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# **CIVIL SERVICE**

## **Radical reform for civil services?**

Special Correspondent

The second Administrative Reforms Commission, headed by senior Congress leader M. Veerappa Moily, has, in an attempt to make bureaucracy accountable, proposed the establishment of a radical system of assessment, allowing government servants to be sacked after 20 years of service if they are found unfit to continue. The commission also wants to bring down the number of attempts for selection in civil services allowed to candidates.

The report said the first review of bureaucrats at 14 years would primarily serve the purpose of intimating to the public servant about his or her strengths and shortcomings, while the second review at 20 years would mainly serve to assess the fitness of the officer for further continuation in service.

"The services of public servants who are found to be unfit after the second review at 20 years should be discontinued. A provision regarding this should be made in the proposed civil services law," the report said. To ensure better accountability, the report said that for new appointments, it should be expressly provided that the period of employment shall be for 20 years. "Further continuance in government service would depend upon the outcome of the intensive performance reviews," it said.

It also proposed that civil service aspirants in the general category may get only three chances, one less than they are allowed at present. It mooted that five chances be given for OBC candidates, two less than now, and six chances for SC/ST candidates who have

no ceiling now. The ARC report "Refurbishing of Personnel Administration" also favoured reducing the upper age limit for the civil service examination from 30 to 25 years for general candidates, 33 to 28 years for OBC, and 35 to 29 years for SC/ST aspirants.

# **E-GOVERNANCE**

## **Has e-governance made citizens happier?**

P. K. DORAISWAMY

The computer's sheer speed and convenience often fool us into thinking it to be an autonomous force and a panacea

E-governance is the most prestigious of government's efforts to make it more citizen-friendly through modernising its processes. Its 'successes' have been much publicised. Has it really made a difference to citizens' overall perception of governance quality?

A computer facilitates and considerably speeds up the storage, retrieval and the processing of data. It will, therefore, be effective if governance suffers because one or more of these operations is presently slow, tedious and/or, voluminous by eliminating employees' drudgery and minimising citizens' transaction and travel time. If the computerised information is publicly accessible, it will also improve transparency. A computer is simply an extension of the human arm. Its sheer speed and convenience often fool us into thinking it to be an autonomous force and a panacea.

Initially, access to e-governance services is bound to be limited to the urban and semi-urban areas and the relatively more educated and affluent. This, however, cannot be held against the idea itself as it takes time for any technology-based practice to get diffused.

The following examples would show some of the inadequacies noticed in e-governance: E-governance has not made any dent on the pervasive evil of corruption. Computerised Sub-Registrars' and RTOs' offices are still teeming with touts.

Theoretically, instead of spending Rs. 500 and two days in visiting the district headquarters to meet the Collector and present a petition

for widow pension, a widow in a village could now go to the nearest computer kiosk and send an e-petition to the Collector. But widows who have met the Collector and personally handed over a petition are waiting for ages to get their pension!

According to a former Vice-Chancellor, even universities and IITs which use computers for teaching computer courses rarely use them for upgrading their internal academic and administrative processes.

Some other defects in e-governance in the public sector are:

- \*software already in use in some similar sectors is again developed independently.

- \*Many existing outdated and cumbersome procedures are being computerised. If an application is unnecessarily required to be made in quintuplicate, the solution is not to make the copies fast electronically but to change the rule.

- \*Computerisation has three components: the front office where interaction with the citizen takes place, the back office where his request is processed and decisions taken; and the infrastructure (hardware and software) which connects the two. The infrastructure is designed by the back office often without taking into account the requirements of the citizen and considering only the convenience of the systems designer and the back office staff.

E-governance has produced visible benefits to citizens mainly in transactions like booking of railway tickets, payment of government dues or filing of returns which are spot transactions involving no discretionary decision-making. Corruption is a major, pervasive evil in public governance. E-governance can impact this evil only if it builds in transparency at all stages of processing and empowers citizens to move higher officers to intervene. Even after e-governance, frequent face-to-face interaction between citizens and

senior officers is essential. Otherwise, there is the danger of e-governance at the cutting edge distancing senior officers from citizens.

