The excise duty rate, the peak customs duty rate and the service tax rate have all been set at 10 per cent, preparing the ground for introduction of a unified Goods and Services Tax next year. This, along with the Direct Taxes Code, will usher in a new phase of thorough tax reform. However, an opportunity has been lost in not significantly extending the coverage of the services tax. Also, the indirect tax proposals are still full of discretionary exemptions, concessions and specific rates for individual items, which are reminiscent of the pre-reform days.

Tax reforms will be combined with a new commission to oversee significant reforms in the financial sector, licensing of new banks and another commission to monitor large corporations that could pose systemic risk as seen in the advanced countries during the financial crisis of 2008-09. Announcement of a substantial reform programme, along with fiscal consolidation, and the protection of capital expenditure on infrastructure while compressing revenue expenditure, makes the current budget a very sound budget for growth.

However, the budget has been quite conservative on the inclusion

agenda and social programmes, which are mostly items of revenue expenditure. Thus, total spending on the flagship inclusion programme NREGA, now renamed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, has remained essentially constant at Rs 40,100 crore in nominal terms compared to Rs 39,100 crore last year, which means a decline in real terms. It's the same story if you take the total spending programme on rural development, or agriculture, or school education and literacy, or women and child development, or health. In all these social inclusion programmes, the expenditure levels have been maintained at more or less the same nominal levels as last year, meaning a decline in real terms.

This is not surprising coming from an experienced finance minister. This being the first year of the UPA II political cycle, he knows he has only this year and the next to push through all the hard-nosed reforms and fiscal discipline that are important for sustaining high growth. After that, inclusive spending will start galloping in response to political compulsions as elections loom large on the horizon, and fiscal discipline will fall by the wayside.

It also has to be mentioned that there is a whole different approach to inclusive growth outlined in this year's Economic Survey, which proposes revolutionising the delivery of social services and anti-poverty programmes, making them more effective and leakage-proof through a coupon based system instead of just throwing more money at them. The finance minister has hinted that he is buying into this approach. We will hopefully see far-reaching reforms not only on the growth front but also in the approach to inclusiveness over the next two years. So all is not lost for the silent majority after all.

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# **INETRNATIONAL RELATION**

## HINDU 26.2.10 INTERNATIONAL RELATION

### **Dreaming of a chance for peace**

V.R. Krishna Iyer

*The latest round of India-Pakistan talks represents a major opportunity to both countries to put in place a new bilateral architecture.*

The India-Pakistan discord and the repeated armed conflicts between the two countries have stemmed chiefly from the accession to India of the state of Kashmir. The strife has caused a heavy drain of human and financial resources over the years, including in Jammu and Kashmir itself. We must halt the disaster and end the recurring loss of life and property that has been occurring. False prestige should not stop an exploration of all possible solutions to find a dignified resolution. Every available proposal should be discussed in a spirit of honour. And, meanwhile, there should be no begging for arms by either country. Both are nuclear-capable and may be tempted to use the weapons in a crisis. There is possibly enough nuclear weapon capability to destroy all of Asia that the two countries have.

Statesmen from both sides have repeatedly spoken out on the potential havoc involved and projected a vision for peace. Superficial solutions or talks will not work. Both countries will have to go to the root of the problem and seek an understanding.

Religion is the cause of the dispute. Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and India is secular. Both were one before the two-nation theory gained acceptance. The British Parliament recognised India and Pakistan as separate sovereign nations. Kashmir was at that time a separate entity. There is no sign of peace now; in fact, every available sign points to aggravating discord over a land of enchanting beauty.

If Asia is to enjoy real peace, this dispute has to be resolved. If Asia has no comity, world peace itself is at stake. Neither the U.N. Security Council nor any statesman with vision has taken positive measures to end this bleeding battle. Curiously, the leaders of both countries do not want other states to intervene and negotiate a settlement on fair terms.

Luckily, a historic moment has arrived. The Prime Ministers of both countries agreed to hold bilateral talks without reservations, with the objective of restoring cordial relations. Exploring the possibilities of a peaceful settlement is a task that could spell a supreme patriotic service.

