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CIVIL SERVICE

UPSC prelims to give way to aptitude test?

TNN

NEW DELHI: Focusing on aptitude of candidates to meet challenges of demanding life in civil services, the UPSC on Thursday advocated replacing the existing Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination with an Aptitude Test.

"UPSC is convinced of the need for important changes in the method of recruitment to the higher civil services that are the vehicle for public service delivery. One of the recommendations made by the commission to the government is that a Civil Service Aptitude Test replace the existing Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination," UPSC chairman Prof D P Agrawal said.

The proposal is to have two objective type papers that are common to all candidates. The emphasis is on testing the aptitude of candidate for the demanding life in civil service, as well as on ethical and moral dimensions of decision-making, he said.

"It has also been proposed that the structure of the Civil Services (Main) Examination may remain the same till a committee of experts, that may be appointed by the commission, goes into various aspects," Agrawal said during the inauguration of UPSC lecture series on governance here.

Inaugurating the conference, President Pratibha Patil said, "The system has to be made corruption free. Like a cancer, corruption is the sore which drains the strength of a nation. Corruption has

deprived the nation of better infrastructure and better facilities." The UPSC chairman said, "Careers in public service have become more attractive in the context of a better emoluments regime, as also on account of the changes in the global economic scenario. This places a responsibility on the government system to tailor procedures and careers to suit the newer vistas."

The commission is also of the view that while lowering the age of entry to the civil services may be desirable, interests of rural candidates who may complete their graduation later than their urban counterparts needs to be considered also, the UPSC chairman said.

"A reduction in the number of attempts allowed at the examination, as proposed by the Second Administrative Reform Commission (ARC), is however called for, so as to remove the premium on cramming and memorisation that a large number of attempts provides," Agrawal informed.

TIMES OF INDIA 12.11.09 CIVIL SERVICE

Tamil Nadu civil servant declares assets

U Sagayam

Namakkal District Magistrate U Sagayam has done what few civil servants would dare: declare his assets publicly. Others of his stature are ready to emulate him.

Sagayam has announced on the district administration website that he has a modest bank balance of Rs.7,172 and a house in Madurai valued at Rs.900,000. "This is nothing great as every civil servant has to submit his asset details to the government. I have just made it public," Sagayam told IANS over telephone from Namakkal.

"The public perception of civil servants is very bad now. This is not good for civil society in the long run. I feel corruption is the major stumbling block for the country's progress. I want to be myself," Sagayam, 45, said.

Other Tamil Nadu officials say they don't mind declaring their assets too, provided there is a structured format.

"If the government or the Central Vigilance Commission or IAS Officers Association advises us the manner and the place where the asset details are to be declared, it will be helpful," Chief Electoral Officer Naresh Gupta told IANS.

Such declarations will act as a deterrent for officials who may go wayward.

"Already we are declaring our assets to the public - to the government. Making it open to the public is not an issue," a senior IAS officer added.

As a part of civil service rules, IAS officials are made to declare details of their assets in a sealed envelope. It is opened only if there's an enquiry against the official.

Said Sigy Thomas Vaidhyan, Virudhunagar's district collector: "My personal view is that there is no harm in making the assets public."

Born into a family of farmers in Pudukottai district in Tamil Nadu, Sagayam obtained a Master's degree in social work and as well as in law from the University of Madras.

He joined the Tamil Nadu Civil Services 18 years ago. He was conferred the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) status in 2001.

Sagayam is known for the battles he had fought against the sand mining mafia, soft drink manufacturing multinational corporations (MNC), hotels, gas dealers and others.

He was severely assaulted when he tried to prevent illegal mining in Kanchipuram district.

Sagayam was in the spotlight in 1999 when he ordered a soft drink multinational to close its plant because it was bottling drinks that were unfit for human consumption.

The order was overruled by the Madras High Court.

When Sagayam was deputy commissioner of civil supplies, he raided hotels that were using cooking gas meant for domestic use

and not the more expensive commercial cylinders.

"In my estimate the loss to the oil companies is to the tune of around Rs.4,000 crore," he said. A report was sent to the government.

Sagayam is also credited with recovering prime land worth over Rs.200 crore encroached by a leading hotel chain. This happened when he was the district revenue officer.

CORRUPTION

INDIAN EXPRESS 15.11.09 CORRUPTION

News on sale? That's nauseous

Sudheendra Kulkarni

Democracy lovers, wake up. What you and I value highly is being increasingly devalued. What you and I cherish and pride in is endangered. The danger comes from a familiar foe: corruption.

But aren't we all too familiar with this foe, and yet unable to curb his depredations? What's new about the danger he poses?

Just that the foe has opened a new front.

Corruption in two of the four pillars of democracy, legislature and executive, has long been a part of the national debate on what is ailing our polity. In recent years, corruption in the judiciary is also being discussed, albeit in markedly muted voices, the fear of inviting the contempt of court whiplash still deterring many an intrepid investigative reporter and commentator.