Quality of governance has many aspects to be managed — people, systems, procedures, resources, responsiveness, transparency, accountability and, above all, work culture. (Many officers do not operate the computer themselves and even personal e-mail messages addressed to them have to be printed out by a clerk and placed in a conventional file pad to be seen by them like any other file. When a Chief Minister wanted to use computerisation to eliminate citizens' direct contact with the government staff, the latter threatened to go on strike claiming that meeting citizens was their fundamental right!) . Unless these are managed simultaneously, e-governance will produce mere sizzle without the steak.

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Growth? Yes. But can it be sustained?**

The stock market gave the thumbs down to the figures for industrial production on Friday even while the government and some sections of decision-makers were pleased with the figures. The truth is that the double digit growth figure of 10.3 per cent was higher than the base figure, or the figure for October 2008, the period when the global financial crisis was at its peak. But the index of industrial production (IIP) was less than what it was month-on-month and, therefore, is indicative of a slowdown in the pace of growth. The deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, said that growth well above 10 per cent is not just due to the base effect and that there is an element of growth which he hopes will be sustained in the following months. This is a positive interpretation of the IIP figures and a morale-booster for the economy. The tricky part is to sustain this growth. There is an admission that this growth has been fuelled by the government's stimulus package. No study has been made of the percentage that the stimulus package contributed to this growth in the various sectors though the stimulus package is said to have contributed nearly two per cent to GDP growth. It is more likely than not to be quite significant because captains of industry as well as industry and business organisations have been repeatedly saying that the stimulus packages should stay for some time even as the Reserve Bank of India keeps talking of an exit policy in phases.

So the continuation of the stimulus package is critical to growth. Growth will have to be stimulated by real economic activity, and this is yet to be seen. There has been growth in car sales, which is said to be fuelled by the fact that cars could be dearer in the coming

months as inflation and interest rates go up. A lot of growth has been stimulated by government spending as against private spending. Private investment is not picking up and in the current fiscal is said to be just six per cent as against 18 per cent in 2007-08. The signals on investments are mixed. It is said that several projects have been shelved and those that have been completed are fewer than planned. It is true that industry has been showing profits, but that is mostly due to cost-cutting and other related measures. The top-line growth is still insignificant. There is a general concern about the fragile nature of the recovery and people, and the market, are not fully convinced about the solid nature of the growth. Though India is not dependent on global growth to the extent that the Southeast Asian countries are, the weakness in the growth in the US and Europe are still worrying and can affect growth impulses in India. The sovereign ratings of various countries, like Greece and Ireland, have stoked fears of several others being in line, particularly after the Dubai financial crisis. India's fiscal deficit is still only on the increase and is close to eight per cent of GDP though the government says it is lower but a source of concern. If there is another global financial crisis, as is feared, then India will have very little leeway to offer any more stimulus packages with such a high fiscal deficit. It is said that India experienced a difficult second quarter, but that the worst is over. But India needs to see more investment and increasing capacity utilisation across the board if growth is to be sustained in the real economy.

# **ENVIRONMENT**

## **Is Climate Change for Real?**

Amit Bhattacharya

The hard talk is on at Copenhagen. In the huddle are negotiators from more than 192 nations, trying to forge a common plan to save the planet. At last count, 110 world leaders were slated to gather in the Danish capital for end-of-summit declarations that may well lay the ground for a fundamental retooling of the global economy.

Beyond the hope, hype and bickering about who pays how much to whom, lies a plain fact - there's near-total consensus among governments of the world that fossil fuel emissions have been leading to a critical rise in atmospheric greenhouse gases, which in turn is causing global temperatures to rise and changing the Earth's climate patterns.

Ironically, this consensus totally breaks down when civil society begins to talk about climate change. The Internet is replete with assertions of climate change being the "biggest scam of the century". Okay, you may argue that internet is also full of accounts from victims of alien abductions and creationists who denounce evolution. Society's loony fringe often has exaggerated presence on the Internet.

Except, with the climate debate, it's not exactly the loony fringe. Consider this: Of the top 12 bestselling books on climatology in Amazon.com, only three - one by Al Gore and two by leading climate scientist James Hansen - present the mainstream scientific view on the subject. As many as five other books deny human

induced climate change in some way or the other.