It is imperative that the war of words over J&K should stop and a happy and just resolution achieved. An ad hoc and tentative package for discussion among the peoples of both sides and nations is overdue: without it, peace will remain a dream and a solution an illusion.

Kashmir was under a Hindu maharaja who ruled a large number of Muslim subjects and a micro-minority of Pandits. Jurisprudentially, therefore, J&K belongs to the Indian Republic. The maharaja

decided to join India. Sheikh Abdullah, the head of the National Conference, endorsed the accession. But Pakistan, a cultural victim of communal bigotry and obdurate obscurantism (India is not far behind, either) invaded a part of J&K claiming it to be a Muslim-dominated state and saying that it should go to Pakistan.

Is world jurisprudence communal? If the present “line of actual control” gets international recognition and there are socialist secular democratic governments on either side of it, there can be peace and a permanent end to war between the two countries. The violent territories bleeding daily, leading to armed conflict and carnage, cannot be sustained. Humanity the world over will treat peace in J&K as a secular wonder. From a brave new Bharat and a peaceful Pakistan, a new socio-political secular philosophy will emerge to mark a modern and dynamic era of majestic concord. A civilised and humane world order will then be the epic accomplishment of the 21st century.

Can we have race or colour dividing the world, making the globe white or yellow or dark-brown? And now religion is taking on the role of ensuring the collapse of humanism in the name of god fighting another god, making mankind a casualty. J&K is symbolic of all these divisive forces.

To be a member of a secular confederation should not cause any infraction of sovereignty. It will merely be an expression of willingness to be humane in the process of forming a collective consent to act together, not against one another. A confederation will represent a public political accord, a liberal organisation to bury discord or hostility but agreeing to be allied in foreign relations, never to have a mutual armed conflict. It will mark the beginning of a friendly formation of two or more sovereign states to shed hostilities and be willing to act as comrades.

From a historical perspective, India and Pakistan have so much in common. In geographical terms both were one. In material matters the two have religious bonds. India has more Muslims than Pakistan, and shrines for them to worship. There are common economic interests. The respective economies can go forward as a single integral whole, complementing each other.

My solemn proposal is to begin with a resolution that all Indians and Pakistanis believe in the worship of all versions of god in deep devotion. Let all noble negotiations be founded on a spiritual basis, not on mundane arms-dealing on a communal bedrock, but Advaita-Islamic divine inspiration. This is a unique opportunity. Our peoples are allies.

Let the conscience of the Buddha's renunciation and compassion be the basis of a settlement. Emperor Asoka put an end to war and pleaded for religious fellowship as a greater asset than victory. Renounce, unite not split. Two sovereign nations, but a dynamic togetherness.

The Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan should become the leaders of an Indo-Pakistan Friendship Society. It will make for a glorious start. All political parties should be invited to become its members. The two, like all great statesmen, should practise Asoka's creed.

The two countries should realise the extent of human loss that will come about if the confrontation continued. The Taliban, that wicked terrorist force of fanaticism, although altogether un-Islamic, has become a source of terrorism in both countries. Islam and Advaita win by faith, not guns. Islam is peace, humanism, not terrorism or bigotry.

Our resources are common. Rivers and the territorial nexus make us one. Our languages have much in common. Our culture and

economy will prosper, given unity. Varanasi has its mosques. There are temples, churches and mosques standing in friendly proximity in Kerala. In Hyder Ali's part of Mysore State there is a great mosque and a great temple in a sanctified neighbourhood.

Why, then, should we not live united? Islam stands for world brotherhood, and Advaita with the same semantic profundity stands for one creation. It follows that we fight in the name of Allah and Siva and blaspheme both. Gods are one but their priests with basic obscurantism battle for more power and followers. This is sacrilege and betrayal. Sri Narayana Guru, the great revolutionary of Kerala, was a global humanist. One of his credos was to ignore religious and caste distinctions. And he had as disciples Muslims and Hindus of all castes. He installed a few temples. The festivals were open equally to Muslims, Christians and others.

Whenever a Muslim in Pakistan dies of a bullet injury I breathe in pain. We are brothers, and every Hindu is his brother's keeper, be he Muslim or Christian. There is no reason we should not have a large and powerful movement for human rights and peace among Pakistanis and Indians.

