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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Dread of drought in weather data

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT



New Delhi, Aug. 7: India appears trapped in a state of meteorological drought this monsoon with the rain deficit across the country rising this week to 25 per cent, new data from the India Meteorological Department show.

The rain shortages have worsened in all regions except for pockets of the east and the northeast, the IMD said in its first rainfall analysis after the monsoon season's midpoint on July 31-August 1.

The rain deficit for the country rose from 19 per cent on July 22 to 25 per cent on August 5. In the northwestern region— a major grain-producing zone — the rainfall has been 40 per cent below normal.

A senior weather scientist said the farther away from the midpoint, the lower the chance that rainfall during the rest of the season would be able to make up the shortage.

“The longer we wait for the revival, the lower its chances of changing the season's (rain) amount significantly,” the scientist said.

Agrometeorology teams are now attempting to simulate the impact of the poor rains on crops to predict yields in different states. One analysis conducted last week indicated that the yields of paddy in Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were likely to drop by at least 10 per cent.

The IMD had, however, predicted that monsoon activity was likely to improve over the coming week with a strengthening of wind flows over the Arabian Sea. It said parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar would also receive increased rainfall over the next two days.

Scientists have some clues about the poor monsoon behaviour. The anticipated rise in the sea surface temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean — the phenomenon known as El Nino which is unfavourable for rains in India — has occurred and may impact rainfall in the coming weeks, a weather researcher said.

The sea surface temperatures over the equatorial Indian Ocean just west of Indonesia have also been slightly higher this year, which might prevent monsoon weather systems from moving northwards, the scientist said.

India's last major drought was in 2002.

Our bureau adds: Finance minister Pranab Mukherjee conceded in the Lok Sabha today that the poor rainfall might set back the economy that had started gathering pace. "The economy has started moving slightly, but other problems may come from an adverse impact of scanty rainfall."

Monsoon concerns, combined with weak global cues, dragged down the stock market for the second consecutive day today. The sensx ended 354 points lower against its previous close, losing 744 points in two days. Agriculture minister Sharad Pawar allayed fears of an impending food crisis in the event of a severe drought but accepted that prices of essential commodities were too high. He told the Lok Sabha that the country had enough buffer stocks of wheat and rice to survive for the next 13 months.

Cabinet secretary K.M. Chandrashekar has called a meeting of state chief secretaries tomorrow to discuss the surge in prices and the drought

in various regions.

Drought and floods in some areas have resulted in a 25 per cent less sowing of paddy. Agriculture ministry officials are hoping that late rains would see paddy sowing going up in August.

D.K. Joshi, principal economist at Crisil, the credit-rating agency, said that a drought could stir inflation and pull down production of foodgrain and overall economic growth.

Tushar Poddar, vice-president and chief economist at investment bank Goldman Sachs India, said in a report that the weak rainfall could reduce agricultural growth to -2 per cent year-on-year, down from an earlier estimate of 1.4 per cent.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Reforms: where to begin?

Udayan Namboodiri

The UPA's new Companies Bill smacks of insincerity — fraudulent practices in auditing will continue to breed more Satyams and resultant misery for millions

In *Untouchables* (1987), the Kevin Costner character based on the life of Elliot Ness, the US Treasury Department official who went after Al Capone in the heyday of prohibition era gangsterism, discovers half way through the film that his quarry has an Achilles heel. His bookkeeper. The only way to get Capone behind bars is to prove in a court of law that the leader of the Chicago mob was a tax defaulter. After an exciting shootout, the bookkeeper is caught and Capone is put away.

Another Hollywood thriller, albeit played out in undertones, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), has Tim Robbins in the role of a tax lawyer serving three life sentences in a penitentiary where the warden routinely skims off the cream from the prison's earnings from a social project in which the inmates work in public construction projects.

Robbins is engaged to ensure that the moneys are hidden well and deep. So Robbins conjures up characters with social security numbers, driving licenses and yes, bank accounts. Over decades, millions of dollars are stashed away in accounts all over town.

Both movies are set in pre-computerisation America and tell much about the powers that society and government invest in auditors. Such

operations may be impossible in today's paperless world of American finance, but the moot point is that in the world's most powerful democracy, the men and women who are trained to read balance sheets and ensure that the State is not cheated of its rightful share of revenue are bound by a strict code of professional honour. They may owe their earnings to private persons and entities, but their fundamental loyalty is to Uncle Sam. An auditor, or 'chartered accountant' (CA), who places personal enrichment before the national interest, stands to lose his license, apart from facing stiff prison terms.

In India however, recent experience has revealed that the economic reforms process has quite bypassed this crucial area. Our CAs operate much like Al Capone's recorders and since there are hardly any Elliot Nesses around, their machinations get blown only when the Boss makes a mistake. Something like that happened in the case of Satyam Computers. A long story cut short, B Ramalinga Raju, the much feted-by-government and pampered-by-media, promoter-chairman of Satyam Computer Services, confessed early January that he had cooked the books of his companies like there was no tomorrow. As more facts come to light, it becomes clear that Raju and his family have been spiriting cash out of the company since 2001, if not earlier, through an elaborate, well-ramified set of arrangements and manoeuvres, including forgery, inflating expenses, stripping assets, and manipulating income, inventory value and profits.

Some rushed to conclude that the Rs 2,700 crore (\$1.5 billion) scam hurts the image of the IT sector, which is the pride of 21st century India. But actually, the people who should have gone underground in shame are our CAs. But nothing happened to them. Reason: clever auditors are indispensable for the high and mighty. For the nth time since the beginning of the neo-liberal reforms process, the country's financial bottomline, and along with it the investments of thousands of people — not to mention jobs — were put to peril by this class of professionals. The Harshad Mehta scam, the MS shoes affair and hundreds of little

others, both exposed and otherwise, were all results of a serious flight of ethics from a profession once respected for its old world solidity and conservatism.

This week, **Saturday Special** revisits the economy via the financial sector. We feature IIT alumnus and Supreme Court lawyer Somnath Bharti (**main article**) to shear the false rhetoric off the recently introduced Finance Bill, 2009. The gravity of the problems afflicting the country's financial well-being by morally profligate CAs is either not appreciated fully by the media or deliberately concealed. How many billions are evaded in taxes year after year is just the tip of the iceberg. The credibility deficit that has resulted is something far more serious. At this January's Pravasi Bharatiya Sammelan of economic and political leaders drawn from the Indian diaspora, the Satyam scam was talked about as something worse than a terrorist attack. "Who in his right senses will think of investing in India now?" a visiting desi said. Sam Pitroda, chairman of the Knowledge Commission was reported saying: "The Satyam scam shows some major manipulation of accounts, not just by its chairman but also the management and auditors. I have a question: what were the board members doing?"

According to many people, equal blame was due to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and the Reserve Bank of India. But what is easily overlooked is that the hand of the unprofessional auditor is omnipresent in whichever institution you go to looking for the culprit. The various committees set up by the government to suggest roadmaps for financial sector reforms harp endlessly on ombudsmanship and independent regulators. After Satyam, where we saw one of the most respected Indian audit firms, Price Waterhouse, compromise its vaunted tradition of maintaining high standards, little is left to the imagination as to the workability of this idea.