But what about corruption in the media, the fourth pillar that sustains our democracy? Since the media also act as the messenger, the messenger is understandably uncomfortable talking about the malady within this once-hallowed institution. But all those who care for the health of this dependable protector of democracy should know that the disease is spreading.

It is an open secret that some of the most successful and perennially self-congratulating "superbrands" in India's newspaper business sell their editorial space to commercial entities and celebrities, without letting their readers know that the news and features that they read

are paid for. But far more disturbing is the recent phenomenon that a growing number of newspapers, magazines and TV channels across the country are selling their election coverage, both at wholesale and retail prices, to political parties and candidates.

I had witnessed it first-hand during the Lok Sabha election in May. Nevertheless, what I heard from numerous sources about its lurid manifestation in last month's assembly election in Maharashtra was shocking. So brazen had it become that, on the day election results were announced, Loksatta, the highly popular Marathi daily belonging to The Indian Express group, devoted its entire editorial page to deploring this troubling trend.

Similarly, The Hindu carried a searing commentary last month by celebrated journalist P. Sainath ('The medium, message and the money'), in which he wrote: "The Assembly elections saw the culture of 'coverage packages' explode across Maharashtra. In the financial orgy that marked the elections, the media were never far behind the moneybags. Not just small local outlets, but powerful newspapers and television channels, too. No money, no news. Many candidates complained of 'extortion' but were not willing to make an issue of it for fear of drawing media fire."

It is necessary to be blunt about who these "extortionists" were. Who were blackmailing parties and candidates? Who were doing the deals about the price for per-column-centimetre news, the premium to be paid for blacking out news about other candidates, and a higher premium for printing negative news about rivals? Not reporters and editors, but media owners themselves. The deal that was struck by owners had to be dutifully implemented by the editorial staff. Almost every serious candidate who aspired to win had to earmark at least a couple crores for such "media management". What a mockery of freedom of the press! Freedom comes with the obligation of integrity. Integrity brings credibility. And it is

credibility, and not profitability, which is the most precious badge of honour for everybody associated with the noble profession of journalism.

But who cares? Who should care?

First of all, readers of print media and watchers of TV media must care. They are citizens of this country, and have a vital stake in India's democracy. Just as freedom of the press is sacrosanct for media owners and must be defended, readers have the right to demand that the freedom is exercised as per the highest ethical and professional norms of journalism. The government and the election commission have a responsibility to ensure that readers and affected candidates have effective outlets to voice their protest. Since the media are playing an increasingly powerful role not just in elections but also in our national life, the time has come for Parliament to codify citizens' enforceable rights vis-à-vis the media.

Second, the time has also come for all concerned and conscientious members of the media fraternity to combat the scourge of corruption that is darkening the name of their profession. Their number is not insignificant. Nor is their collective power to be belittled. Sadly, organisations of professional journalists and media owners, like the Editors' Guild and Indian Newspaper Society, are almost dysfunctional when it comes to self-regulation.

Lastly, why is the political class silent about this problem? If the media makes a noise—which they must—about corruption in politics and government, shouldn't those political leaders who are upright (their number too is not insignificant) make corruption in the media a matter of public debate? Why shouldn't this issue be discussed in the upcoming winter session of Parliament?

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Delayed economic reform killed 14.5 mn children

S A Aiyar

The 20th anniversary of Communism's fall is a good time to estimate the costs borne by countries like India that did not become Communist but drew heavily on the Soviet model. For three decades after Independence, India levied sky-high taxes, strove for self-sufficiency, and gave the state an ever-increasing role in controlling the means of production. These socialist policies yielded economic growth averaging 3.5% per year, just half of that in export-oriented Asian countries, and yielded poor social indicators too.

Growth accelerated with tentative reforms in 1980, and shot up to 9% after reforms deepened in the current decade. How much lower would infant mortality, illiteracy and poverty have been had India commenced reform a decade earlier, and enjoyed correspondingly faster growth and human development? I have published estimates in a paper for the Cato Institute (see <http://www.cato.org/pubs/dbp/dbp4.pdf>). This shows that the delay in reforms led to an additional 14.5 million infant deaths, an additional 261 million illiterates, and an additional 109 million poor people. Indian socialism delivered a monumental tragedy, lacking both growth and social justice.

Economists frequently estimate what would have happened had policies been different. The assumptions on which such estimates are based can always be questioned.

For instance, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has popularized the

notion of 100 million missing women on account of gender discrimination in China, South Asia, West Asia and North Africa. These regions have 94 females per 100 males, against 105 females per 100 males in other countries with equal gender treatment. Sen assumed that without gender discrimination, the female:male ratio in the four developing regions would also have been 105:100. On this basis, he estimated that gender discrimination had caused a shortfall of over 100 million females — what he called “missing women”.