Look at opinion polls. A survey conducted in the US by the respected Pew Research Center in October showed a 14% drop in the number of Americans who thought there was solid evidence that the Earth was warming from 71% who had said yes to the question in April 2008, to 57% in October 2009. Only 36% of the respondents thought humans were causing it, down from 47% last year.

Then there is the "climategate" episode, in which leaked emails of British climatologists proved at least to some people that scientists were cooking data to fit their models.

That the Earth is steadily warming has itself been denied by some experts. They point out that the global temperatures haven't really gone up since 1998, and the graph has been more or less flat since then (despite the 2000-2009 decade being the warmest on record). There are others who say that the warming trend of the last century is part of a natural cycle and not human-induced; that human activities haven't reached the critical scale to impact climate. Many of these experts point to waxing and waning of solar activity to explain temperature variations on Earth.

All this brings us to the point of this post: Governments of the world are convinced about the warming effects of greenhouse emissions, but are the people? Is the science of global warming settled?

During the course of a climate change fellowship I attended in the US last month, leading climatologists spoke on the subject. The insights we got were both revealing and troubling. To answer the second question first - yes, the science behind what's causing the Earth to heat up seems pretty settled. A few notable dissenters aside,

an overwhelming majority of climatologists believe there's strong evidence to show that fossil fuels are causing the warming.

It's not just about individual scientists. The study of climate change is a multidisciplinary system science. Like any science of this nature, there are things that are well established and areas which aren't as clear, that is, where competing explanations exist and some parts that are yet speculative. Understanding is built and unbuilt through accumulated evidences over decades.

As Stephen Schneider, professor for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies at Stanford University and a preeminent climate change expert put it, understanding climate is like understanding the world economy: it's never solved by one new piece of information. And the answers are never in plain yes or no, but in degrees of certainty.

For instance, to understand whether human activity was leading to a rise in global temperatures, scientists had to build climate models based on observed data and make predictions. These models predict an overall warming trend. Temperature data of the last 100 years, and the last 50 years, bear this out. Since there are two possible outcomes in the data set "warming or cooling" there's a 50% chance that this prediction was random.

There's more. The models also predict that middle of the continents warm up more than middle of oceans. Again, observations show that's the case. Models predict stratosphere cools, lower atmosphere warms. Right again. Models predict the stratosphere cools because of ozone depleting substances and relative damping. They also predict that there's more warming at night than the day. Yet again, the models get it right.

Put together, these models leave a statistical possibility of just 5%

that all these correct predictions were arrived at by pure chance. In other words, the statement that humans through fossil fuel emissions are warming up the planet has a scientific accuracy of around 95%. That's a very high degree of certainty. No other competing explanation of the observed data's natural cycle or solar activity comes anywhere close to the robustness of this theory. (Of course, there's still a 5% chance that the warming is being caused by a factor that's yet unknown; but can we risk our planetary future on this basis?)

To return to the first question: Why are so many people not convinced? There are two main reasons why this is so. The first one is obvious: There are strong vested interests in letting people believe that warming is a myth; or that the issue is far from settled. It's no surprise that a lot of climate change deniers get funds from multinational oil conglomerates. There are websites that carry lists of who gets funded by whom. (There would, of course, be some genuine non-believers in the mix, but oil funding is the ugly, predominant truth.)

The second reason is the way the science works and the way scientists communicate it. Climate science is all about probabilities, not certainties. And scientists are careful about throwing in all the caveats while making their points. On the other hand, people who are cherry-picking facts to suit their slant are forceful and definitive. No guessing which set of speakers would leave a more lasting impression on primetime TV.

There's no denying that climate is the most politicized and contentious science of our times. But on one side is method and rigour, and on the other, half-truths and slant. At stake is a planet called Earth.

**Let's not forget, we are climate victims**

SUNITA NARAIN

Just two days into the Copenhagen conference and the fight is out in the open. Two worlds brought together by one [climate](#)-uncertain future. But as yet, the climate conference is a dialogue of the deaf.