It is against this background that the schizophrenic nature of the UPA

Government becomes clear. On the one hand it talks about the need for an 'inclusive financial system' (Rajan Committee recommendations), yet, on the other, it winks at the empire of lies that routinely rips off poor and middle class investors. Of course, even the NDA Government had to bow before pressure from India Inc when it tried to give 'whistleblowers' within organisations the legal teeth they crucially lack. But then, the UPA, which introduced the

Companies Bill, 2009 this week in the Lok Sabha, killed off any hope of transparent corporate governance. Not only was the JJ Irani Committee's suggestion to have watchdogs given the pass, the government also refused to dovetail this with the outstanding issues of regulation and closures.

This **Saturday Special** owes its genesis to the hard work put in by a young CA aspirant from Vadodara, Chirag Sawant, who has started asking awkward questions (**The Other Voice**) even before making the grade. Thanks to his persistence, we have today a growing movement of young CAs all over India who are keen to see reforms in the profession which could in the long run lead to India cleansing itself of the shame that Satyam, PW Coopers and others have wreaked.

-- The writer is Senior Editor, The Pioneer)

Greed cannot be our creed

Sitaram Yechury

The budget, the sensex and discussions in the electronic media made for an insipid verbal cocktail. The sensex plunge, unmindful of the changes in the international stock markets, is being solely attributed to the fact that the budget did not match the expectation of India Inc. in carrying forward the neo-liberal reforms process. Particularly, when the UPA is no longer constrained to seek the Left's support. Clearly, 'shining India' was expecting more.

In fact, they got more than what they expected. The abolition of surcharge and the increased exemption limit for income-tax has given a bonanza of Rs 10,000 crore to the rich. Those earning Rs 1 lakh a month will now pay nearly Rs 30,000 less tax. Those earning more than Rs 20 lakh-a-year will now pay over Rs 53,000 less. To that extent, the government's revenues will be lesser by Rs 10,000 crore. Additionally, the budget has disclosed that the tax revenue foregone last year as a result of various concessions, was as much as Rs 4.18 lakh crore. These concessions has now been extended for 2009-2010. The Fringe benefit tax and the commodities transaction tax have also been abolished. The latter is bound to impact by further hiking the prices of essentials due to speculative trading in commodities. Avenues for increasing profits of India Inc. have also been provided in the emphasis on public-private-partnership (PPP) in the development of infrastructure. The India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) will now refinance 60 per cent of commercial bank loans for PPP projects. The budget has announced that the IIFCL and banks are now in a position to support projects involving a total investment of Rs 1 lakh crore.

The main issue in this budget was to provide a stimulus for growth in the background of global recession, growing job losses and declining purchasing power of the people, on the one hand, and to meet the needs of 'inclusive growth' for the aam aadmi. Unfortunately, neither has been met adequately. The expenditure is slated to increase by a mere 2 per cent of the GDP. This is too small to generate the required stimulus.

While there is rhetoric on the government's flagship programmes, the allocations have not matched the declaration of intent. When the government is preparing to bring the right to education bill in Parliament, the increase in budgetary allocation for elementary education is less than Rs 200 crore. Despite the Supreme Court's directive for the universalisation of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), the budgetary allocation has been increased by only Rs 360 crore. Similarly, the National Rural Health Mission has been allocated only Rs 1,730 crore more than what was spent last year. The allocations for social security schemes for the unorganised sector workers, despite legislating a Bill in the last session of Parliament, has been increased by only Rs 100 crore. While the proposal for a Food Security Act is welcome, it is most unfortunate that families below the poverty line will receive 25 kg of foodgrains at Rs 3 per kg. They are already receiving 35 kg at a price of Rs 2. This glaring anomaly needs to be set right.

The budget, therefore, reflects the basic contradiction inherent in the UPA: concerns of the aam aadmi, on the one hand, and the desire to push forward the neo-liberal reforms, on the other. How this will unfold will determine whether the gap between the 'shining' and 'suffering' India will widen or narrow down in the future. India Inc., however, would wish that this contradiction unfolds in a manner that is loaded to advance reforms for enlarging private profits. They bemoan that the budget does not carry forward the direction set by the Economic Survey that targeted Rs 25,000 crore of disinvestment in the public sector. They

want India to adopt this course while the rest of the world is doing exactly the opposite.

Nobel laureate Paul Krugman recently called Alan Greenspan, the former US Federal Reserve Chairman, a comrade for having suggested the need to nationalise banks in the US. Krugman argues that the road to economic recovery is through nationalisation. “Still, isn’t nationalisation un-American? No, it is as American as apple pie”. Britain, the fountainhead of modern day privatisation, (recollect, Margaret Thatcher, “The government has no business to be in business.”) has virtually taken over the financial sector.

In the US, 19 big banks have already received over \$140 billion. President Obama, in his budget proposals for the next year, is proposing to ask the US Congress for as much as \$750 billion as additional spending to prop-up the financial system.

In India, however, the cries for disinvestment are masked behind the need to meet the burgeoning fiscal deficit. Selling family silver to meet deficits is the surest way to ruin. The cries for disinvestment also come in the name of ‘efficiency’. They simply forget the innumerable instances of bankruptcy under the private sector like Enron some years ago or General Motors today, or for that matter, the experience of Satyam. Efficiency must be measured in economic and not in political terms. To treat the public sector as a whole as ‘inefficient’ and the private sector as ‘efficient’ is the politics of India Inc. — it masks their desire for generating higher profits by buying over the public sector ‘for a song’. During the recent years of high growth, the number of Indian billionaires in dollar terms increased from nine in 2004 to 53 in 2008. The assets of the top ten corporate houses tripled from Rs 354,000 crore to Rs 10,34,000 crore. Further greed must be jettisoned if our objective remains one of ‘inclusive growth’.

Sitaram Yechury is CPI(M) Politburo member and Rajya Sabha MP

EDUCATION

Towards literacy, then scholarship

Tavleen Singh

In the week that we finally passed a law making primary education compulsory, it would be churlish of me to write only bad things about the abysmal state of Indian education. So good things first. Kapil Sibal has already proved to be the best Minister for Human Resource Development that we have had in decades. He is educated, energetic, modern and appears to be aware of the magnitude of the task before him. More than can be said of his predecessor who did not understand even the basics of education. I remember a press conference in the '90s when Arjun Singh was HRD Minister in P.V. Narasimha Rao's government and an American reporter asked him why India did not make primary education compulsory. His answer was, 'It is compulsory.' When the reporter asked up to which class it was compulsory, Arjun Singh was flummoxed. He had no idea what compulsory primary education was.

Some days after this press conference I was invited to an official lunch that Dr Manmohan Singh, then finance minister, was giving for some visiting dignitary. I managed a few moments alone with the minister and brought up the subject of making primary education compulsory. I pointed out that it was compulsory across South East Asia and literacy rates in those countries were now in the eighties and nineties. At Independence these countries were all as illiterate as India. Surely compulsory primary education was what made the difference? Before the minister could answer, an evil bureaucrat who lurked behind him said with absolute certainty and a smug sneer, 'Don't you know that India is a democracy? It cannot be compulsory here.'

Well, it is now. And, if the new HRD minister can handle the infinitely more complicated process of implementation, it is possible that India becomes fully literate by the middle of this century. This is good. But, when are we going to start aspiring to more than basic literacy? When are we going to understand how much India has lost in the past 60 years because of our contempt for education? And, our unforgivable contempt for our magnificent classical heritage.