Sen’s model was so simplistic that he did not send his paper to an economic journal: he published these estimates in the New York Review of Books. Various economists complained that he had neglected other causes of gender differences, and some came out with alternative estimates. Despite these objections, Sen’s estimate of 100 million became world famous, and his phrase, “missing women”, became standard lexicon in gender debates. What mattered was not the precision of his estimates, but the magnitude of the social disaster he was able to highlight.

In the same spirit (but without implicating Sen), i have sought to estimate the number of missing children, missing literates, and missing non-poor arising from the delay in economic reforms. Had reforms started in 1970 rather than 1980, India would have grown faster. In this fast-growth scenario, i assume that per capita income growth in the 1970s would have been what was actually achieved in the 1980s: growth in the 1980s would have been what was actually achieved in the 1990s: and growth in the 1990s would have been what was achieved in 2001-08. I calculate the rate of change of infant mortality, literacy and poverty with GDP since 1971. I then apply this rate of change to the fast-growth scenario. This reveals what infant mortality, literacy and poverty would have been with faster

growth.

In a fast-growth scenario, infant mortality would have been less every year, and in 2008 would have been 27 deaths per thousand births, against the actual 54 per thousand. The cumulative number of “missing children” turns out to be a massive 14.5 million. This is two-and-a-half times the number of Jews killed by Hitler. I use trends from the latest surveys to calculate actual literacy and poverty levels in 2008, and compare these with literacy and poverty levels in a fast-growth scenario. With faster growth, literacy would have been virtually 100% by 2008, and 261 million more people would have been literate. Again, faster growth would have reduced the number of poor people in 2008 from 282 million to 174 million. This means we have 109 million “missing non-poor” on account of delayed reform.

Doubtless critics will object, as they did after Sen’s exercise, that i have used a simple model that neglects other factors affecting infant mortality, literacy and poverty. Demographer Ansley Coale reworked Sen’s calculations to show that the number of missing women was probably 60 million, not 100 million. That did not dent public horror at the social tragedy that Sen unveiled.

I invite critics to produce more sophisticated models on the impact of delayed reform, as Coale did in the case of missing women. If these more sophisticated models conclude that Indian socialism killed only 10 million children and not 14.5 million, i will shrug. My point about the magnitude of the social tragedy will stand.

Prime but don't pump

Laveesh Bhandari

There is much talk of government investment in infrastructure as a policy response to the current financial crisis. China announced a \$586 billion stimulus package this week. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh too has been speaking of similar plans. And from the lack of alternative responses from anyone else, it appears that indeed the government will try to “pump-prime” the economy. This means that we should expect dramatic increases in government expenditures directed towards the infrastructure sector.

There are many good things that can come about from improved infrastructure, but the critical issue is not whether improved infrastructure would help, but whether government financed/built infrastructure will help us in getting out of the expected slowdown. The answer is an unambiguous no.

It is well known that the government has tried many ways to improve infrastructure but has not been as successful as it desired. The reasons have to do with difficulties in contracting and follow-up action between the various entities involved in the government and private sectors. Systems that enable smooth interaction between the two are still somewhat weak in India.

Consequently, the only way the government will be able to pump-prime the economy very rapidly would be through public sector leadership and action. This is the first danger. Post-Independence we assigned to the public sector a similar task,

and it delivered for a while; but it took us many decades to emerge from the deep hole of inefficiency that we let the public sector dig for us.

The second danger is related to financing these expenses. Where will the government get the money from? It won't tax much more, and will borrow either internationally or domestically. Domestic borrowings will lead to the same set of problems that contributed to this mess — increased interest rates, the crowding out of stable but low-return investments in the private sector, and greater probability of high-risk, high-return investments. Given recent experience, the government would like to avoid this.

Consequently the government will need to increase its international borrowings. This is something that countries in Latin America are very familiar with — infrastructure investments by the government backed by large-scale international borrowings. This is not really a problem if the scales are limited. But if we want to “pump-prime”, then scales cannot be low. Large-scale international borrowings will be a natural outcome of pump-priming.

The third danger is related to timeliness. Infrastructure build-up takes many years, the gestation periods are high, and it is not clear how the downturn would be affected during the intervening period. Typically an infrastructure project takes one to two years to plan and two-four years to set up (the experts will say these are optimistic numbers); but during that period the regular business cycle would have run its course internationally.

In other words, “pump-priming” would require international borrowings, greater role of the public sector, and will yield

fruits quite a few years from now.

Pump-priming is a bad idea. This is a typical World Bank and IMF solution and taken directly from discredited Keynesian texts (as the PM himself mentioned). But international institutions will love this idea, as it will once again allow them to affect India's reform process. And the centre-left politicians will love this idea as that calls for increased government expenditures and meddling in the markets.

There is a consensus within and outside India on our long term potential, and within this envelope of opportunity and optimism is a short term crisis. No one can deny that there is a crisis. No one can also deny that infrastructure is required. But infrastructure investment is the wrong solution to this crisis. Trying to fit the two together will not benefit us, and may only harm. The solution to this crisis of confidence is somewhere else.