There are many skirmishes and sides in the conference. But the end issue is as follows: The Group-77 and [China](#) want the world to stick to the commitments already made. They want the industrialized countries to cut emissions as agreed under the Kyoto Protocol. In the first commitment period of the Protocol, these countries identified as those having to take action first because of their historical and current contribution to global emissions had to cut by a mere 5% over 1990 levels.

But instead of reducing, emissions have increased: by 14.6% between 1990-2006. The issue on hand is to get these countries to commit to what [science](#) and politics say they must do to keep the world below 2 degrees C. The developing countries have demanded at least 40% reduction below 1990 level from the rich world.

In addition, this group is demanding that the world agree how it will enhance the implementation of the four issues on the table: mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and finance. They are reminding the world that at [Bali](#), the developing countries had agreed to take on nationally appropriate actions to cut emissions at home but that these needed to be aided by finance and technology. This was the deal. But it is being reneged upon.

The reason is that the Umbrella group -- known because it brings together all the rich and renegade polluters -- the US, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, [Canada](#) and sometimes, Russia, is asking for a completely different deal. They want to undermine the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is based on the distinction between the polluters who created the problem and others who need their right to development. The rich also want to scrap the Kyoto Protocol, which gives them legally binding targets and forces compliance.

This group is pushing for a completely new framework: the Copenhagen Accord is what they are calling it. They want the conference to issue a political vision to guide action for a new legally binding treaty. But this will be a different kind of multilateral regime -- bad for climate change; bad for us.

Their proposal is simple: No country rich or poor will take on legally binding targets. Instead all countries will agree to 'pledge' what actions they can undertake domestically. These pledges will be the individual reduction targets of each country -- from Australia's miserly 5-25% emission cut over 2000 levels, to US's meaningless 17% over 2005 levels or India's newly announced carbon intensity reduction target of 20-25% from 2005 levels -- all by 2020. All these added together will form the basis of the international agreement with two added components.

One, that actions will be comparable so, even if they are not equal, countries like [India](#) or China must show that their domestic action will be substantial.

Two, all these actions must be monitored, reported and verified. This is the nub of the matter. Because the minute domestic action is internationally monitored or verified it becomes an international

legal commitment.

The proposal is delicious. Therefore, India will not as well as take on legally binding international commitments -- interestingly by doing what the environment minister has/has not proposed. So, India sets a domestic target -- as it has for 2020 (interesting taking the 2005 base-year, which ends up suiting US).

This will be a domestic commitment to its own Parliament. And if we agree that all domestic actions can be internationally verified, as the minister himself proposed in media interviews, then the same domestic target would become elevated to an international commitment. Backdoor entry. No name. Same thing.

The cleverest part of this proposition is that it will also fundamentally change, forever, the distinction between the past polluters (defined as Annex 1) and the rest of the emerging world. In this proposal all major emitter would be on one page -- in the same font size or smaller or in an Annex. But no difference: the principle of equity and equal rights of every individual to the atmospheric space would be buried and lost forever.

This is why the debate in Rajya Sabha on Monday was so heated and so critical. Members quizzed the minister on his statements -- will actions supported through international finance or technology transfer only be open for international scrutiny or all actions? On the floor of the house, the minister clarified that unsupported action would not be open for international scrutiny but will be part of an annual or bi-annual reporting to the UNFCCC (the secretariat of the framework convention on climate change) for “their consideration.”

Pushed further, he said, that this report would only be for

“information”. So, he has agreed that we will not, willy-nilly, be part of this second grand coalition of the willing.

In the next few days this issue will heat up in Copenhagen. The problem is this is a coalition of the not-so-willing when it comes to cutting emissions. Their proposal, based on weak and legally non-binding targets will be disastrous for the world’s efforts to combat climate change. It will be bad for us. We are climate victims. Let us not forget.

## **Bound by omissions**

**Dhiraj Nayyar**

India's negotiations at the Copenhagen climate summit got off to the worst possible start with two senior negotiators expressing dissent, publicly, over the government's decision to move from per capita emissions to a moderate voluntary cut in emissions intensity of GDP. In the battle of attrition that international negotiations often turn out to be, a serious division of opinion in any negotiating team can end up being a major handicap that simply strengthens the hand of rival negotiators. That the official Indian delegation is a divided house (never mind the fact that the two dissenters have been "persuaded to join") is now well known. And it's not just the dissenters who are responsible for giving that impression.