Last week I read a report by my friend Sheldon Pollock, who teaches Sanskrit at Columbia University, and it made me weep. Listen to the report's first paragraph. 'As recently as 50 years ago, India could boast of a cadre of scholars in classical studies (defined here as research based on textual materials—literary, philosophical, religious, historical, etc. — produced prior to 1800) who were as skilled as any in the world. In the time since, this class has diminished to the point of extinction.'

The report predicts that in less than ten years, classical studies will have died in all Indian languages unless the HRD minister initiates a move to set up at least one Indian Institute of Classical Studies. The report makes the point that if we can invest in IITs and IIMs by the dozen, then we can surely fund one Institute of Classical Studies. This report was prepared for a Mumbai industrialist who is trying to set up such an institute with private funding. But, in the end, if government and universities do not make a concerted effort, nothing will change. There will be no Indian scholars of classical studies left in India. Those that there are will be in foreign universities.

Already, as I have mentioned before in this column, the best translations of classical Sanskrit texts are those that have been done by foreigners. I am at the moment reading Sheldon Pollock's translation of the Ramayana and have no hesitation in admitting that I have not read a single Indian translation that comes anywhere close. Thanks to the American billionaire who funded the creation of the Clay Sanskrit

Library, nearly a hundred classical Sanskrit texts are available in excellent English.

If Kapil Sibal wants his name written in letters of gold in the history of Indian education, he should just make the Clay Sanskrit Library's books available in all our universities. Then, since higher education comes entirely under his Ministry, he needs to find out why our universities are not producing scholars of classical studies. Why do none of Delhi's universities have a single professor of classical Hindi literature? Why was it impossible for the University of Chicago to find a single scholar of Telugu literature in ten years of trying? Why do Maharashtra's universities not have a single serious scholar of classical Marathi?

The most important question of all is why has the HRD Ministry not invested in an Indian Institute of Classical Studies? The state of classical scholarship is so dismal that we need such institutes in every state if we are not to end up as a country that loses all sense of its past.

ENVIRONMENT

Everybody Wins

Yvo de Boer

In little more than three months, the world must seal an effective climate change agreement in Denmark, at Copenhagen. Such an agreement must be the turning point in the fight to prevent dangerous climate change. It also represents a unique opportunity for developing nations to shift from unsustainable paths of development towards a cleaner, greener future that preserves their hard-won gains in reducing poverty. Yet a misapprehension has arisen over what rich industrialised countries are asking developing countries to do.

Judging by recent media reporting, one cannot escape the impression that developing countries are being assailed with demands to accept legally binding greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments, or emission 'caps'. The fact is that not a single industrialised country is asking major developing countries to accept binding mid-term emission reduction targets. The international community, in drawing up the broad parameters for a climate change deal two years ago, acknowledged that industrialised countries must accept binding emission reduction targets. But developing countries are asked only to limit growth of their emissions in line with sustainable development needs, and only if supported through finance and technology from developed countries.

Nations agreed to this because the science on which they founded their judgement makes it clear that, even with binding cuts by industrialised countries in line with historical responsibilities, the world could not avoid dangerous climate change if developing nations' emissions continue along a business-as-usual path.

Indian officials have said that India is not prepared to take on caps that

would impair efforts to eradicate poverty by providing affordable energy. They are right to say so. It would be wrong for the industrialised world to oblige India to reduce its emissions, when it already has one of the lowest levels of emissions on a per capita basis. But the question is whether India and other developing countries can afford not to fully exploit the possibilities offered by international cooperation on climate change.

Without an ever-increasing source of reliable, affordable energy, the developing world will be unable to sustain the high economic growth it needs to ensure a sustainable, long-term shift out of poverty for the majority of its people. Without a global shift to a clean, green economy, it will be forced into increasing competition with rich countries for energy resources, which only get scarcer and more expensive. India imports approximately 70 per cent of its oil, a figure expected to rise to up to 95 per cent in 2030, unless there is a change in the patterns of access to energy. Even in the worst recession for generations, oil prices are stubbornly high, an indication of what they will be when real recovery occurs.

While India has significant reserves of coal, power utilities will need to import almost 30 million tonnes this year, and the next, to meet domestic demand. While continued use of fossil fuels will remain for some time an important part of the developing world's energy use, clean production of those fuels and rapid development of renewable sources are the only practical, long-term response.

The economic argument to shift to clean energy is compelling. According to UN data, the global market for environmental products and services is projected to double from \$1.4 trillion to \$2.7 trillion by 2020, creating millions of new green jobs globally. India can be a major player in this boom, as it has been in the broader global economy in the last decade, or it can decide to play only a minor role. For example, the Woods Hole Research Centre in Massachusetts, US, estimates that

9,00,000 jobs could be generated in India by 2025 in the area of biogas alone. Many more jobs could be created in other clean technology areas like solar energy. One estimate is that 1,00,000 jobs could spring up in India in the solar photovoltaic sector by 2020, with scope to push that figure much higher. The global potential for jobs in that industry is in the order of 10 million.

Many developing countries, including India, have plans in place to limit emissions, because their governments see the dangers of not acting, and the benefits in energy, job security and growth potential. Many have also said they will do more, if finance and technology support starts to flow from the industrialised world. The rich countries must this year put a significant sum of money on the table to allow developing countries to do more. There must be a commitment that much larger amounts of money from public and private sectors would follow in the coming years, deployed in line with the priorities developing countries set for themselves.

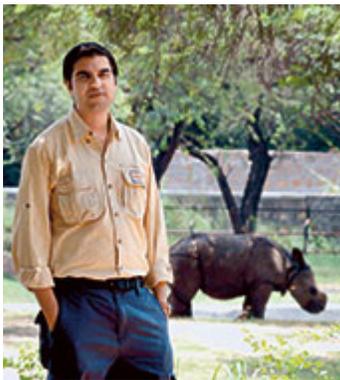
At the same time, major developing countries could spell out what these priorities are, so they can make a decisive shift towards a more stable, secure energy future. Mahatma Gandhi's words can serve as a beacon: "You may never know what results come of your action, but if you do nothing, there will be no result."

The writer is executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

Green warriors

Sushmita Biswas

Saving Planet Earth is the top priority for a new group of environmental businessmen and activists, says **Sushmita Biswas**



Vinay Jaju is a green warrior and also a businessman. He's campaigning vigorously against new coal mining projects and he cycled all the way from Calcutta to Delhi to drive home his message earlier this year — via India's coal belt. To bring in the green bucks he and his partner, filmmaker Ekta Kothari, have also set up a one-year-old energy solutions company Onergy, which advises clients on energy solutions from bio-waste.

Abhishek Behl uses tiger tourism as a conservation tool.
Pic by Jagan Negi

Cut to Mumbai where couple Hemant and Sangeeta Chhabra along with journalist friend Simona Terron started The Bicycle Project in 2008 which gives new meaning to the word 'recycling' by collecting old bicycles and distributing them to tribal children in villages just outside the metropolis. The Chhabras' two-wheeler project pedalled onto the road slowly at first but they're now being inundated by e-mails by people who want to donate their bicycles — IIT, Mumbai, has just offered to handover 500 bikes. Meanwhile, the pedal-power project is spreading its wings with collection centres coming up in Delhi and Pune as well.