The current crisis happened because of improperly working financial markets, and the solution also lies there. A liquidity crisis arose in September abetted by government action (large amounts were withdrawn from the system to pay taxes and interest rates were high). The government has already taken corrective action, and is expected to take some more in coming weeks. Interest rates are also expected to go down. But despite this the pessimism continues, and stories of organisations holding cash and slashing expenditures continue.

To improve confidence and remove pessimism from the markets, the government needs to ensure that markets are strengthened, and it signals universally its faith in Indian private initiative and markets — just as we support a child who has failed a test. There are many possibilities within this larger

framework. And pump-priming is not one of them.

First, high interest rates have made many projects unviable, so interest rates need to go down (inflationary expectations are also down). Second, there are a range of regulations that prevent smooth flow of funds within and between the financial and real sectors. Third, many companies have become undervalued; let the public sector resort to equity market purchases in the stock markets — other countries such as Taiwan have done it. Fourth, real estate overpricing is a real problem that needs to be corrected. A good quality real estate index is being developed and good information works wonders in introducing sanity in a market. The key is to ensure that government action does not help in sustaining a bubble, as that will only create a more serious problem later (and pump-priming can very easily create another bubble). Fifth, by all means improve infrastructure, as long as it is not based on ad hoc public sector action. Outsourcing IT infrastructure creation within the government is one such example, where our IT companies can compete.

A strong economy is characterised by low costs of production and economic efficiency. Only this leads to sustained and long term optimism and progress. Everything else leads to short term gains at best. Pump-priming will yield fruits when they are no longer required, adversely affect the fisc, weaken the growth and maturing of all kinds of markets (not just financial), and increase governments role in the economy. As a consequence it will increase pessimism in the economy. A better alternative is to take measures that remove pessimism directly by removing the factors that caused this short term pessimism in an era of 8 per cent growth.

The writer heads the economics research firm Indicus Analytics

IP rights create a secure environment for investment in innovation

Francis Gurry

The current contraction in global economic growth offers an opportunity to re-assess what will foster economic resurgence.

The sustained growth of India's IT sector is a further example of what can be achieved through strategic use of IP

A strong commitment to strengthening its IP capacity will help India unleash the full potential of its people

The Indian government has declared a decade of innovation, emphasising the importance of innovation to India's well-being. I share the confidence that investment in India's enormous human capital, coupled with a focus on innovation, will bear healthy dividends for many years to come.

The current contraction in global economic growth offers an opportunity to re-assess what will foster economic resurgence. The importance of innovation and technological progress as a means of creating jobs and boosting growth and competitiveness is well established. While the annual global expenditure devoted to research and development now exceeds \$1 trillion, knowledge creation alone is not a sufficient stimulus for growth. It is also necessary to create the conditions for its commercialisation.

Intellectual property (IP) is one of the indispensable mechanisms for translating knowledge into commercial assets. IP rights create a secure environment for investment in innovation and provide a legal framework for trading in intellectual assets. An investment in knowledge creation, and the maintenance of a robust IP system that strikes an appropriate balance between the interests of innovators, investors and society, should feature prominently in any strategy to ensure sustainable economic growth.

Indian commentators are familiar with the need to ensure that the IP system balances the interests of all IP stakeholders — including developing countries — and that it continues to serve the public good. Indeed, this is a constant challenge for WIPO and its constituents. The international IP system must be able to deliver tangible benefit to all countries, irrespective of where they fall on the spectrum of technological or economic development. The reality for a global organisation like WIPO, with 184 Member States, is that it must be fully able to serve all of them.

It is important to bear in mind that the IP system is a mechanism for stimulating and disseminating innovation and creativity, for countering unfair competition and for contributing to market order. The debates and discussions at WIPO are ultimately about how the system can best serve these underlying principles, from which all countries stand to benefit.

A member of WIPO since May 1975, India continues to make an important and positive contribution to the ongoing process of exploring how to further improve different aspects of the international IP system and to influence the future evolution of the IP landscape.

India is no stranger to the economic advantages of IP. Consider Bollywood, the world's largest film industry, producing over 1,000

feature films a year. Nor, alas, is it a stranger to the enormous challenges confronting the entertainment business under threat from piracy and a growing lack of respect for their IP rights. A recent study estimated that the Indian entertainment industry loses some 820,000 jobs and around \$4 billion each year to piracy. Imagine what this dynamic, high-growth industry which already generates over \$11 billion annually could further achieve if piracy rates were checked. India is not alone in confronting the global challenge of piracy and collectively, we need to reflect on the fundamentally important question of how we are to finance culture in the future — the future evolution of the copyright system, is of course central to this debate.

The sustained growth of India's IT sector is a further example of what can be achieved through strategic use of IP. The country's high-tech prowess is evident in a growing range of fields such as information technology, nuclear power, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology. Companies such as Infosys Technologies, Wipro, and Ranbaxy have become household names around the globe.