The problems begin at the top. The government seems to have two lead negotiators rather than one, and no one is quite sure where the buck finally stops. There is the prime minister's special envoy on climate change, Shyam Saran, who has been leading the talks on climate since the tenure of UPA-I. In the absence of a weighty environment minister in UPA-I, that worked out well enough. However, once the undoubtedly clever and competent Jairam Ramesh took office in UPA-II, that situation was bound to change.

But the disarray and confusion in the negotiating team in Copenhagen is just the symptom of a bigger problem — the general disinterest in the establishment (at the political level) in dealing with this important issue. Somehow, the government has given the impression that either climate change was an issue on which India did not need to do anything at all (that would explain the continued insistence on the unsustainable and defensive per capita emissions as a target position until the last minute) or that at best it was an issue

that should be left to bureaucrats and other “experts” to deal with.

What we seem to have completely overlooked is the huge political, diplomatic and economic opportunity for leadership on this critical issue. So even when the government made a sensible shift to emissions intensity of GDP, with Jairam Ramesh’s speech in Parliament, it was probably too little, too late. The move just does not seem to have the kind of political support it deserves. Our position still appears defensive — why won’t we even consider accepting international scrutiny of our voluntary targets? And everyone from the G-77 to the G-7 is pointing fingers at India for being a thorn in the side of a potential agreement. How did we land ourselves in such a bind?

First, the government should have accepted many months ago that climate change was a political issue, not a technical one. Once that decision was made, the government should have worked to persuade public opinion that it was in India’s interest to do something about climate change. There is enough scientific research to show that developing countries like India are likely to suffer the impact of climate change disproportionately more than the rich world. It would have been even easier to convince public opinion and the wider polity that India had nothing to be defensive about on climate change.

Everyone agrees that the rich countries are largely responsible for the problem. And even among developing countries, China and Brazil have probably more to be defensive about. Unlike trade, where India once upon a time may have genuinely had reason to be defensive (we had amongst the highest trade barriers anywhere), on climate there is nothing to hide — if anything, our limited manufacturing base and underdeveloped infrastructure when compared with China and Brazil has meant that our emissions are much lower.

But winning public opinion and the political debate may not have been enough. There was bound to be opposition from industry. Ficci, in an unusual move from a chamber of industry, has officially opposed the government's emissions intensity of GDP target. Yet again, the government missed a chance to highlight the economic opportunity for Indian industry and the economy at large from an agreement on climate change. One of the key provisions of any agreement (or even national policies on climate change in rich countries) is for carbon offsets. These offsets which may be valued in trillions of dollars will essentially transfer to developing countries for mitigation efforts. China has already made use of offsets from the European carbon trading scheme to finance a number of renewable energy projects. There would be opportunity for Indian entrepreneurs in this too.

But that is not all. Despite all the doubts and problems, we can be reasonably sure that the world will eventually take action on reducing emissions. For this, technology is critical. And when the change of technology takes place, it will be critical to be at the frontier of the new technology. For Indian industry, climate change is a great opportunity to aspire to the technological frontier they have always trailed. The government ought to have been more forceful in pointing this out. By being defensive, China will beat us to this too.

Once the domestic political and economic constituencies were satisfied that there was enough to gain by being positive and aggressive on climate change, India could have taken the diplomatic lead in international negotiations. We could have finally emerged out of our conservative mentality that negotiations are only about giving — in climate, at least for us, there is more about taking. And we should have been aggressive in cornering the rich countries to make the major concessions while being flexible ourselves. Now, that leadership opportunity is faint.

Still, all is not lost. The negotiations will likely continue beyond Copenhagen to Bonn or Mexico City next year. For the second round, the government needs to put visible political weight behind our sensible position on emissions intensity. And rethink partnerships. On climate, we cannot ally with G-7. As an aspiring major power, and an economy growing at 8-9 per cent we should not automatically fall into G-77. Brazil and South Africa, with smaller populations (and in Brazil's case heavy forest cover), have very different interests from ours. So, how about a G-2 with China?

After all, we got our best idea, on voluntary emissions intensity cuts, from them.