You could call them eco-warriors with a difference or even eco-entrepreneurs. Their top priority is to play their role in saving Planet Earth from an environmental holocaust — and some have found ways to make money from the green cause. So whether it's by setting up organic farms or emphasising alternative energy solutions or launching campaigns for a greener living — these eco-warriors like Jaju and the Chhabras are spreading the word about sustainable living.

Crucially, however, the new campaigners aren't fiery radicals who demand that we return to a Garden of Eden world without automobiles and other energy guzzling machines. Most of them have carefully taken a middle-path to usher in change. “We want development to happen and at the same time reduce environmental degradation by adopting certain healthy green practices,” says Delhi entrepreneur Govind Singh.

Singh is, in fact, a perfect example of the new breed. The 25-year-old runs an organisation, Delhi Greens, that conducts bus eco-tours to environmental hotspots and green areas around the city. He also organised a contemporary art ecology festival 48°C last December and he has launched the Indian Youth Climate Network which holds climate meets in several Indian cities and aims to create youth leaders who'll work for the environmental cause. Says Singh: “The idea behind all these ventures is to sensitise people about the ever-growing environmental concerns.”



Vinay Jaju and Ekta Kothari are trying to make cycles the eco-friendly solution for transport problems. Pic by Rashbehari Das



Govind Singh owns Delhi Greens which is documenting the green spaces in the Capital. Pic by Jagan Negi

Take a look at Bangalore-based Poonam Bir Kasturi, a graduate of the National School of Design, who's trying to spread the word that you don't need to take big steps for a cleaner environment. Her chosen field of activism and business is household waste and her company Daily Dump, started in 2008, offers affordable solutions for tackling waste right at home. How it works is that Kasturi has created a range of terracotta composters that convert household waste into compost or organic manure.

Daily Dump works on an 'open source' model. That means she hasn't patented the company's technology and even offers the technology to anyone who wants it, even if that might turn them into potential rivals (she, in fact, calls them clones). "I didn't want to make money by selling this idea," she says. "The model can be replicated anywhere in the world and I'm here to give them all the technical knowhow related to these products." She does, however, offer service plans for people who don't want to do their own composting. For a fee, her company will turn up every week and take care of all the organic waste being produced.



Gaurav Gupta, who runs an eco-tourism company, is the

Responsible tourism is another field that's attracting several young environmental entrepreneurs. Take Mumbai-based Gaurav Gupta who's the India director of Al Gore's The Climate Project (it's an international non-profit organisation founded by the former US vice president to boost public awareness about climate change). Gupta, who trained abroad under Gore, holds presentations and one-day workshops in corporate offices, schools and colleges. Says Gupta: "The aim is to create a network of climate leaders who can then provide climate solutions at the grassroots level."

director of Al
Gore's The Climate
Project, in India.
Pic by Gajanan
Dudhalkar

But he also has a second hat as a tourism entrepreneur. Gupta worked with the Boston Consulting Group in Sydney for six years and while he was there he founded an eco-tourism lodge in Australia called Canopy Tree Houses. Moving in the same track when he came back to India last year, he has set up an eco-tourism company called Travacco Pvt Ltd which promotes responsible tourism in India.

In addition to all that he also manufactures organic Bollywood-inspired T-shirts under the label Indigreen, along with partner Nidhi Singh in Mumbai.



Poonam Bir
Kasturi has created
a range of
terracotta
composters that
convert household

waste into compost Then, there's Delhi-based Abhishek Behl, a wildlife enthusiast, who has started TOFT (Travel Operators For Tigers) which attempts to turn tiger tourism into a conservation tool. Under the TOFT umbrella he has 60 travel operators and hospitality players supporting responsible tourism and operating outside six national parks in India — Bandhavgarh, Kanha, Pench, Panna, Ranthambhore and Corbett. He gives lodges and hotels ratings based on how well they are following healthy environmental practices.

So Behl travels 25 days a month to these national parks laying down strict conservation standards for lodge owners and park managers. "Local communities should be sensitively involved in tourism. So we give guidelines on how to incorporate good environmental practices in their hotels and lodges like saving electricity and water, recycling of waste water, boosting jobs for locals and better sewage treatment," he says.

Besides that, he's also working closely with Global Tiger Patrol, a UK-based conservation agency, whose goal is to stop tiger poaching. Says Behl: "Tigers are vital for our environment as without them the deer population would increase. And overpopulation of deer will lead to the depletion of vegetation cover on farmlands."



Hemant and Sangeeta Chhabra spearhead The Bicycle Project which recycles old bicycles and

So how do they raise funds for their work? The answer to that differs from one green warrior to another. Many depend on voluntary donations. Then, there are others like Gupta who gets international aid to run his project in India. Jaju, on the other hand, runs his alternative energy company Onergy which takes up lighting projects in rural India. Meanwhile, Chhabra, who runs the bicycle project, is also a businessman who makes eco-friendly bags under his label Hide-Out.

distributes them to tribal children. Pic by Gajanan Dudhalkar

And each of these have different marketing and communication strategies too. Apart from word-of-mouth publicity, most of these entrepreneurs blog to mobilise younger people — who their messages are really aimed at.

So, while Singh has a Delhi Greens blog, Hemant and Sangeeta Chhabra blog regularly on *www.thebicycleproject.blogspot.com*. At a slightly different level, Jaju reaches out to youngsters in Calcutta through Bengali folk art (Gambhira and Patachitra) and makes short films to get across the message that climate change could be catastrophic. The folk artists he has teamed up with stage dance dramas and short dramas in schools and colleges in Calcutta that highlight the dangers of climate change.

Similarly, Singh has attracted considerable attention with his 48°C festival which aimed to highlight environmental issues through contemporary art. In it, 24 installations were put up in eight different public places in Delhi, highlighting environmental issues like the scarcity of water and the cutting of trees. For instance, a 20ft bucket was hung near Kashmiri Gate and a tree was dangled from a crane at Barakhamba Road in Central Delhi. The festival was a great success and Singh has plans to hold it again this year.

Each of these eco-warriors has had a different level of success in their

Earth crusade. Jaju is getting customers who want him to provide alternative energy solutions from bio-waste from all parts of the country including in remote corners of Kerala.

Kasturi on the other hand is upbeat about her growing business opportunities and has plans to come out with a range of chemical-free household cleaners — toilet and kitchen cleaners and detergents — made from plant extracts. And Singh is compiling a list of green spaces and water-bodies in South and East Delhi and will soon be launching a City Greens Project that will compile a directory of Mumbai's green spaces.

At a different level, Gupta's eco-tourism company is promoting responsible tourism by teaming up with people offering homestays (www.namastay.in). He is promoting homestays with the argument that it's more environmentally friendly and it also allows tourists to get closer to the 'real India with its diverse natural and cultural heritage. "This is to maximise local economic benefit in a big way," he says.

All of them are confident that awareness about the environment has reached crescendo levels. But as Gupta says, "Everyone will have to come up with innovative strategies and more and more voices should join us in our effort to reduce the carbon footprint." The battle to reduce the levels of environmental destruction globally will be a long and arduous one, but that isn't about to stop this group of campaigners.

JUDICIARY

HINDUSTAN TIMES 9.8.09 JUDICIARY

Just 30 days to justice

Alex Fernandes and Arnab Kumar Hazra

It was a rainy day and Shripati Navghane had just herded his cattle out to graze in the pastures of Vasuli village, in the mountain-locked Satara district of Maharashtra.