The country's wealth of ancient traditional knowledge and its rich biodiversity are additional platforms on which to build economic strength. India is in the forefront in developing practical solutions to defend against the misappropriation of traditional knowledge, genetic resources and traditional cultural expressions. The "Indian Systems of Medicine" initiative, the Health Heritage Database and the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) initiative — which alone already contains some 36,000 formulations in patent search compatible formats in various languages — all attest to India's leadership in these areas.

India also plays a key role in WIPO's Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC). The IGC, which received its

strongest mandate yet from Member States last month, is about to embark on international negotiations to ensure the effective protection of Traditional Knowledge (TK), Genetic Resources (GR) and Traditional Cultural Expression (TCE) through the development of an international legal instrument. The historic decision is significant in that it recognises TK, GRs and TCE as part of a more universal knowledge base upon which the IP system rests, and could potentially lead to a major normative shift in the IP system.

The return of many Indians who have studied and worked abroad has further energised the country's technological research capabilities, its entrepreneurial drive, and the ability to finance new business ventures. Ten years ago, Rajeev Samant, a Stanford University graduate and former finance manager at Oracle, recognised that the climate in the Nasik region north of Mumbai is similar to that of California's Napa Valley. Today, India is host to a burgeoning wine industry.

There are innumerable stories that illustrate the potential of India's rich endowment of inventive and entrepreneurial talent. This, together with a large domestic market that can support substantial investments in research and development, and a renewed commitment to innovation, means the prospects are good for one of the world's fastest growing economies. It is good news as well for a global economy in search of new sources of growth. Continued investment and a strong commitment to strengthening the country's IP capacity will not only reinforce India's position as an emerging economic power, it will help it unleash the full potential of its people. — *Courtesy: U.N. Information Centre, New Delhi*

(Francis Gurry is Director-General of the World Intellectual Property Organisation.)

EDUCATION

Indo-Asian News Service

Kerala adopts free and open source software in education

The Kerala government has adopted free and open source software (FOSS) for the state education department and for e-governance.

The curriculum department Saturday has also recommended extension of FOSS to higher secondary schools.

The implementation of this has been entrusted to the [IT@school](#) Project, a mission mode agency under the state's general education department.

Information Technology was made a part of high school curriculum in Kerala in 2003 when IT was made a compulsory subject for Class 8.

"The higher secondary sector is using software like Visual Basic, MS office package, Tally in the computer science and commerce streams. With the new curriculum committee decision, the entire higher secondary section will now changeover to FOSS," said Anvar Sadath, executive director, [IT@school](#).

"Training for teachers in FOSS and development of various software tools to supplement the existing proprietary software will commence from December 2009," he said.

The state's general education department will be the only agency in India to make its e-governance fully on FOSS, he said.

[IT@school](#) Project was in the news recently for saving a minimum of Rs.11 crore in purchase of software after it adopted FOSS.

"The FOSS implementation implies the values of sharing and stands for the true value of freedom which enables the user to copy, modify, share, study it and use it on requirement without any restriction," added Sadath.

Deemed universities: the good & the not so good

R. P. KAUSHIK

The deemed-to-be universities in recent months have acquired the misnomer of being “dam’nd universities.” Recent moves by the HRD Ministry in this regard have raised doubts about the efficacy of these institutions. The Yashpal Committee and other experts associated with policy matters in higher education are also not comfortable with the system.

As a result, the stakeholders of ‘deemed universities’ as also the student cadres of institutions along with others, have been confused. The public at large, remains confounded.

The concept of deemed university was conceived by the UGC to evolve an educational structure of the institutions which excelled in their spheres of higher education. These institutions had the potential of a university but were still lacking in some areas as to qualify themselves as a full-fledged university. The rationale was that these institutions could breathe easy and evolve their course structure and syllabi in the wake of new academic challenges.

No easy task

In the traditional system, these institutions faced bottlenecks in their growth due to the affiliation system with one university or the other. Undue delays and non-approval of their new programmes, coupled with the regulatory mechanism of the university system and the obtrusiveness of its hierarchy, held them back from further progress. Hence, to provide sufficient autonomy and make provision for their speedy developments of academic programmes, the deemed-to-be university was brought about.

These institutions were examined rigorously by a multiple process which seldom left scope for faltering in the findings of the examiners. Several high-level autonomous bodies, viz., the All-India Council for Technical Education, the Medical Council of India, the Dental Council of India, the Bar Council of India and scores of other autonomous bodies, were part of the Central government's scheme of inspection committees for approval of such professional courses.

Therefore, it may not be misconstrued that 130-odd varsities sprang up overnight and became the bone of contention between those who stood for uprightness and others who took this task rather in a Bohemian style — the perception which has usually been created.

In demand

Most of these institutions were significantly in demand due to the heavy rush of students for talent growth and match the market demand for employment.

