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AGRICULTURE

BUSINESS LINE, AUG 19, 2015

For a second Green Revolution in India

BIJAY SINGH

Precision agriculture is the key, which relies on interactive mobile-based applications and timely feedback

Revolution waiting to happen Technology can change his life Parth Sanyal

In an effort to tackle sluggish long-term agricultural growth in India, Prime Minister Modi is calling for a second Green Revolution. One in every two Indians relies on agriculture for livelihood, yet India still has the second highest number of undernourished people in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that our government wants to promote a return to that golden era of the 1970s and 80s, which saw record yields thanks to the technologies made available at the time — we had improved high yielding varieties of rice and wheat, better irrigation, fertilisers, and pesticides.

But the agricultural landscape has changed drastically since this intervention, that a second Green Revolution is going to need an entirely new approach, and an entirely new set of technologies. Climate change is tightening its grip and threatening food supply, not just in India but worldwide. It has never been more important to protect the scarce natural resources that are essential to agriculture.

Focus on precision

A new approach, termed “precision agriculture”, will be key. We now have a wealth of data at our disposal, which, if harnessed appropriately, can help farmers make the most efficient use of vital inputs such as water and fertiliser by applying them in precise amounts. A new mobile phone application called MITRA©, for example, is being developed in Tamil Nadu, that will give site-specific recommendations to farmers on the correct fertiliser dose, based on data from the local department of agriculture. It is able to operate offline for farmers in remote areas who do not have internet access. This prevents the farmer from wasting important inputs, and also reduces agriculture’s impact on the environment.

The correct type of fertiliser is, in fact, as important as the correct quantity, which should be an important consideration in any plan for a second Green Revolution in India. Modi’s call to reopen fertiliser plants in Sindri (Jharkhand) and Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh), and open new ones in West Bengal must take into account that India’s soil is diverse, and fertiliser requirements will vary greatly across the country. Just like humans, soils need a balanced diet of the right kind of nutrients in order to be healthy; this is a fact that has been overlooked by government subsidy programmes that only favoured urea for a long time. The right kind of nutrients for a specific soil area needs to be applied, at the right rate, at the right time and in the right place for optimal soil health. This is called the 4Rs or nutrient stewardship.

Testing of samples of soil from agricultural fields is vital for achieving nutrient stewardship. India has a vast network of 661 soil testing laboratories including 120 mobile vans operating in 608 districts that can carry out 7.2 million tests annually. Farmers will soon be able to access these reports online. Besides soil-testing, gadgets such as leaf colour charts and optical sensors are becoming popular with farmers to guide the application of urea. This nitrogen fertiliser, if used incorrectly, can affect groundwater reserves and contribute to emissions of the greenhouse gas, nitrous oxide.

Interactive applications

Mobile-based applications for farmers will form an important part of the data-driven precision agriculture approach. But it is important to ensure this meets the needs of the farmer. Research carried out by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, Mexico, found that these applications need to be interactive; the farmer must have a way of asking questions and giving feedback, either through a helpline or via “field scouts” who visit the villages receiving the mobile-based information. The research also showed that a wider range of issues needs to be tackled in addition to input use, such as how to deal with pests, and new climate-resistant crop varieties. This signals an important area where governments and NGOs can intervene and offer this kind of detailed advice on an ongoing basis. It will also be key to ensure that applications are affordable and accessible.

Another major challenge is the evidence that groundwater stocks are rapidly depleting. Groundwater sustains around 60 per cent of agriculture in India, while 80 per cent of the people living in rural areas use groundwater for their domestic needs. Laser levelling is a technology that can grade an agricultural field to a flat surface by using a laser-guided scraper. Laser levelling has been shown to improve crop yields, reduce labour time spent weeding, and, in particular, reduce water use for irrigation by up to 20-25 per cent.

Although the challenges to bringing a second Green Revolution to India are immense, it is not impossible. India has led the charge before, and yielded phenomenal results. But we must recognise that success will be just as much about using resources efficiently, as about increasing yield. If we consider these two equally, we will succeed.