Suddenly, a stone the size of a closed fist was hurled at his grazing buffalo.

Blood gushed from its eye, which had been nearly gouged out, and the animal bellowed in pain.

Shripati, who was squatting nearby, scurried on spindly legs to catch a glimpse of the assailant.

“I knew it was Narayan Navghane’s son,” says Shripati. “But I had to get a look because I knew the council would ask if I had seen him with my own eyes.”

Shripati can still barely conceal his anger, even as Narayan stands beside him in silence, head bowed.

But they aren’t really enemies any more. The village’s disputes redressal council has seen to that.

“We both decided to take the matter to the village council because we didn’t want an endless, complicated court case,” says 50-something Shripati. “I sought monetary compensation to meet the expenses of getting the buffalo’s eye treated. I got the money. It worked well for me.”

Narayan, a wrinkled farmer of indeterminate age, nods in agreement.

“Maybe my son did not mean to hurt the animal,” he says, slightly on the defensive. “But yes, it was my boy’s fault. So I agreed to pay the price deemed fit by the village committee and the other party.”

It’s been two years since then deputy chief minister R.R. Patil launched his Mahatma Gandhi Dispute-Free Village Scheme in Maharashtra. Over 4.5 lakh disputes have been settled across the state since then, in a unique take on near-instant justice through mediation.

It’s a model that could help reduce the number of petty cases filed every day across the country — and even help reduce the crushing load of pending cases holding up justice.

There are currently 2.64 crore cases pending across India.

In end-2005, there were over 5 lakh cases that were over 10 years old — in the high courts alone.

The average duration of a trial, in fact, is now a whopping 15 years, as against the international benchmark of a maximum of three years.

With too few judges tackling an ever-increasing workload, most hearings end in instant adjournments as courts attempt to clear their dockets within the working day.

The solution can only be two-pronged: Recruit more judges and improve back-end operations and case-flow management. But also, move towards ensuring that judges only hear those cases that absolutely cannot be settled out of court.

That's where the dispute-free villages scheme comes in.

“The matters dealt with are of a petty nature, those that can be nipped in the bud at the community level,” says Manik Gutte, under-secretary at the state Home Department and the man overseeing the functioning of the scheme. “The idea is to not let such petty squabbles end up as complaints at local police stations and, eventually, the courts.”

The way it works is simple: Each village council or gram sabha elects between 20 and 30 people to its disputes redressal committee. If the village is home to a police officer, journalist or retired judge, they are automatically invited to join. The composition and working of this committee is then overseen by district-level disputes redressal cells set up within the police force, which also conducts periodic audits of the proceedings.

Re-elections are at the discretion of the gram sabha, and are usually rotational, with a third of each council being phased out and fresh candidates elected.

As long as both parties agree to take the dispute to a council, the council is empowered to hear any case that does not include a cognisable offence (serious crimes like murder, rape and robbery must be reported directly to the police).

The only other condition is that both sides agree to the resolution — in effect, a formalised and yet instant system of mediation and arbitration.

If the resolution offered by the council is unacceptable to either party, the matter proceeds to the official channels — the police and the courts.

“The scheme has also taken a lot of pressure off the police,” says Constable Sachin Pawar of Satara’s Dispute-Free Villages Cell, set up to help implement the scheme and oversee the working of the councils in the district. “It also helps maintain law and order and prevent crime in rural areas, because most feuds, which invariably turn violent, begin as petty squabbles.”

The best part: The average pendency for these cases is just 30 days — the councils meet monthly and adjournments are unheard of.

“The concept of expanding this scheme to cover more states is quite feasible,” says R.K. Kalia, director of coordination at the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. “In fact, the Centre recently recommended that state governments undertake such measures to improve governance and reduce the burden on various departments.”

To tackle case backlog, though, case flow management could be improved within the judiciary, with similar cases marked to the same judge so one judgment can dispose of many.

Ideally, a court administrator — a qualified manager with an MBA — could be made responsible for case and case-flow management, implementing timelines, looking into why cases have overshot timelines, helping in more equitable distribution of cases among judges, re-

organising back-office functions, introducing new technology and computerisation of records etc.

Meanwhile, with cases against the government forming a huge chunk of all disputes in court, the Centre is planning a grievances redressal system of its own.

“We propose to have an ombudsman in every department,” says Union Minister of Law & Justice M. Veerappa Moily. “So, if people are not satisfied with a particular government department, they can go to the ombudsman before going to court and increasing the number of pending cases.”

(With inputs from Sumegha Gulati)

Out-of-court settlement

The Problem

With 2.64 crore cases pending across India, justice is nearly always delayed in India. The duration of the average court case, in fact, is now up to a whopping 15 years — as against a global benchmark of three years at most. And every day, as an understaffed judiciary struggles with the backlog, more cases are filed, many of them for offences as petty as a buffalo injured by a neighbour or a fight between youngsters.

HT's FIX

n Expand the dispute-free villages scheme to all rural areas, using a formalised system of instant arbitration and mediation to prevent petty cases from getting to the police and eventually the courts.

n It takes a maximum of one month to resolve these disputes at the village council level, since the council meets every month and adjournments are unheard of.

n The scheme also eliminates the bitterness that follows court verdicts, since the one condition at the village councils is that both sides agree to the resolution.

n In addition to the dispute-free villages scheme, there must be better workforce planning within the judiciary, with an improvement in back-office functions and the use of computerisation to speed up paperwork.

n A court administrator — a qualified manager with an MBA — could be made responsible for case and case-flow management, implementing timelines, looking into why cases have overshot timelines, helping in more equitable distribution of cases among judges, re-organising back-office functions, introducing new technology and computerisation of records etc.

NATIONALISM

TIMES OF INDIA 8.8.09 NATIONALISM

Log On To The Power Of Ideas

R A Mashelkar

"The next 10 years would be dedicated as a decade of innovation" were the words used by the president of India to conclude her address to Parliament on June 4. On June 7, US president Barack Obama, in his Cairo address, said: "Education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century." Between June 3 and 5, the first Global Innovation Leaders' Summit (I-20), fashioned on G-20, was held in San Francisco. I was invited to represent India. I-20 accepted Norway's suggestion of

introducing a Nobel Prize for innovation. So from Delhi to Cairo to San Francisco, the 'buzz' was around innovation.

This buzz has been around for a while though. For instance, the names of the ministries of science and technology, in Argentina, Australia, Spain, South Africa, Malaysia, UK, etc, have been changed with the word 'innovation' explicitly included. So why is innovation suddenly gaining such currency? Innovation-led growth, innovation-led recovery, innovation-led competitiveness all these are not mere slogans; they are a hard reality.

Innovation is all about converting ideas into new or improved products, processes and services. India's world ranking on innovation is low. According to a survey, among 130 countries, India is ranked only 41 in the innovation index. Even Malaysia (25) and China (37) are ahead of India. Singapore and Korea are in the top 10.

Look beyond statistics now. Ashok Jhunjhunwala of IIT, Madras, develops the wireless local loop technology. It gets implemented first in Madagascar, Angola and Brazil before it does so in India! The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research's New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative gave the challenge and funding for the creation of a low-cost computer to entrepreneur Vinay Deshpande, who created a mobile personal computer. But the first such PC will be produced this year in Malaysia and Brazil and not in India. Due to the limitations in India's patent laws, the phytopharmaceutical breakthrough medicine on psoriasis by an Indian company will be commercialised first in the West, not in India. And one can go on.