During the 1990s, there was a spurt in demand in areas that suited the economic reforms and a tendentious turn towards professional employment in the spheres of medical, and engineering education, business and hotel management, housing, tourism etc. Inevitably, higher education became part of this industrial growth — hence an industry in itself. These demands began multiplying and government agencies were hard put to respond to such needs. The deemed-to-be universities became the tool “ready to respond” to such demands and their growth increased.

These institutions were not exactly the same as the conventional varsities in terms of research output or characteristic innovativeness. They were meant to be a quick recipe for short-term courses or vocational courses and did marvellously well in those areas. In many cases these universities stood aloft in comparison to other institutions. Their infrastructure, lab facilities, libraries, the quality

of classrooms and facilities have been worthy of mention, compared to the pathetic state of affairs in State universities and, to some extent, in some Central universities.

However, some of the deemed-to-be universities fell short of the requisite standards and they created a dismal image of these institutions. As a result, they met a sad demise at the hands of experts and lost the academic market. Hence, no universality of judgment could be valid in those cases.

A question has been raised about these institutions' research potential. Research is a long process and it does not show quick results. Nor are these institutions by their very nature of catering to the demands of students in emerging areas — for short term course, with an eye on jobs — could become the mainstay of research.

It is also well-known that several government-sponsored institutions are languishing in a pitiable condition as far as research is concerned. Do we close down those institutions? Is it not a laudable mission if institutions can impart quality education to prepare future generation to be excellent managers, engineers and professional corporate executives? Will that not be the main contribution to a developing society by educational institutions? Although imparting quality education and engaged in research are not incompatible, it is a question of emphasis and parenthetically singling out one or the other.

(The writer is a former member, UGC and former Indian ambassador to Turkmenistan).

ENVIRONMENT

HINDU 11.11.09 ENVIRONMENT

Climate: rich and poor must work together

Douglas Alexander and Mohamed Nasheed

We take inspiration from underwater politics.

Be in no doubt. Climate change is not tomorrow's future menace. It is today's growing catastrophe. In Copenhagen next month a meaningful deal must be secured if we are to have any hope of avoiding catastrophe.

This very human crisis is already being felt in parts of the world. This year, entire communities in Bangladesh are being forced to leave their homes due to rising sea levels; women in drought-ridden parts of Ethiopia have to walk five miles a day to collect water; and natural disasters are occurring with increasing frequency and ever more devastating results.

Climate change threatens us all. If we fail to bring it under control in the next decade we may move past the point of no return. This is a defining political test of our generation. Less than one degree of global warming since the industrial revolution has caused dangerous changes to our world.

Last month (October), the government of the Maldives held a cabinet meeting underwater to illustrate the stark reality facing the nation. The meeting caused a media sensation internationally. It was a lighthearted event with a deadly serious message: if climate change is not addressed, these beautiful islands will slowly slip into the Indian Ocean.

This week (Nov. 13, 14), the Maldives is hosting a conference of

climate-vulnerable developing countries. The conference aims to thrash out a common position among the most vulnerable nations ahead of the Copenhagen meeting in December.

Britain stands shoulder to shoulder with the Maldives and all vulnerable countries. The U.K. government are working to ensure the voices of the people who will be hit first and hardest by climate change are heard around the negotiating table. Copenhagen must secure a deal that sees rich countries shouldering their fair share of the burden of controlling climate change. This means tough targets on their own emissions but also an agreement on funding to help developing countries pursue green growth and cope with the impacts of climate change.

This will mean helping to end the deforestation that sees 8m trees lost every day; governments working with the private sector to secure large investments in green industries; and a commitment to renewable energy, to make renewables cheaper than fossil fuel.

A fair deal at Copenhagen also means that climate change funding is not plundered from existing aid budgets but should be new, additional finance.

It is vital that the developing world has a strong, coherent voice at the table. The rich world must take the lead in cutting emissions and providing sufficient funds for developing countries. They, however, also have responsibilities. Developing nations need to grow, but their economic growth must be green.

To that end, the Maldives has signed an agreement to build a 75MW wind farm which will power the capital, Male, the international airport, and 24 luxury tourist resorts. This project will cut CO₂ emissions by 25 per cent. It is due to be operational in 20 months. If a small developing country can make this rapid shift to renewables, there can be little excuse for richer nations to drag their feet.

Copenhagen is a moment of necessity. We must agree a credible, long-term deal that is fair and equitable. One that merely protects the interests of the rich will tell the world that the leaders of 2009 lacked the political will and moral conviction to help those whose lives will be blighted by climate change.

We need to use these last 28 days before Copenhagen to ensure that all parties are in a position to work towards a deal that will stand alongside the Geneva conventions and the U.N. charter as a defining document for humanity. — © *Guardian Newspapers Limited, 2009*

(Douglas Alexander is the U.K.'s International Development Secretary; Mohamed Nasheed is the President of the Maldives.)