The writer is a professor and senior soil scientist at Punjab Agricultural University

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated August 19, 2015)

CIVIL SERVICE

ASIAN AGE, AUG 17, 2015

IAS officers to start careers in Delhi

In a change, first posting to be at Centre, not at state level

In a new practice, IAS probationers will now start their service careers with the Central government in New Delhi instead of going for their first posting to the state whose cadre they have joined, minister of state for personnel, public grievances and pensions Jitendra Singh has said.

“From this year onwards, new IAS probationers will start their career with a three-month stint at the Centre before going to their respective state of posting as per the cadre allocation,” he said at a function to felicitate civil services toppers.

The minister said this decision by the personnel ministry will give an opportunity to incoming IAS officers to be groomed at the Centre before moving to their states.

“This will not only help in enriching their perspective, but also acquaint them with the functioning of the Union government and enable them to be introduced to various functionaries and officials in the Central government hierarchy, which may also make it easier for them to discharge their responsibilities more effectively when they take up assignments in the state,” the minister said.

Referring to another recent decision to revisit and revise the pattern and syllabus of the Civil Services Examination, Mr Singh said a committee of experts was being set up for this under the Union Public Service Commission, which conducts the test.

“The objective is to provide a level-playing field to civil services aspirants from diverse backgrounds so that the selected candidates are most appropriately suited to the requirements of governance in contemporary India,” he said in a press statement issued by his office on Sunday.

ECONOMIC TIMES, AUG 19, 2015

Modi government to give IAS trainees a peek into Centre's functioning

By [Aman Sharma](#)

No leaves, a monthly salary of Rs 63,607 and an unprecedented look into the Centre's functioning for three months – this is what the Narendra Modi government is offering 178 IAS officers of the 2013 batch who were ready to join their state postings but will first need to come to Delhi.

NEW DELHI: No leaves, a monthly salary of Rs 63,607 and an unprecedented look into the Centre's functioning for three months - this is what the [Narendra Modi](#) government is

offering 178 [IAS](#) officers of the 2013 batch who were ready to join their state postings but will first need to come to Delhi.

Each officer will be assigned a joint secretary as "mentor" and 39 ministries will accommodate these officers in a specially created post of 'assistant secretary' and specify to them a "work expectation", the [Department of Personnel and Training](#) (DoPT) had said in a presentation prepared for the officers, which was accessed by ET.

The training starts from August 31 and officers have been given a joining time of 8 days from August 22.

"Officers are advised not to avail any other leave considering the short period of appointment," DoPT says. The idea comes straight from the PM who felt IAS officers on coming for their first deputation to Delhi are not well-versed with Centre's functioning. The officers hence will be given a "wider picture" of working of central bureaucracy, intricacies of working relationship between ministries and dealing with foreign delegations, a senior DoPT official said.

The brainwave however has not pleased all states, as there was little consultation with them besides a letter from DoPT Secretary Sanjay Kothari to the state chief secretaries late last month informing them of the decision.

This three-month training comes at end of a two-year long training at Mussourie. It has bred many doubts among trainee officers too - forcing the DoPT to come up with a set of FAQs based on their queries.

The officers asked DoPT if their state government had been informed, what would happen to their posting in the state as a sub-divisional magistrate, who will write their Annual Confidential Reports (ACRS), who will maintain their service books and if they were required to submit a report at the end of the threemonth long training.

Department of Personnel and Training has now told officers will get a monthly salary of Rs 63,607 during the training in Pay Band-3 after adding two increments, his record sheet will be maintained by the ministry and will then be merged later on with service books and the APAR will be recorded by the ministries in SPARROW e-module.

The officers have been told to report to a Director or Deputy Secretary level officer, informed that they will get CGHS cards and identity cards and put up in guest houses at reasonable rates. "No joining time will be given at the time of relieving by the Centre on November 30," the DoPT has further clarified.

ASIAN AGE, AUG 19, 2015
[IAS officers' new trajectory](#)

The system of introducing civil servants to careers in administration by posting them to states allocated to them has been turned on its head. IAS probationers will now move

from the historic training academy in Mussoorie in the hills to the capital New Delhi to learn the ropes before they shift to their “home” states. The idea is to give them a different orientation as well as a wider national perspective, which is to be welcomed provided the change brings about a change in attitudes in the civil service.