Innovation converts knowledge into wealth. We need to recognise that Saraswati and Lakshmi should coexist. George Whitesides from Harvard is the highest cited scientist in the world and the market capitalisation of his research-based companies is over \$20 billion! Such academic entrepreneurship is missing in India. Indian genes express themselves in

Silicon Valley. But not in Indus Valley. Why?

Why do we fail in completing the journey from an Indian mind to an Indian marketplace? Because India lacks a robust national innovation ecosystem. The essential elements of a powerful ecosystem comprise physical, intellectual and cultural constructs. Beyond mere research labs it includes idea incubators, technology parks, a conducive intellectual property rights regime, enlightened regulatory systems, academics who believe in not just 'publish or perish', but 'patent, publish and prosper', potent inventor-investor engagement, adventure capital and passionate innovation leaders.

The unique genes of almost every Indian for innovation became evident to me while chairing the National Innovation Foundation and other bodies. Even an ordinary Indian in a remote village can innovate this has been demonstrated in rural areas by the pioneering Shodh Yatras of IIM Ahmedabad's Anil Gupta. Research in typically Indian innovation has brought out how some Indians can make the seemingly impossible possible.

'Gandhian engineering' is getting 'more from less for more and more people, and not for the exclusive few'. India uniquely excels in such innovations. Tata's Nano car (\$2,000), low-cost, advanced hepatitis-B vaccine (18 cents), cheapest mobile phone call (1 cent), etc, are brilliant examples.

Paradigm shifts are occurring in the Indian innovation landscape. Earlier, Indians created products that were new only to India. Now Tata's Nano is a product that is new to the world! Our pharma industry is now creating new molecules, not just copying them. Reliance grew through scale, scope and cost. Now it has embarked on innovation-led growth.

Such and other recent path-breaking events compel me to make five

suggestions to kickstart the 'Indian decade of innovation'. First, change the 'ministry of science & technology' to 'ministry of science & innovation', boldly bringing the innovation agenda upfront. Second, create an ambitious national innovation policy, going way beyond our science and technology policy (2003).

Third, set up a powerful mechanism to implement this policy by creating a National Innovation Council comprising world-class innovation leaders. Make the council autonomous, empowered and accountable. Give it the mandate of putting India among the top 10 innovative nations within this 'decade of innovation'. Fourth, drive inclusive growth by launching an 'Indian Inclusive Innovation Initiative' based on the tenets of Gandhian engineering. Fifth, launch a national innovation movement like our freedom movement, so that innovation becomes every Indian's obsession.

Then the dream of the 21st century being innovative India's century will certainly come true.

The writer is president, Global Research Alliance.

HINDU 11.8.09 NATIONALISM

Questions of real national security

Pushpa M. Bhargava

Policies with regard to agriculture, education and health need to change in order to ensure a meaningful and wide-ranging security for this country.

The arms business is probably the second largest business in the world after the food business. It is, therefore, not surprising that we

consider national security to be just what the defence and allied services provide the country.

But there could not be a greater illusion than that. With all the weapons in the world, we must not consider ourselves secure unless we have agriculture security (which is synonymous with food security, farmers' security and rural sector security), education security, and health security. If India were secure on these fronts, there would have been no so-called left-wing extremism affecting a quarter of the districts: in many areas the government's writ does not seem to run now.

We waived farmers' loans, but did we take steps to empower them so that they do not need to take any more loans? What we did was for political gain. For what we did not do, the explanation is that we pay only lip service to farmers' security.

Agriculture security concerns seeds, agro-chemicals, water, power and soil. It involves the marriage of traditional and modern agricultural practices; the de facto empowerment of panchayats and women; the marketing of agro-products at fair prices. Such security requires the provision of sources of augmentation of income to agriculturists and village-dwellers through the development of traditional arts and crafts, medicinal plants, and the unparalleled repertoire of fruits and vegetables. Also involved here are organic farming; the use of post-harvest technologies; orchid tissue culture (for example, Arunachal Pradesh has 650 varieties of orchids which, if exploited, can bring the State an income of Rs.10,000 crore a year), mushroom culture, and the appropriate use of fisheries and marine wealth. Other elements include intelligent energy use; the empowerment of the rural sector with knowledge; microcredit; the integration of rural and urban sectors; appropriate research such as on organic farming, bio-pesticides, and the development of varieties with all the advantages of hybrids, that would benefit India: research

that is being encouraged under the Indo-U.S. Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture would be of greater use to the U.S. The integration of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme with carefully thought-out developmental plans; prevention and management of disasters such as floods and famine and the cleaning up of land records are also not to be forgotten. Then come a system to prevent, detect and take care of bio-terrorism against agriculture. Emerging new and exotic diseases of plants and animals need to be tackled by setting up centres of plant and animal disease control. Climate change has to be addressed, bearing in mind the fact that a one-degree rise of temperature can bring down the production of wheat by 5 million tonnes. None of the above constituents of agriculture security has been adequately taken care of.

If a power from outside India wishes to control this country's destiny today, it is not going to drop a nuclear bomb: it only has to control Indian agriculture. And to do that, it needs to control just seed and agro-chemicals production. The Indian government is not cognizant of this: otherwise, more than 30 per cent of the country's seed business today would not have been under the control of multinational seed companies. Indeed, a moratorium on genetically modified (GM) crops would have been declared until preparations were made to test them adequately.

As regards education, the most important division in the country today is between those (numbering less than 10 per cent) who have access to good education and those (adding up to more than 90 per cent) who have only education without any value. The former are the rulers and the latter are the ruled.

With the extensive commercialisation of both school and higher (including professional) education leading to a university degree, education has become a commodity to be sold and purchased. India is perhaps the only country in which this has happened so

extensively, with the buyer getting the minimum that the seller can get away with. So a private school has no hesitation in charging Rs.10,000 as laboratory fees for a Class I student, and there is often no correlation between what is charged and for what amount the receipt is given. You could sometimes get your required registration and university affiliation for an engineering, medical, pharmacy or nursing college that you are setting up by buying off the inspection team and officers of the accreditation authority. It is no surprise, therefore, that 80 per cent of the engineering graduates (in fact, graduates in all areas) India produces are unemployable.

Till the 1960s, there was no commercialisation of education, and government-run or trust-run schools were uniformly good. The children of the rich and the poor went to the same school, and the rich and the powerful had a stake in government schools. Now only the poor send their children to government schools; they might as well not do that too for, at times the school may exist only in name or the designated teacher may not come for weeks on end. Or, if he is a little more considerate, he may send a surrogate replacement for 20 per cent of his salary which he would compensate for by engaging in a more lucrative business activity during school hours.

The Right to Education Bill that has just been passed by the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, if it is notified by the government, will only be a boon for those who make money in the school business, while it will be a disaster for those who have no access to education today. Unfortunately, that is what the rich and the ruling classes want. For education is the most important weapon of empowerment, and the best defence against exploitation.

To be truly independent as a nation, and to maintain national dignity, India needs a knowledge society in which every citizen has a minimum amount of knowledge. The country can do that only by decommercialising and decommodifying education and setting up a

common school system (for which there has been a continuous demand since the days of the Kothari Commission in the early-1960s) in which the students of the rich and the poor in the same neighbourhood would be studying in the same school without paying any fees, and with a new curricular framework. That is the only way for us to ensure education security.