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Child Rights

Ananthapriya Subramanian

Alamin Ali is a precocious 13-year-old with big dreams. He wants to live in a big house and drive a big car. At 13, he does know quite a bit about houses. He makes bricks for a living. He wakes up at 6 a.m. to go to work in the brick kiln with his parents till about 11.30 a.m. After a break he does another back-aching stint from 3 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. Alamin etches his dreams on paper, in drawings, of living some day in the big houses that he helps build.

November 14-21 is the UN Child Rights Convention (UNCRC) week. This year is significant because it is 20 years since the CRC was signed. India is one of the signatories to the Child Rights Convention. However, little has changed on the ground for millions of children in the country. India's report card on the status of its children is not a cause for celebration this Children's Day.

Article 32 of the UNCRC recognises the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that interferes with a child's education or harmful to the child's health or physical, mental or social development. Brick kiln work is one such hazardous and exploitative form of labour recognised by the International Labour Organisation (Convention 182) as intolerable.

Amending the law

Alamin is one of 13 million children below the age of 14 who are engaged in child labour in India. Though the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act does ban child labour, it only applies

to those categories of work that it deems “hazardous.” This is unacceptable as any form of child labour is a complete violation of children's rights. Until the law is amended to ban all child work and more importantly, the law is effectively enforced, India can only get a 2 out of 10 on our report card on how it fares in the treatment of its children. Also, more importantly, the social and cultural sanction of child labour must end.

Article 28 of the UNCRC recognises the right of the child to education... “and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, the State parties shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all...”

Seven million children are still out of school in a country where education is a fundamental right. The majority of these tend to be the most socially excluded groups such as disabled children, children of migrants, street and working children. Crucially, only 47 per cent of children finish elementary schooling with 20 per cent dropping out by Grade II. True, advances have been made with the Right to Education Bill being passed this year and the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan making some headway. While many more schools may have been opened, whether children actually learn within schools is debatable. Our schools and education system must be made inclusive and relevant to the most marginalised and underprivileged children in society and quality of education improved to meet diverse needs. Until this happens, India can only get a 4 out of 10 on the report card.

Preventable tragedies

Article 6 of the UNCRC recognises the inherent right of every child to life. In India, a tragedy quietly unfolds everyday across villages and towns but receives scant or no attention. According to

government sources, 45 children die every hour due to respiratory infections! One child dies every two minutes due to diarrhoea! Over four lakh children die within the first 24 hours of life every year in India mainly of diseases that are easily treatable and even preventable. Despite a decade of rapid economic growth, India's record on child mortality at 72 per 1000 live births is worse than that of neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh. India ranks 171 out of 175 countries in the world in public health spending, and nearly 50 per cent of India's children remain malnourished. Despite myths that the costs of reducing child mortality are high, there are examples from within India itself that low-cost interventions could prevent children dying needlessly by up to 70 per cent if provided universally. On present trends India will only reach the Millennium Development Goal 4 on reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2020. India can get no more than a poor 2 out of 10 on this report card.

India's progress can only be measured by the progress it makes in securing the rights of its children. This is critical to ensuring sustainable progress in social and economic productivity. We owe it to the future of our country, our children, that we invest in their well being. Only then can we truly celebrate a day dedicated to children.

Ananthapriya Subramanian works with Save the Children.

SOCIOLOGY

A Nobel Prize for Political Science

Jorge Heine

Let us hope that the Economics Nobel awarded to prominent political scientist Elinor Ostrom will open the doors for this “Nobel” to be the forerunner of a recognition given to all social sciences, not just one of them.

The award of Nobel Prize in Economics to Elinor Ostrom and Oliver Williamson surprised many, and not just because Ms Ostrom is the first woman honoured with it. Observers are taken aback because Ms Ostrom is not an economist. She received a Ph.D in Political Science at UCLA, has taught for many years in the Political Science Department at Indiana University and was president of the American Political Science Association (APSA), one of the highest honours conferred by the profession. To say she was merely “trained” in Political Science, as much of the press has put it (at least those who have not described her, inaccurately, as an outright economist), or that she is “more of a political scientist than an economist,” as others have, implying that she later took up the discipline of Economics as her “true” vocation, is false. Ms Ostrom’s whole career took place within the boundaries of Political Science, where she excelled (she was the second woman to be elected president of APSA in the organisation’s 100-year history) and made significant contributions to our understanding of a number of key issue areas.

Like many political scientists, Ms Ostrom does research in political economy, albeit from a perspective very different from that of neoclassical economists. That is, as many of her fellow political scientists, she does actual field work and draws her conclusions

from the findings of it, and not on the basis of abstruse models built on preconceived notions of human nature and how we behave. The reason she has enhanced so much of our knowledge of human behaviour is she sets out to find out what happens “out there” — as opposed to starting from the premise she already knows it and that it is just a question of building the mathematical models to prove it.