Indo-Pakistan cultural friendship and political amity has to become a people's movement. Jinnah, the first President of Pakistan, was secular, every cell of his: he was western in outlook and allergic to the religious life. He was driven to the Muslim League by the Congress' tactless politics. Later, of course, he had political reasons for the way he went. His first message to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was indeed beautiful and secular.

Let Indo-Pakistan comradeship be a popular passion to fight the cult of hate. Either you continue to be poor colonies of the White House or be together as powerful Asian allies.

If need be, set up a common Indo-Pakistan Supreme Court. It will be

a great idea to have once in two or three years a three-month-long sitting of an India-Pakistan Parliament. Let there be also a Common Defence Force.

We will enjoy a grand Indo-Pakistan Federation. It will be a superlative political experiment: never to kill, only to salvage. It will represent a new sublime world order. Humanity will bless this century if such a federation is created.

The bilateral dream sequence is endless. A new oath, a new capital, a new Indo-Pakistan wonder with universal impact abjuring the nuclear menace. A new oath for judges and officers should state that they would uphold Indo-Pakistan friendship. In cricket, football and hockey there will be only be an Indo-Pakistan team, not separate teams. No visas, only fraternity between the two countries. In the field of education, common examinations are possible. Common hospitals, why not? J&K could then be a part of Indo-Pakistan territory. All from both countries will be free to enter and exit sans visa. Let there be one Federation.

# **POVERTY**

## HINDU 24.2.10 POVERTY

### **Poverty estimates vs food entitlements**

Jean Drèze

*Statistical poverty lines should not become real-life eligibility criteria for food entitlements.*

Nothing is easier than to recognise a poor person when you see him or her. Yet the task of identifying and counting the poor seems to elude the country's best experts. Take for instance the “headcount” of rural poverty — the proportion of the rural population below the poverty line. At least four alternative figures are available: 28 per cent from the Planning Commission, 50 per cent from the N.C. Saxena Committee report, 42 per cent from the Tendulkar Committee report, and 80 per cent or so from the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS).

On closer examination, the gaps are not as big as they look, because they are largely due to the differences in poverty lines. The underlying methodologies are much the same. The main exception is the Saxena Committee report, where the 50 per cent figure is based on an independent argument about the required coverage of the BPL

Census. Other reports produce alternative figures by simply shifting the poverty line.

In this connection, it is important to remember that the poverty line is, ultimately, little more than an arbitrary benchmark. It is difficult to give it a normative interpretation (in this respect, the Tendulkar Committee report is far from convincing). The notion that everyone below a certain expenditure threshold is “poor,” while everyone else is “not poor,” makes little sense. Poverty is a matter of degree and to the extent that any particular threshold can be specified, it is likely to depend on the context of the exercise.

What tends to matter is not so much the level of the benchmark as consistency in applying it in different places and years (by using suitable “cost-of-living indexes” to adjust the benchmark), for comparative purposes. It is this consistency that is being threatened by the current mushrooming of independent poverty lines. In this respect, the Tendulkar Committee report does a reasonably good job of arguing for the adoption of the current, national, official urban poverty line as an “anchor.” State-wise urban and rural poverty lines are to be derived from it by applying suitable price indexes generated from the National Sample Survey data. This approach permits continuity with earlier poverty series, consistency of poverty estimation between sectors and States, and some method in the madness from now on.

As it happens, the Tendulkar Committee report's estimate of 42 per cent for rural poverty, based on this new poverty line, is not very different from the 50 per cent benchmark proposed in the Saxena Committee for the coverage of the BPL Census. In fact, the Tendulkar estimate, plus a very conservative margin of 10 per cent or so for targeting errors, would produce much the same figure as in the Saxena Committee report. Thus, one could argue for “50 per cent” as an absolute minimum for the coverage of the next BPL

Census in rural areas.