Officers would usually have to work a certain number of years in the states before they could hope to move to New Delhi and fulfil their ambitions of becoming like Sir Humphrey of the television serials Yes Minister and Yes, Prime Minister and dictate the true direction of government administration. Of course, they may soon realise that although Delhi may appear to be the ultimate base of power, postings in the states can often be more fulfilling with their decisions likely to impact people more.

In India’s federal set-up, states are often more powerful as owners of land, which is essentially the site of the means of production. But to give the neophytes academy training and a Bharat Darshan as a way of acclimatisation and a chance to see the bigger picture is not a bad idea. It remains to be seen if the systemic change would lend a fresh perspective to the emerging generations of bureaucrats, who would be expected to get over Indian inertia and strike a new course in clean administrative practices free of excessive political interference.

ECONOMIC TIMES, AUG 19, 2015

No UPSC consultation for appointment of IB officials in PMO

A mandatory requirement of consulting UPSC for appointment of Intelligence Bureau (IB) officials on deputation basis to PMO has been done away with by the government

NEW DELHI: A mandatory requirement of consulting [Union Public Service Commission](#) for appointment of [Intelligence Bureau](#) (IB) officials on deputation basis to Prime Minister's Office has been done away with by the government.

The recruitment of personnel from [IB](#) on deputation basis for appointment to the post of Assistant Director in the [PMO](#) has been exempted from consultation with the UPSC, a notification issued today by Personnel Ministry said.

It means that the file relating to the appointment of IB officers in the PMO need not go to the UPSC, which is the recruiting body for them, an official said.

As per Article 320 of the Constitution, the [UPSC](#) shall be consulted on all matters relating to methods of recruitment to civil services and for certain civil posts.

INDIAN EXPRESS, AUG 17, 2015

IAS probationers to start off with Delhi stint

Singh said this will “not only help in enriching their perspective, but would also acquaint them with the functioning of the Union government

In A bid to groom freshly recruited IAS officers at the Centre, the government has decided that IAS probationers will start their career from Delhi instead of cadre states they have been allocated.

“From this year onwards, the new IAS probationers will start their career with a three-month stint at the Centre before going to their respective states of posting as per the cadre allocation,” Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions Jitendra Singh said.

He was speaking at a felicitation function held on Saturday attended by Ira Singhal, Nidhi Gupta and Vandana Rao — Delhi girls who topped the civil services examination, 2014.

Singh said this will “not only help in enriching their perspective, but would also acquaint them with the functioning of the Union government and enable them to get themselves introduced to various functionaries and officials in the central government hierarchy”.

INDIAN EXPRESS, AUG 18, 2015

New IAS officers to work as assistant secretary in Delhi

Until now, IAS officers were eligible to come on Central deputation only after nine years of service at their cadre.

Written by [Shyamlal Yadav](#)

Freshly recruited IAS officers, who will soon start their careers from Delhi instead of cadre states allocated to them, will get a three-month attachment as part of their two-year training and will work in capacity of section officers with the Union government. But these officers will have a new designation during their Central stint — Assistant Secretary.

The first batch of such officers — 187 officers of 2013 batch — will reach Delhi by August 31. Their three-month deputation will begin the next day. Sources in Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said the idea was mooted by the PM and the decision was taken only this month.

Sources said every ministry will accommodate 2-5 officers depending on its size and the officers will fill vacant posts of section officers. Currently, around 250 such posts are vacant. Sources added that the new batch would directly report to their respective joint secretaries.

Until now, IAS officers were eligible to come on Central deputation only after nine years of service at their cadre. The new plan, sources said, was devised after realising that most officers when they came to Centre had no idea about the functioning of Central Secretariat. The designation, Assistant Secretary, was thought of to avoid any controversy, since section officers are from Central Secretariat Service.

DEFENCE, NATIONAL

STATESMAN, AUG 19, 2015

[Alienating our armed forces](#)

Sushil Kumar

August 2015 will surely go down as the blackest day for India's civil-military relations. Depressing visuals of military veterans being roughed up by civil police and municipal workers have deepened the fault line in this delicate relationship. Unfortunately it may have even distanced our jawans from the very society they serve and which has unfailingly admired and applauded their sacrifices.