Last November, Queen Elizabeth visited the London School of Economics (LSE) and asked some of the top minds in that discipline in Britain why they had been unable to predict the Great Recession of 2008. Given that failure, the award of the Economics prize this year (strictly speaking, the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Science, established much later than the original Nobel awards, and not really a “Nobel Prize” as such) represents a refreshing change from the tradition of giving it to specialists in evermore abstract models of the workings of the financial system, many of whom had nothing to say about the global meltdown that hit us in 2008. As has been pointed out, there is no small irony in the fact that the odds-on favourite to win the Prize this year was Eugene Fama, the author of the efficient markets hypothesis. It was precisely such approaches that did so much to open the doors to the 2008 crash, as Alan Greenspan himself admitted in a testimony before the U.S. Congress.

In an impressive oeuvre of 20-some books and hundreds of articles in top journals, which she continues to churn out uninterruptedly at age 76 (Princeton University Press will publish her latest one, *Working Together: Collective Action, the Commons and Multiple Methods in Practice*, in 2010), Ms Ostrom has addressed that question from a variety of angles. And one of the most fascinating aspects of her by now classic book, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions* (1990), is precisely that it goes against one of the most ingrained dogmas among economists: the notion of the “tragedy of the commons.” That is, the

belief that “property that belongs to all, effectively belongs to nobody.” The classic example is the alleged contrast between the fate of the wild buffalo that runs the risk of extermination because “it belongs to nobody,” and that of domestic cattle that survives happily because “it has an owner.” The economists’ typical response has been that the solution is to privatise, thus solving the problem (though it is not obvious how wild buffalos can be privatised).

In contrast to those who take the opposite tack, that is, having the government take over the commons, Ms Ostrom, in her extensive work in places as far apart as California, Switzerland, India and Nepal, has discovered that self-organised communities are perfectly able to manage their lands, forests, fishing resources or irrigation systems. At a time when many indigenous communities across the planet find themselves under heavy pressure to privatise whatever common lands they still have, this is highly pertinent.

As Ms Ostrom put it in her 1997 APSA presidential address, “the theory of collective action is the central subject of political science. It is the core of the justification for the state. Collective-action problems pervade international relations, face legislators when devising public budgets, permeate public bureaucracies, and are at the core of explanations of voting, interest group formation, and citizen control of governments in a democracy.”

At the core of Ms Ostrom’s work is her effort to explore the ways in which “social dilemmas,” that is, situations in which individuals make independent choices amid interdependence. In so doing, she presses beyond the rather simplistic rational choice approach followed by many of her colleagues, which also reduces human beings to *homo economicus*. In keeping with her notion that “political systems are complexly organised and that we will rarely be able to state that one variable is always positively or negatively correlated to a dependent variable,” she deploys a multipronged

approach to establishing causal relationships. Through field work, laboratory experiments and such high-tech approaches as satellite photography, she tries to determine how self-organised communities devise rules that protect common property and public goods — without having to rely on privatisation or on the overarching power of the state.

In her work, she establishes such apparently unsurprising propositions as “face-to-face communication enhances cooperation,” something which the first-generation of rational choice theory had not contemplated, dismissing communication as “cheap talk.” There is no substitute for sitting in a meeting with someone and watching his or her face while he or she makes a commitment. An e-mail won’t do for these purposes, and that is one reason teleconferencing, though not quite the same as face-to-face meetings, is becoming so popular. But this is only the first step to her finding about human relationships and what she refers to as the second-generation of rational choice theory: the key links between reciprocity, reputation and trust.

Once human beings start to communicate with each other, they realise they are better off working together than by remaining in splendid isolation. They also become aware that developing a reputation for trustworthiness is an asset. People are more likely to cooperate with those who stick to their word than with those who “jump ship” at the first opportunity. The longer they are able to do this, the greater the benefits they derive. This mechanism is self-reinforcing. Teams of individuals who know they can rely on each other tend to be more successful than those riven by dissent, and given to backbiting and jockeying for position.

Beyond Ms Ostrom’s unquestionable merits, her award underscores a broader phenomenon. For too long, the economic profession has allotted to itself a quasi-monopoly of the vocabulary of public

discourse and of the methodologies applied to analyse social problems, and the public policies designed to overcome them. The use of econometric models that make total abstraction of reality has become so dominant in many countries that the notion of undertaking field work, that is, genuine field research aimed at establishing how real human beings actually behave, has often been set aside, with disastrous results. The misplaced hubris of the economic profession, that has tended to look down on its sister disciplines in the social sciences, has partly been fed by its being the only one with a “Nobel Prize.”

Economics, like the other social sciences, has much to contribute to our understanding of social processes. Indian economists have certainly done so, and the worldwide recognition of such noted specialists as Amartya Sen and Jagdish Bhagwati reflects it. However, the analytical and methodological toolkit of economists is by no means the only one available to map out the road towards improving our comprehension of social problems. It also has considerable limitations, including the reluctance of its practitioners to engage in field work. This last year provided us with abundant evidence in this respect. Let us hope that this prize awarded to prominent political scientist Elinor Ostrom will open the doors for this “Nobel” to be the forerunner of a recognition given from now on to all social sciences, and not just one of them.

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