However, poverty estimation is one thing, and social support is another. The main purpose of the BPL Census is to identify households eligible for social support, notably through the Public Distribution System (PDS) but also, increasingly, in other ways. In deciding the coverage of the BPL Census, allowance must be made not only for targeting errors, which can be very large, but also for other considerations, including the fact that under-nutrition rates in India tend to be much higher than poverty estimates. This gap is not so surprising, considering that the official “poverty line” is really a destitution line. The consumption basket that can be bought at the poverty line is extremely meagre. It was an important contribution of the NCEUS report to point out that even a moderately enhanced poverty line basket, costing Rs.20 per person per day, would be unaffordable for a large majority of the population. How would you like to live on Rs. 20 a day?

Also relevant here is the case for a universal as opposed to targeted PDS. The main argument is that the Right to Food is a fundamental right of all citizens (an aspect of the “Right to Life” under Article 21 of the Constitution), and that any targeting method inevitably entails substantial “exclusion errors.” This raises the question of the BPL Census methodology.

The 2002 BPL Census was based on a rather convoluted scoring method, involving 13 different indicators (related for instance to land ownership, occupation and education) with a score of 0 to 4 for each indicator, so that the aggregate score ranged from 0 to 52. There were serious conceptual flaws in this scoring system, and the whole method was also applied in a haphazard manner, partly due to its confused character. The result was a very defective census that left out large numbers of poor households. According to the 61st round of the National Sample Survey, among the poorest 20 per cent

of rural households in 2004-05, barely half had a BPL Card. Any future BPL Census exercise must be based on a clear recognition of this major fiasco.

The Saxena Committee recently proposed an alternative BPL Census methodology, involving a simplified scoring system. Instead of 13 indicators, there are just five, with an aggregate score ranging from 0 to 10. This is a major improvement. Even this simplified method, however, is likely to be hard to comprehend for many rural households. This lack of transparency opens the door to manipulation, and undermines participatory verification of the BPL list. There is no guarantee that the results will be much better than those of the 2002 BPL Census.

Perhaps the proposed method can be further improved. But the bottom line is that any BPL Census is likely to be a bit of a hit-or-miss affair, not only because of inherent conceptual problems but also because of widespread irregularities on the ground. This is the main argument for universal provision of basic services, including access to the PDS. Another strong argument is that targeting is divisive, and undermines the unity of public demand for a functional PDS. It is perhaps no accident that the PDS works much better in Tamil Nadu, where it is universal, than in other States.

A universal PDS would, of course, involve a major increase in the food subsidy. However, universalisation could be combined with cost-saving measures such as decentralised procurement, self-management of Fair Price Shops by gram panchayats, and a range of transparency safeguards. There is no obvious alternative, if we are serious about ensuring food security for all. If someone has a better idea, let's hear it.

Meanwhile, the government seems to be running in the opposite direction, judging from the recent recommendations of the

Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) in charge of the proposed National Food Security Act. The EGoM suggested not only that the government's legal obligation to provide foodgrain under PDS should be restricted to 25 kg per month for BPL families, but also that the Planning Commission's measly poverty figures should be used as a “ceiling” for the BPL list. This amounts to disregarding at least three official committee reports (Tendulkar, N.C. Saxena and NCEUS), and trivialising the proposed Act.

In a country where half of all children are underweight, the idea that freedom from hunger and under-nutrition can be made a legal right is rather bold and far-reaching. It has a bearing not only on the Public Distribution System but also on a range of other interventions and entitlements, relating for instance to child nutrition, social security, health care, and even property rights. Framing an effective National Food Security Act requires a great deal of creative work, public debate, and political commitment. Alas, seven months after the Finance Minister stated, in his previous budget speech, that work on the Act had “begun in right earnest,” and that a draft would be in the public domain “very soon,” things seem to be moving backward rather than forward. Let us see what the Honourable Minister has to say on this in his forthcoming budget speech.

(The author is Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, University of Allahabad.)

# **RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

## HINDU 27.2.10 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

### **The wrong way for rural doctors**

Anbumani Ramadoss

*The proposal to introduce a shortened medical course is a folly: it will aggravate the rural-urban divide and give a raw deal to villages.*

The proposal put forward by the Central government to introduce a shortened medical course at the graduate level to serve the rural areas will only widen the rural-urban divide and impede India's role as an emerging global power. In seeking to virtually revive the Licentiate Medical Practitioners (LMP) scheme that was available before Independence, the government has taken a regressive step. And in the process it is resorting to discrimination against rural folk, who are taken for second-grade citizens deserving medical care by a brigade of 'qualified quacks'.