Who was actually responsible for thoughtlessly ordering the eviction of our military veterans, peacefully protesting at Jantar Mantar, is not germane to their demand for OROP - one rank one pension. OROP is their rightful due, approved for decades; yet one that remains in the realms of fantasy.

But what is relevant is that even after OROP does become a reality, what will never be forgotten is how civil-military relations got scarred forever by the highly insensitive action on the eve of Independence Day 2015 . It may well have eroded the faith reposed by our military in our netas.

Is it not surprising that after successive Governments have stamped their seal of approval OROP remains only a dream? The British script writers of the comic series Yes Minister can perhaps pick up a few Machiavellian tips from our Indian babus. Down the years they have managed to confuse umpteen ministers and cabinets about OROP, be it through arithmetical or bureaucratic jugglery.

It does appear as if Narendra Modi and his team of advisers may not have heard the lyrics of that wartime ballad Old Soldiers Never Die. It symbolises the spirit of camaraderie in the armed forces and this is what the Indian Ex Servicemens' Movement (IESM) is all about. This is a well-knit, nation-wide organisation that remains in sync with brethren in uniform. Once a Fauji, always a Fauji.

This league of ex-Servicemen is united and unique and quite unlike any other institution. While OROP signifies their rightful due, theirs is a far greater concern. It is about neglecting our armed forces and the dignity and izzat that go with it. All this is crucially linked to morale, which is deemed to be the most important principle of war. This is true of militaries across the globe and the reason why military veterans, worldwide, are

honoured and respected. This is why the Jantar Mantar incident of 14 August should make us hang our heads in shame.

It was way back at the Ex- Servicemens' rally at Rewari that Modi first wooed soldiers with election promises. One of his targets had been OROP. The faujis were taken in by the promises of Achche Din, since OROP had always been their rightful due. But they had obviously misread the rhetoric that went with the target set for OROP.

To a military person, there are only two things one can do with a target. You can either hit it or miss it. But to a neta or babu, a target has many interpretations. It is something that can be extended, modified, reduced, distorted or simply ignored. That in short is the story of OROP. Amidst the myriad problems that plague our society, the armed forces of India provide a ray of hope. Their secular credentials, disciplined approach and apolitical character make them the strongest pillar in our democratic system. And since our front line security forces are the best organised, it is to the armed forces that our nation invariably turns, in times of emergencies - be it natural disasters, insurgency or war. Their sacrifices are legend and their loyalty unquestioned.

Who else could have been tasked for Operation Blue Star or to suppress the police unrest in the sixties?

This is the irony of the Jantar Mantar incident where one saw aged and disabled war veterans and their widows being pushed around. In the words of William Shakespeare, this was surely the unkindest cut of all.

A statesman must feel the pulse of his armed forces, was the advice of Chanakya. It was counsel that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee scrupulously followed and every week, without fail, he met all three military chiefs. It was a personal tete-a-tete for almost an hour, with no one else present. It certainly sent the right signal - that the armed forces are the most important instrument of state power.

One therefore wonders what has really changed and why we are alienating our armed forces?

The writer served from 1998 to 2001 as the Chief of Naval Staff and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

DOMESTICS

ASIAN AGE, AUG 17, 2015

Government may set Rs 9,000 per month pay for full-time domestic help

Hiring a full-time domestic help may soon be a costly affair, as they will have to be paid a minimum salary of Rs 9,000 per month, compulsory paid leave of 15 days annually and maternity leave for women.

To safeguard domestic workers' interests, the Centre is learnt to have drafted a national policy with these features, along with benefits like social security and provisions to check sexual harassment and bonded labour. The policy is likely to be presented before the Union Cabinet soon.

The policy envisages the right of domestic helps to pursue education, enjoy a safe work environment and a means to redress grievances. Workers and employers will also have the right to form groups and engage in "collective bargaining".