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# **HUMAN RIGHTS**

## **Child undernutrition in India is a human rights issue**

Karin Hulshof

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” So begins the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established 60 years ago and celebrated today around the globe. This year’s theme is non-discrimination. When it comes to nutrition, all of India’s children are not equal. According to India’s third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) of 2005-06, 20 per cent of Indian children under five-years-old are wasted due to acute undernutrition and 48 per cent are stunted due to chronic undernutrition. Seventy per cent of children between six months and 59 months are anaemic. Despite a booming economy, nutrition deprivation among India’s children remains widespread.

In absolute numbers, an average 25 million children are wasted and 61 million are stunted. The state of child undernutrition in India is — first and foremost — a major threat to the survival, growth, and development and of great importance for India as a global player. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has referred to undernutrition as ‘a matter of national shame.’

Children who are undernourished have substantially lower chances of survival than children who are well-nourished. Undernourished children are much more likely to suffer from serious infections and to die from common childhood illnesses such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, and measles. More than a third of all deaths in children aged five years or younger can be attributable to undernutrition. Children who survive undernutrition do not perform as well in school as their well-

nourished peers and as adults they are less productive.

Good nutrition early in life is a key input for human capital formation, a fundamental factor for sustainable and equitable economic growth. Widespread undernutrition impedes socio-economic development and poverty reduction. With persistently high levels of child undernutrition, vital opportunities to save millions of lives are being lost, and many more children are not growing to their full potential.

There is a critical window of opportunity to intervene when mothers are pregnant and during children's first two years of life. After that age, the window closes and the opportunity for the child is lost forever. We know what works — ten proven, high-impact interventions can dramatically reduce undernutrition in young children if delivered nationally:

Timely initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth

Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life

Timely introduction of complementary foods at six months

Age-appropriate foods for children six months to two years

Hygienic complementary feeding practices

Immunisation and bi-annual Vitamin A supplementation with deworming

Appropriate feeding for children during and after illness

Therapeutic feeding for children with severe acute malnutrition

Adequate nutrition and support for adolescent girls to prevent

anemia

Adequate nutrition and support for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers

These 10 essential interventions could halve the proportion of undernourished children over the next 10 years.

A number of emerging economies have encountered nutrition challenges similar to those currently facing India. For example, China reduced child undernutrition by more than half (from 25 per cent to 8 per cent) between 1990 and 2002; Brazil reduced child undernutrition by 60 per cent (from 18 per cent to 7 per cent) from 1975 to 1989; Thailand reduced child undernutrition by half (from 50 per cent to 25 per cent) in less than a decade (1982-1986); and Viet Nam reduced child undernutrition by 40 per cent (from 45 per cent to 27 per cent) between 1990 and 2006.

Four lessons can be learned from these countries' experiences: 1) Leadership at the highest level to ensure that priority is given to child nutrition outcomes across sectors and states, with large investments in nutrition interventions and successful poverty alleviation strategies. 2) Targeted nutrition interventions to prevent mild and moderate undernutrition and treat severe undernutrition as part of a continuum of care for children, particularly among the most vulnerable children: the youngest, the poorest, and the socially-excluded; 3) Reliance on community-based primary health care to ensure high coverage through community-based frontline workers; 4) Strong supervision, monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management to provide the evidence base for timely and effective policy, programme and budgetary action.

The universal delivery of this package of ten evidence-based, high impact essential nutrition interventions will lead to an unprecedented reduction in child undernutrition. India has the resources — financial and human — to address, once and for all, the challenge of child undernutrition. The prevention and treatment of child undernutrition in the first two years of life needs to be a national development priority.

India's leadership is recognised globally and its economy is growing at an enviable rate. That strength and leadership can be channelled to ensure survival of India's most precious asset — its children — to thrive and survive. The nutrition targets set forth by the government in its Eleventh Five-Year Plan are ambitious, more ambitious than the international commitments set forth in the Millennium Development Goals. In the government's own words, "it is better to aim high, than to fail low."

Now is the time to combine the existing technical knowledge with the political will to change the lives of millions to guarantee the human rights, dignity and rights of all of India's children. Now is the time to combine the existing technical knowledge with the political will to change the lives of millions to guarantee the human rights and dignity of all of India's children.