As regards health security, the lack of a sense of ethics in the medical profession (with some exceptions granted), and corruption in the Central Government Health Service, in the corporate health sector, and in the Medical Council of India, are matters of common knowledge. Inflated bills, pay-offs, unnecessary medical tests and a lack of general physicians are all well-known and well-documented phenomena. In Bhopal on September 24, 2008, a gas tragedy victim was denied medical assistance in the Bhopal Memorial Hospital which was permitted to be set up by Union Carbide expressly for the gas tragedy victims; he died the next day while waiting in the hospital. But who cares?

Our rural health-care scheme covers just a few diseases. Contrast our health-care efforts with that of China's recently announced well-thought-of programme of spending \$124 billion to modernise its national health-care system in the next three years.

We seem to really care only about the requirements of countries such as the U.S., the multinational companies, and the top 15-20 per cent of our rich and the powerful. According to an article in *The Lancet* (May 16, 2009), a small country like Ghana lost \$60 million since 1951 which it spent on training health workers who have migrated to the U.S., the U.K. and Canada. The U.K. alone saved £103 million in training costs by importing Ghanians. It is unclear what the corresponding figures are for India and the U.S., but there is no doubt that the U.S. will be the winner.

Ironically, the Indian government can do everything required to ensure agriculture, education and health security. The Green Revolution was based on our own varieties and not seed companies' hybrids. Some of the best schools in the country even today are the Central Schools, or Kendriya Vidyalayas. And many of the best institutes of higher learning in every sector are government institutions. Some of our best hospitals, such as the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi, the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh, and the Christian Medical College Hospital in Vellore, are run by the government or a trust without a profit motive.

If the present Indian policies with regard to agriculture, education and health security continue to be pursued, there could well be a civil war in the next 10 to 15 years.

(Dr. P.M. Bhargava is former vice-chairman, National Knowledge Commission.)

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

INDIAN EXPRESS 10.8.09 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Find the side effects

Ila Patnaik

A recent amendment to the NREGA includes working on small and marginal farms as permitted activities under the scheme. But there also remains a lot to be done in the sphere of providing public goods in Indian villages. The most important public good that needs urgent attention is rural sanitation. This should be on the top of the priority list of the NREGA. Not only will this fill part of the gap in the rural

health policy, the NREGA is better suited for this work than the myriad Central government schemes that have tried to address this issue.

India accounts for about 25 per cent of the world's child deaths. Among the most important causes in India is diarrhoea. In 2006, 33 per cent of Indian children under the age of 5 received treatment for diarrhoea. The disease needs to be addressed by improvements in sanitation. UNICEF says that easy measures like sanitation can prevent 90 per cent of diarrhoea deaths. However, India's rural sanitation programme has not been successful. In 2006, only 18 per cent of the country's rural population had access to sanitation.

One of the main reasons for the failure of rural sanitation schemes has been an attempt to implement schemes designed at the Centre or in state capitals which do not take account local conditions. The one-size-fits-all approach, such as, when subsidies are given for construction of facilities by BPL families, has not resulted in increased usage or improvements in outcomes measured by health status. For example, there are instances of centralised schemes which privileged the importance of sanitation and built septic tanks and latrines, but these were never utilised, as the community was not involved in the decision-making process.

The lack of awareness about hygiene and sanitation is pervasive. The task involves not merely construction of facilities as a mechanical task to get a subsidy from the government, but of education and awareness. This can, to some extent, come through involvement in decision-making.

The power of the NREGA is that the projects taken up are conceptualised at the local level. In this regard, the NREGA has an advantage over Central or state government sponsored schemes, which cannot create public assets suited to the needs of each village.

Although some of these top-down schemes are well meant, they still do not have the potential for taking account of local conditions and needs. Effectively, the NREGA provides untied money to the block or village as long as the money is spent on labour intensive work.

While it has been seen that in developed countries one of the most important contributions by the government to improvement in public health status has been through interventions that lead to better sanitation, cleaner drinking water and reduction of rats and mosquitoes, in India, health policy has focussed on medical services. Any discussion of a health budget for rural areas allocates funds for tangible assets such as new clinics and wards, as well as towards subsidies on medication and treatment. The number of doctors or nurses, the number of hospital beds and primary health centres have been the focus of health policy and health reports. The policy has not been about doing what it takes to improve the health status of the population. Instead of preventing diseases from spreading, the government takes credit for providing medical care once a child has fallen ill.

The first step in meaningful public intervention for improving rural health is not just to provide subsidised treatment and medicine, but to also prevent the occurrence of such diseases by focusing on preventive measures. Simply by ensuring clean drinking water and proper segregation of waste, we can prevent many episodes of diarrhoea. Similarly, malaria can be averted through good drainage systems. The focus of public policy needs to be clean drinking water, well-functioning drainage and sewerage, systematic garbage disposal and elimination of pests.

Under the NREGA, several measures can be implemented to improve sanitation — cleaning of community ponds to prevent stagnation, as well as drainage of unused tanks, building cement-lined gutters on the sides of roads to channel water and preventing

waste from collecting, and building culverts for streams which otherwise spill on to roads. These are public goods. They are a classic case of market failure where no individual will provide them at her own expense. They impact the health of the whole community, and only the state can sponsor them in an effective, consistent manner. By using the NREGA, which mandates local decision-making, we can ensure community participation and efficient allocation of resources.

Other health measures under the NREGA can also include the creation of assets which are private goods having externalities, for example covered pit latrines and ditches for irrigation. These may belong to a particular household or family, but their construction and use improves the health of the whole village. Along with such creation of assets, maintenance work such as proper garbage collection and disposal, which prevents pests and thus the outbreak of epidemics, should be included. All the above works fit the mandate of the NREGA, which emphasises work that does not require any special skills, and on creating public works proposed by the local government. The only thing that needs to change is the focus of the government towards public goods, both in the case of using NREGA funds and in health policy.

In summary, a focus on rural sanitation under the NREGA has the potential of solving one of rural India's most important problems. It allows expenditure for creating cleaner villages taking into account the needs of the community and the environment. It has a greater chance of success than sanitation schemes that have failed in their mission. Along with a change in focus in the NREGA, the government should put in place awareness campaigns that support this focus. This will help make up for the biggest gap in its health policy which has failed to provide effective intervention in this field.

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SOCIAL SECURITY

HINDU 9.8.09 SOCIAL SECURITY

Policing caste discrimination

A. ALEXANDER MOHAN

Notwithstanding the elevation of Dalits to high public offices, we find reports of atrocities against them appearing in the media with alarming frequency. They point to the continuing social injustice in a system that perpetrates what is perhaps the worst form of discrimination against a group of people born into a community or caste. The Constitution has abolished untouchability under Article

17 and forbids its practice in any form.

The Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 defines civil rights as the rights accruing to a person by reason of the abolition of untouchability. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocity) Act gave more teeth to the law-enforcing agencies to bring to book those who humiliate and dishonour Dalit women. Yet we come across rampant casteism and are witness to its practice in various forms in our day-to-day lives.

Attitudinal change

For caste discrimination and atrocities to end, society needs to change its attitude towards Dalits. But it is easier said than done in a society where caste plays an important role.