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS STANDARD, AUG 17, 2015

NITI Aayog offers 30% hike over PlanComm pay to attract talent

Besides, NITI Aayog has also brought down the age limit for such positions to 32 years, from 40 years prescribed earlier by the Planning Commission. To attract talent, the government think-tank [NITI Aayog](#) has proposed paying over 30 per cent more than the pay scale offered by the erstwhile [Planning Commission](#) to young professionals on its payrolls. NITI Aayog has replaced the decades-old Planning Commission and is being seen as one of the most ambitious projects of the Modi government to overhaul governance and policymaking practices in the country.

Inviting applications from 'young professionals', NITI Aayog has now offered salaries in the range of Rs 40,000-70,000 per month, along with an annual increment of Rs 5,000 in the monthly pay.

This is more than 30 per cent higher than the pay package of Rs 31,500-51,500 offered by the erstwhile Planning Commission for such young professionals.

Besides, NITI Aayog has also brought down the age limit for such positions to 32 years, from 40 years prescribed earlier by the Planning Commission.

The concept of hiring young professionals was introduced at the Planning Commission by its then Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia in 2009.

An official said that the changes have been made to the hiring policy to attract fresh talent. NITI Aayog has started the recruitment process with hiring of 20 young professionals. In the erstwhile Planning Commission, the number of such professionals could go up to 60 at a time.

The Aayog is also looking for a Chief Economist to conduct research on India's economic policy issues and to build contacts with other institutions. The Chief Economist will be entrusted with the task of conducting research on contemporary and futuristic economic policy issues on India and its states.

The job profile would also include conducting workshops, building a research culture within NITI Aayog and promotion of contacts with outside scholars and institutions of distinctions.

NITI Aayog has said that the pay scale for the chief economist will be decided at the time of selection, depending upon the qualification and experience of the person.

EDUCATION

STATESMAN, AUG 17, 2015

School Reforms

The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the HRD ministry's advisory entity on matters academic, is scheduled to take a call next week on at least four parameters of school education that long ago called for reflection, not merely by the Union HRD ministry but also by teachers and guardians, indeed the principal stakeholders. Chief among these is the potentially harmful weight of school bags, as often as not wholly out of proportion to the age and weight of the child. The other issues at stake are: automatic promotion up to Class 8; whether or not the Class 10 CBSE examination ought to be made optional; and the proposal to effect a two-way extension of the Right to Education Act - to secondary and pre-primary levels.

Doing away with exams till the middle-school stage has been one of the breathless provisions of the RTE Act. Whether the child has assimilated what has been taught is an indispensable matrix of learning. The fundamental right to learn cannot be reinforced by skirting assessment, verily the thermometer of educational development and no less crucially whether the schools have been able to deliver.

Of a piece with the no-promotion policy is the equally disingenuous idea of making the Class 10 exam optional. Should it attain fruition, the Class 12 CBSE exam will be the first public evaluation. A more unscientific method of evaluation is hard to imagine. Between them, the twin proposals on scrapping exams can only work to the detriment of the student, let alone the varying praxis of the CBSE, the Higher Secondary boards, and the Council for the Indian School Certificate exam. The fourth proposal on extending the RTE Act to pre-primary and secondary levels needs earnestly to be followed up to ensure a holistic approach to learning. More accurately, the UPA's "flagship legislation" takes care of conventional learning up to Class 8. Substantial is the risk of a partially unemployable generation.

A firm decision on school bags is imperative not least because of what the medical fraternity now cautions as the "stress and strain effect on the spine". Yet the authorities have been uniformly indifferent towards this burden, almost a part of the child's uniform and a matter of public health. Closely intertwined too must be the commercial considerations as schools - under pressure from the publishers' lobby - are known to prescribe a multiplicity of books on a particular subject.

Hence the need for standard texts of the NCERT variety... and free from political intervention. The turmoil of ideas can only confuse the students; the impact on health, as the HRD ministry has belatedly realised, can be no less deleterious. In the net, learning is bound to suffer.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, AUG 20, 2015

Centre may bring back Class 10 board exam, scrap no-fail policy

The class 10 board examination for students of CBSE schools could again become mandatory after it was made optional under the right to education act a few years ago.

Also, automatic promotion up to class 8 under the UPA-era no-detention policy may get scrapped.

Human resource development minister Smriti Irani on Wednesday said there was “unanimous cry” from every state asking the Centre to revoke the no-fail policy as well as to bring the class X board examination back.