The scheme involves a three-and-a-half year course that leads to a bachelor's degree in medicine and surgery. Doctors trained under this scheme will work in rural areas. They will be trained in district hospitals.

In the erstwhile LMP scheme, students were trained for around three years, awarded a diploma and asked to meet rural health care needs. It was considered a way to bridge the gap between demand and supply outside metropolitan India. The LMPs outnumbered the MBBS graduates and largely served in the rural areas. Following the Bhole Committee report of 1946, medical courses were unified into the standard five-and-a-half-year MBBS degree.

The issue is the impact of this scheme on the status of the rural Indian. In what way are rural Indians different from their urban counterparts? Do they deserve health care from medical personnel who are less qualified than those who attend to the health needs of their urban brothers? Are their well-being and lives less important than those in urban areas? This discrimination could sow the seeds of disunity and discrimination. The scheme is against the spirit of the Constitution and human rights.

The proposal is superfluous, too. Any State can introduce a short-term medical course. We do not need a centralised concept of rural service, governed by the likes of the Medical Council of India (MCI).

The need is to utilise existing personnel prudently. Today even medical colleges recognised by the MCI, numbering about 300, face faculty shortage. How is the government planning to equip the so-called rural-based institutions that will eventually churn out semi-qualified medical personnel, with faculty and infrastructure?

India has a wealth of alternative medical systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Homeopathy and so on, that brings in hundreds of thousands of qualified medical professionals into the health care industry. They qualify after more than four years of training. It would be easier to use this huge corps of medical manpower according to the needs of the local regions rather than create a new cadre.

Today a nurse undergoes four years of training during her or his course, whereas the proposed BRMS course is for three and a half years. The rural folk would be better off being catered to by nurse-practitioners who are more qualified than the 'qualified quacks.'

The doctor-patient ratio in India is 1:1,700. Add to this the doctors under the traditional medical systems and the ratio comes down to about 1:700. The World Health Organisation's recommended criterion is 1:300. To reach that target, we cannot go for short-sighted and short-term measures to create a cadre of semi-qualified professionals.

We have the schemes and tools to enhance the health of our rural fellow-beings. With an exemplary scheme like the National Rural Health Mission, all that is needed is to revive and give new momentum to such schemes.

There are more than a million fully trained nurses and more than 3,00,000 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives in India. There are also more than 7,00,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs). Then there are Village Health Nurses, Male Health Workers, Male Nurses, Anganwadi workers and so on. There is no dearth of paramedical professionals and qualified medical personnel to serve the districts and villages.

Adding one more cadre of workers who are neither here nor there will lead to state-acknowledged quackery. Already, nearly 75 per cent of India's population is treated by quacks. The proposal will only help strengthen the cause of the quacks, bestowing upon them respectability.

Already the urban-rural disparity in health infrastructure is huge. If the rural areas are catered to by BRMS personnel, it will deter qualified and experienced doctors from taking up rural assignments. It was after much thinking and cajoling that we put forward a compulsory scheme for rural service for those who desire to pursue higher medical courses. With one imprudent and rash gesture, we will do away with a good practice that was initiated with astute planning.

Ghulam Nabi Azad, my successor Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, says BRMS personnel can be posted in Sub-Health Centres and Primary Health Centres. These already have more than enough qualified nurses who have completed four-year courses and done their practical training. So where is the need for a BRMS course that will produce medical personnel dismally equipped with only three and a half years of training?

The website of the Union Health Ministry provides details about the NRHM. Thousands of crores of rupees are being invested in the rural health sector under the NRHM to strengthen rural infrastructure. As Health Minister, in order to supplement the NRHM, I initiated a proposal for a one-year compulsory rural posting for each MBBS doctor after the internship. This faced stiff resistance from medical students. A committee under Dr. Sambasiva Rao was formed to deliberate on this issue around the country and give their recommendations. Finally, the recommendation was that anybody who aspired for a post-graduate degree should undergo a one-year compulsory rural posting. Unfortunately this recommendation came at the fag end of my tenure. Had this been implemented, every year we would get nearly 30,000 fully qualified doctors working in Rural Health Centres.