The empowerment of Dalits by various means can go a long way in establishing a casteless society but again how soon this can happen in a land mired in poverty, illiteracy and backwardness is a million dollar question. The issue that can be addressed at the micro level is the role of the police in helping to end caste-based atrocities. In any incident of violence against Dalits, the police are blamed for inaction. It is alleged that they take sides with the members of the 'upper' caste and intimidate Dalits into silence.

They are accused of refusing to file FIRs, going slow on the investigation, booking the accused under Sections that do not attract tough sentences and, in many cases, of looking the other way as village panchayats and 'elders' broker some kind of understanding to appease (read threaten) the Dalits.

All this, despite the fact that as many as 18 government agencies are involved in educating Dalits. The Department of Higher Education, the Municipal Administration and Water Supplies, the Rural Development and the Panchayati Raj, in particular, have played a

significant role in ameliorating the problems of Dalits in Tamil Nadu.

Role of the police

Can the police prevent instances of caste discrimination? They can ensure protection but can they bring about the desired change in the thinking of people?

The police can work wonders but the beginning will have to be made at a micro level. Policemen in their initial levels of recruitment are posted to villages and towns they are familiar with. They are aware of the social milieu of the region and their performance is closely monitored. Their training includes sensitisation to the weaker sections.

It would be worthwhile to include in their syllabus field trips to districts and villages where caste tensions have been successfully tackled. They can talk to police officers, administration officials, representatives of NGOs, grass root workers and the locals to learn more about the issue.

Policemen should learn more about Dalits — the pockets in which they live, their annual festivals, rituals, anniversaries of leaders and so on, so that they can develop a sense of participation, on the one hand, and anticipate areas of social tensions, on the other. Even a fiery speech or a street play can lead to caste tensions.

Using force after a law and order situation develops is one thing. But expanding the scope of policing to prevent situations from developing is a challenge. The human aspect of law-enforcement is, by far, the most paying in terms of returns.

Treating Dalits with warmth when they come to a police station, giving them a patient hearing, redressing their grievances at the

earliest, conducting sports meets and cultural activities where the Dalit youth can mingle with others, guiding them to seek gainful employment, educating them on their rights and the special laws that seek to protect them and, above all, making a constant effort to change the mindset of people — by persuasion, education and, when necessary, force — to take Dalits along can go a long way in ensuring that the atrocities against them come to an end.

(The writer is Inspector- General of Police, Human Rights and Social Justice, Tamil Nadu, Chennai)

TERRORISM

HINDUSTAN TIMES 8.8.09 TERRORISM

Mastering the language of strength

Vir Sanghvi

I am getting increasingly tired of people — well-meaning Indians and not so well-meaning Americans mainly — telling us that we have to look at the problem of terrorism from Pakistan's point of view. We should accept, we are told, that we have not given Pakistan any proof about Hafiz Saeed or the 26/11 plotters that will stand up in a court of law.

Besides, we are advised, we cannot expect the Pakistanis to hand over terrorists to a country like India against whom there is so much public sentiment. Moreover, India is interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs and its area of influence. It is arming Balochis and establishing a presence in Afghanistan. In the circumstances, we should accept that Pakistan has gone as far as it can in meeting our demands.

The most annoying thing about these arguments is that they seem superficially reasonable. Surely, as a liberal democracy, India must respect the rule of law and understand the need to provide proof. Can't we accept that Pakistani public opinion is against us and so the Pakistani government must tread carefully? How can Pakistan stand by and watch while we establish a presence in Balochistan? And so on.

But, of course, none of this is really reasonable. And the best way to demonstrate this is to look at the way Pakistan has responded to the Western war on terror. In that case, completely different standards apply.

Let's take the issue of proof first. Responsible Indians such as Home Minister P. Chidambaram say that we have handed over more than enough evidence about Hafiz Saeed. Plus, our intelligence agencies insist that there is a full dossier packed with evidence against the 26/11 plotters.

Nevertheless, let's accept, for the purposes of argument, that Chidambaram and the Indian government are lying. Let's take the Pakistani claim that there is no proof that will stand up in a court of law against these people at face value.

But now, let's cast our mind back to a few years ago when America launched its reprisals for 9/11. At the time, the only evidence against Osama bin Laden consisted of intelligence chatter and speculation. There was no concrete proof at all.

And yet, George W. Bush was able to say that America wanted bin Laden 'dead or alive'. The Pakistanis did not for a moment dispute America's right to apprehend bin Laden. There was not even one cheep about proof or evidence from Islamabad.

Further, over the last few years, Pakistan has turned over a steady stream of al-Qaeda officials and sympathisers to the US without bothering to make any case in the law courts. And America has been content to lock all of these people up in such prisons as Guantanamo Bay without worrying about the need to prove a case or hold trials.

How is it that when it comes to people who attack America or the West, there is no question of proof, of the need for evidence or the will of the law courts?

Why do these considerations only emerge when it comes to people who kill Indians? You could argue, as some Pakistanis do, that you cannot compare America and India because public sentiment is so strongly aligned against India that any Pakistani government that cooperated with Indian investigators would be in trouble with the people.

But first of all, this argument amounts to accepting that there are different standards for those who attack America and those who kill Indians. It only offers a justification for those double standards. And secondly, it's not even true.

Every single poll that has been taken in Pakistan over the last six years will tell you how much the Pakistani people hate America and Americans. The vast majority do not believe in the legitimacy of the so-called American war on terror. And a majority actually support Osama bin Laden.

And yet, when it comes to handing over terror suspects to the hated Americans, the Pakistani government cheerfully ignores public opinion. This excuse is reserved for India.

The stuff about interference in Pakistan's internal affairs is as unconvincing. Even if Pakistani claims about R&AW's involvement in arming Balochi rebels are to be accepted, this hardly constitutes massive interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan.

On the other hand, what the US Army is doing is certainly a massive blow to Pakistani sovereignty. American forces roam around the tribal areas openly engaging in battles with Pakistanis and American drones routinely bomb Pakistani targets. This is not a mere allegation like the one about R&AW and Balochistan. It is a well-documented fact that nobody contests.

And yet, have you ever seen a Pakistani leader demanding that a joint statement issued at the end of a summit with the US includes a reference to America's interference in Pakistan's internal affairs?

So it is with Afghanistan. We claim that our involvement there is of a humanitarian nature. The Pakistanis say that we should have no involvement whatsoever. Afghanistan is part of their sphere of influence.

Even if you were to accept the ludicrous Pakistani position on Afghanistan, what about America's involvement in that troubled nation? American and British soldiers are actively engaged in waging war in Afghanistan.

Do you hear a single Pakistani diplomat complaining about how England and America have no right to be in Afghanistan because it is part of Pakistan's sphere of influence?

Why is it that Pakistan has one set of standards for the West and another for India? As we have seen, it can't be because Pakistanis love America.

The only answer possible is: they fear America; they fear its clout; they fear its strength.

According to President Musharraf himself, the Americans threatened to bomb Pakistan back into the Stone Age if it did not cooperate with the so-called war on terror. This so terrified Musharraf that Pakistan swiftly dumped its Taliban allies and quickly fell in line.

Like all sensible people, I have no desire to see India go to war with Pakistan. Nor do I believe that diplomacy between neighbours should be conducted on the basis of threats. India and Pakistan have to learn to co-exist.

But when you consider the differing responses that Pakistan has given to America and India, you cannot escape one conclusion: the language that Islamabad understands best is the language of strength.

That's a lesson that all Indian governments should never forget.