“We have to be cautious in our approach and have requested all states to formally provide their views in writing within 15 days to the HRD ministry which would consider the next steps based on these recommendations,” she said after a meeting with the newly-constituted Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE).

The centre will take into account best practices in different states and issue guidelines on reducing the weight of schools bags, the minister said.

In 2012, a CABE committee headed by then Haryana education minister Geeta Bhukkal recommended scrapping the no-fail policy as it apparently affected “learning outcomes”.

The Centre will take a final call on the two crucial issues after going through feedback from the states on the Bhukkal committee report.

The government will have to amend the RTE act introduced in 2009 to bring back the board exam and do away with the no-detention policy.

The act specifically says the board exam was made optional for all CBSE students and automatic promotion up to class 8 granted to reduce stress levels.

The twin decisions attracted criticism from parents and teachers, who had raised concern on deteriorating learning outcomes among students.

The 2014 annual status of education report by Pratham, an NGO, said every second class 5 student in rural India cannot read texts meant for class 3-level children.

Irani had indicated soon after becoming HRD minister that the decisions under RTE could be overturned as she was flooded with requests from several quarters to do away with both.

A decision on another issue on the CAGE agenda, extension of RTE from nursery to class 10, will be taken after a new committee examines the issue, Irani said.

The highest advisory body on education, headed by Irani, decided at its 63rd meeting to form sub-committees with the mandate to engage out-of-school children, improve infrastructure in government schools and improve skilling and technical education.

It was the first meeting after the NDA government came to power.

STATESMAN

AUG 20, 2015

Teaching the Teacher

Mohit Chakrabarti

There has been a drastic change in the system of teacher education. The fresh curricula for B.Ed. and M.Ed. will be marked by new prospects and priorities. The one-year course will be replaced by a two-year programme with a vision and mission, values and objectives. The question survives - Will the quest for quality and the concept of a “reflective teacher” attain fruition?

The new curriculum framework for the two-year B.Ed. programme as prescribed by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) dispenses with the evaluation of the earlier B.Ed course. Nothing explicit has been mentioned about inadequacies and limitations of the previous system. A new course structure has been introduced in the NCTE document, December 2014. It states: “The course structure offers a comprehensive coverage of themes and rigorous field engagement with the child, school and community. The programme comprises three inter-related curricular areas - i) Perspectives in Education, ii) Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies, and iii) Engagement with the Field. All

courses include in-built field-based units of study and projects along with theoretical inputs from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Engagement with the field is the curricular component that is supposed to serve as a link to all the courses. It also includes special courses for Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC) of the students and teachers. Implementation of the courses will be carried out through a variety of approaches, such as case-studies, group presentations, projects, discussions on reflective journals, observations of children, and interactions with the community in multiple socio-cultural environments". (Curriculum Framework for the NCTE Two-Year B.Ed. Programme, National Council for Teacher Education, New Delhi, December 2014, page 2).

Both teachers and students are confused by the complexities of the rapid changes in educational programmes and planning. There is little understanding or appreciation of the course content. "The teacher's work", as the Delors Commission significantly observes, "is not confined simply to transmitting information or even knowledge; it also entails presenting that knowledge in the form of statement of problems within a certain context and putting the problems into perspective, so that the learner can link their solution to broader issues. Teacher-pupil relationship aims at the full development of the pupil's personality, with emphasis on self-reliance; from this point of view the authority vested in teachers is always paradoxical, since it is not based on the assertion of their power but on the free recognition of the legitimacy of knowledge.

This function of the teacher as a figure of authority will probably evolve, yet it remains essential as a source of the answers to questions raised by the pupil about the world and as a key requisite for the full success of the learning process. Besides, it is becoming increasingly necessary in modern societies for teaching to help form individual judgment and a sense of individual responsibility, so as to enable pupils to develop the ability to foresee changes and adjust to them, in other words, to continue learning throughout their lives. It is through working under, and through dialogue with the teacher that a pupil's critical faculty is helped to develop". (Learning: The Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, UNESCO, 1996, page 145).