The need is to start more medical colleges in areas such as the northeast, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. The country has nearly 300 colleges, of which 190 are in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Uttar Pradesh, with a population of 19 crores, has only about 16 colleges. Bihar, with a population of nine crores, has eight. Rajasthan with an eight-crore population has eight and Madhya Pradesh, with a population of eight crores, has 12. If the State governments open medical colleges in all the districts, we can have nearly 600 medical colleges, rolling out nearly 75,000 MBBS graduates a year.

We have another huge health resource pool to tap from: doctors trained in Russia and China. Their services can be utilised in the rural areas.

Many doctors settle abroad. The government should take steps to prevent this drain by offering them attractive remuneration, avenues to train and upgrade knowledge and due recognition.

One school of thought favours admitting two batches of medical students in each institution every year – in the morning and in the afternoon. Clinical sessions could be alternated. By resorting to the double shift, we can double the number of medical graduates using the same infrastructure and faculty. This can be followed for medical, dental and nursing courses. This was accepted by the MCI for post-graduate courses when I put forward the suggestion that accommodates one more student per professor within the existing system, given the infrastructure available. Earlier one professor could take in only one postgraduate student; now one professor can take in two students without compromising on the quality of medical education, thereby doubling the intake of students to postgraduate courses, leading to optimum use of the existing resources and infrastructure.

My suggestions in a nutshell are here. Make one-year rural posting compulsory for all MBBS doctors after internship. State governments should start medical colleges in every district to create more medical graduates. Increase the number of medical graduates and post-graduates using the existing infrastructure and faculty. Focus more on the northern and northeastern States. Expand and invest more in the National Rural Health Mission. Start government-run nursing colleges in all districts. Public-Private partnership ventures can be initiated, using the district and sub-district government hospitals for the purpose. Preference should be given to students from rural areas for admission to the MBBS courses, and it should be stipulated that the graduates work for five to 10 years in rural areas. The harmonisation and utilisation of doctors who have been trained in Russia and China, who have undergone seven-year

MBBS courses, to fit into the rural programmes could help. The utilisation of doctors from traditional systems for specific needs and programmes could be planned. Anyone who wants to join a post-graduate course in a government college should have done a minimum of three years in a rural posting.

## **WOMEN**

TIMES OF INDIA 27.2.10 WOMEN

## **Get out of the quota mindset**

KAUTILYA KUMAR

The move to reserve seats for women in Parliament is flawed. Of course, the intention behind the decision that we need to have more women participation in legislating is laudable. But the way to achieve it is not through reservations. Quotas will create another area of patronage, which in the long run will defeat the purpose of achieving gender parity in legislatures.

Our policymakers seem to view reservations as the magic bullet that will wipe out all forms of discrimination. It may have succeeded in some sectors but is not necessarily the solution for all our deficiencies. Ours is essentially a patriarchal society. Men control the levers of power. There are historical factors as well as economic reasons for women being pushed to the background. Power relations shape social perceptions. Political representation is an outcome of these factors.

What do we mean by women empowerment in politics? It is not merely about having more women legislators, but about forcing a paradigm shift in the way public policies are decided. The real issue is to ensure that

public policies become more women-friendly. That calls for a change in social mindset. Can more women MLAs and MPs ensure that? Not necessarily. The additional women legislators could well share the patriarchal mindset and legitimise policies that are unfriendly to women. We have seen in our own country and the neighbourhood that mere presence of women in powerful places needn't necessarily make things easier for other women. Special quotas are unlikely to change the political agenda of parties. What is most likely to happen is that parties will pick pliable women to fill the quota and ask them to further the party agenda in legislative bodies.

A qualitative change is possible only if the basic needs of women are addressed. India's record in women's health and education are abysmal. Low priority is given to their needs even when public infrastructure is built. So few women get the time or opportunity to acquire skills that are necessary for a successful career in public life or economic activity. Quota politics is unlikely to address these issues. If these biases are not changed we may get more women legislators, but few of them are likely to be agents of change.