This is a 'make or break' time to emerge as global leader in the fight against undernutrition... 61 million children are waiting.

*(Dr. Karin Hulshof is UNICEF India Representative.)*

# **MASS MEDIA**

## **In familiar books, a battle over electronic rights**

Motoko Rich

*A rising source of conflict in one of the publishing industry's last remaining areas of growth.*

William Styron may have been one of the leading literary lions of recent decades, but his books are not selling much these days. Now his family has a plan to lure digital-age readers with e-book versions of titles like “Sophie’s Choice,” “The Confessions of Nat Turner” and Styron’s memoir of depression, “Darkness Visible.”

But the question of exactly who owns the electronic rights to such older titles is in dispute, making it a rising source of conflict in one of the publishing industry’s last remaining areas of growth.

Styron’s family believes it retains the rights, since the books were first published before e-books existed. Random House, Styron’s long time publisher, says it owns those rights, and it is determined to secure its place — and continuing profits — in the Kindle era.

The discussions about the digital fate of Styron’s work are similar to the negotiations playing out across the book industry as publishers hustle to capture the rights to release e-book versions of so-called backlist books. Indeed, the same new e-book venture Styron’s family hopes to use has run into similar resistance from the print publisher of “Catch-22” by Joseph Heller.

On Friday, Markus Dohle, chief executive of Random House, sent a

letter to dozens of literary agents, writing that the company's older agreements gave it "the exclusive right to publish in electronic book publishing formats."

Backlist titles, which continue to be reprinted long after their initial release, are crucial to publishing houses because of their promise of revenue year after year. But authors and agents are particularly concerned that traditional publishers are not offering sufficient royalties on e-book editions, which they point out are cheaper for publishers to produce. Some are considering taking their digital rights elsewhere, which could deal a financial blow to the hobbled publishing industry.

The tussle over who owns the electronic rights — and how much the authors should earn in digital royalties — potentially puts into play works by authors like Ralph Ellison and John Updike.

Some publishers have already made agreements with authors or their estates to release digital editions. All of Ernest Hemingway's books, for example, are available in electronic versions from his print publisher, Scribner, a unit of Simon & Schuster.

But with only a small fraction of the thousands of books in print available in e-book form, there are many titles to be fought over.

# **POVERTY**

## Poverty estimates rise

ET Bureau

Economist Suresh Tendulkar has estimated that 37% of Indians are poor, not 27% as we'd been led to believe by the Planning Commission, say reports.

Apart from warming the cockles of leftist hearts, which have been skipping quite a few beats at the steady decline in the official poverty count over the past decade and a half of 'neo-liberal, anti-people' growth, this revelation means little. While we don't know the details, Prof Tendulkar's revised figures base themselves on a larger basket of consumption than the one used by the earlier, calorie-centric method. But dissimilarity of the consumption basket is not the only reason not to wax anxious over the higher poverty estimate. Economists have been measuring poverty for a long time. The point, however, is to remove it. And that is a task for politicians, not economists.

Whether poverty is 27% or 37%, the strategy to remove it is the same. The poor must be equipped with the minimal degree of political agency without which they are unable to prevent liberal central funds for high-minded poverty alleviation programmes from leaking away to sundry politicians, bureaucrats and contractors. They must have the minimal degree of political agency that will allow them to hold primary school teachers and primary health centre staff accountable, and prevent the local administration from acting in cahoots with powerful land-grabbers. They must have political agency to transform their elected representatives from rent-seeking power brokers into vocal champions of their cause. It is precisely this needed political agency that is missing in the country's poverty landscape. And it cannot be brought in by any department of the government or NGO. Political mobilisation of the

poor is the job of political parties. Tragically enough, the only political party to mobilise the poor is the Maoists, who seek to overthrow the system, not make it work.

Investment in agriculture, rural roads, power, telecom, markets, schools and hospitals will raise both economic opportunity and the capacity to take advantage of them. The government has, indeed, been stepping up investment in these vital areas, pursuing its goal of inclusive growth. However, between the government's investment outlays and their desired outcome, there is a huge gap. And that gap is yet to be filled by our political parties.