The new system envisages a triad - the response of the pupil, the student teacher and the teacher educator. This is the major challenge inherent in the so-called Enhancing Professional Capacities (EPC). It does call for a radical approach towards enhancing quality and excellence in teacher-education. A mere change of curricula to reconstruct the

content of education can turn out to be an eyewash. In the name of economic growth, education ought not to be obsessed with technology and science. The fundamentals are yet to be addressed. What are the arrangements for training and orientation of teacher-educators? Will a bridge-course be introduced for those teacher-students who have been successful in the one-year B.Ed. course? What are the guidelines for the appointment of new teachers? Is the infrastructure suitable for the two-year B Ed programme? Is the new curriculum a significant departure from the previous one-year programme or simply a sort of course-extension? Above all, is it a miscalculated prescription for advanced studies in teacher-education? Certain segments have not been covered, notably childhood and the growing-up stage, contemporary India and education, learning and teaching, gender, school and society, knowledge and curriculum, creative and inclusive schooling, language, and assessment. There could well be a patchwork arrangement due to “unavoidable circumstances”, specifically lack of time, planning and administration, organisation and application with due emphasis on relevance, revaluation and foresight. As a matter of fact, a careful and well spelt-out curriculum necessitates a very positive outlook. It is undeniable that the curricula area under Engagement with the Field - the Self, the Child, Community and School with its three components particularly the last one viz, courses on EPC including reading and reflecting on texts, drama and art in education, critical understanding of ICT, and understanding the Self - suffers from ambiguity and appears to be a little too ambitious.

To revisit one’s childhood experiences, as the new curriculum suggests, is a highly sensitive and difficult task, one that may not be comprehensive and effective. To quote the UNESCO document - “(a) Sharing case studies / biographies / stories of different children who are raised in different circumstances and how this affected their sense of self and identity formation; (b) Watching a movie / documentary where the protagonist undergoes trials and finally discovers her / his potential despite odds; (c) Issues of contemporary adolescence / youth need to be taken up as student-teachers first need to understand themselves in relation to their students and classroom situations; (d) Different modes of expression can be used in each of the sessions (so that students get a chance to express themselves through any of the modes that they are comfortable in and at the end of the year, the resource person and the coordinating faculty can reflect back on whether or not all modes of expression were included through the sessions.. (e) The exercise of developing reflective journals and providing regular feedback on those journals can also be used here”.

In a word, the prescription is dense and comes with a package of promises to keep.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

HINDU, AUG 20, 2015

India Post, 10 others get nod for payments banks

OOMMEN A. NINAN

TOWARDS BANKING FOR ALL	
Payments bank is a step towards financial inclusion	
STRUCTURE: Such banks will be registered under the Companies Act and will aid high-volume low value transactions in a technology-led system	KEY FUNCTIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To accept demand deposits➤ Issue ATM/debit cards➤ Such banks can become a business correspondent of other banks with RBI nod, but they cannot undertake lending activities
TARGETS: Poor households, migrant labourers, small businesses and unorganised sectors	

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) gave approval in principle for 11 entities on Wednesday to set up payments banks.

They are India Post, Reliance Industries Ltd., Aditya Birla Nuvo, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma, National Securities Depository Ltd., Airtel M Commerce Services Ltd., Vodafone m-pesa Ltd., Cholamandalam Distribution Services Ltd., Fino PayTech Ltd. and Paytm.

Payments banks will take deposits and remittances, but will not advance loans. In its previous bi-monthly monetary policy, the RBI said the names of the entities would be announced in August. An external advisory committee, which submitted its report on July 6, selected them.

“It has selected entities with experience in different sectors and with different capabilities so that different models could be tried,” the RBI said in a press release.

However, as this is the first time, the central bank said, “It would be difficult at this stage to forecast the most successful likely model in the emerging business of payments.”

Payments banks will take deposits and remittances, but will not advance loans

INDIAN EXPRESS, AUG 17, 2015

No more hiring from pvt sector for top jobs

The government had last week roped in private sector professionals to run two of its largest banks — Bank of Baroda and Canara Bank.

The finance ministry has ruled out hiring private sector individuals to head public sector banks and instead would look within their internal talent pool for future appointments.

“For the remaining 16 banks we have no proposal to induct private people...we will soon start interviews, where it will be from PSBs only,” financial services secretary Hasmukh Adhia said.

The government had last week roped in private sector professionals to run two of its largest banks — Bank of Baroda and Canara Bank.

“These are top banks and we wanted to try it as a pilot,” Adhia told [The Indian Express](#).

INDIAN EXPRESS, AUG 17, 2015

PSB unions revolt against pvt sector appointments

The bad loans of banks had risen to Rs 2,97,000 crore — excluding another Rs 4,03,004 crore of stressed loans of 530 corporate companies shown as rescheduled and restructured loans under the CDR scheme.

The government decision to appoint managing directors and chief executives from the private sector in two top public sector banks – Bank of Baroda and Canara Bank – has come under the attack from bank employees and unions.

The government, instead of messing up with PSU banks further, should focus on recovery of bad loans stuck with corporates, they said. The All India bank Employees Association (AIBEA) said, “private sector executives heading PSU banks is not a good move. We will be shortly organising protest programmes throughout the country against

these decisions.” The government last week appointed P S Jayakumar (53) as MD and CEO of VBHC Value Homes Ltd to head Bank of Baroda while MD and CEO of private lender Laxmi Vilas Bank Rakesh Sharma (57) was selected to head Canara Bank.

According to CH Venkatchalam, General Secretary, AIBEA, the main issue facing the banks today is the mounting non-performing assets “and it is no secret that the main contributor for this problem” is the private sector. “We have experienced how some of the private sector executives have messed up some of the private banks which later had to be salvaged by takeover by PSU banks,” he said. Terming the move as a “definite step towards diluting the public sector character of the banks”, he said private sector and private sector banks have their own sphere of working and operation and mixing up with PSBs will be in the wrong direction. ”The physics of private sector banking will not tally with the chemistry of public sector banks,” Venkatchalam said.

The bad loans of banks had risen to Rs 2,97,000 crore — excluding another Rs 4,03,004 crore of stressed loans of 530 corporate companies shown as rescheduled and restructured loans under the CDR scheme. Bad loans stuck in top 30 borrowal accounts of PSU banks as of March 2015 is Rs 121,162 crore. “All these are private corporate companies which had defaulted and it is an irony that the government is trying to make the executives of the private sector to head the glorious public sector Banks. It is nothing but an attempt to build a private sector superstructure with the help of the public sector infrastructure,” unions said.

While so much has been talked about by the government on increasing bad loans, there are no concrete measures to recover the same through stringent measures, he said.

BUSINESS STANDARD, AUG 17, 2015
Banks cannot reject notes with scribbles

Tinesh Bhasin

To ensure [currency notes](#) have a longer life, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is planning to introduce plastic currency notes as an experiment in five cities. They'd be stain-proof and don't tear easily, though costlier than cotton fibre-based paper currency. Apart from being more durable, they will also be difficult to forge.

The banking regulator has had a clean note policy for a long while. It has tried to implement various changes like asking banks not to staple the notes and urging people not to scribble on these. Usually, people scribble at the portion with the watermark, which is a major security feature. If something is written in that area, there are chances that sorting machines will reject it, if unable to verify the watermark. Due to this, some public sector banks have started rejecting notes with any scribble, though there's no such directive from the central bank. In fact, [RBI](#) has a clear policy for soiled and mutilated notes.

- Banks accept partially burnt notes if their essential features are intact
- Avoid scribbling as it damages watermark. Banks, however, cannot reject it
- Taped notes are valid for exchange if the two parts are of the same notes
- Half of the note can still fetch you half its value
- Soiled notes can be exchanged at any bank branch, even if you aren't a customer

Soiled notes

For quicker exchange of weathered notes, the regulator has liberalised the definition of a soiled note. It means a note which has become dirty due to normal wear and tear and also covers a two-piece note pasted together, wherein both the pieces presented belong to the same note, with no essential feature missing. While a bank can accept such notes, RBI has mandated that they cannot issue it back to customers.

Mutilated note

If a portion of a note is missing or composed of more than two pieces, it's called a

mutilated note. The regulator has asked banks to accept and also exchange these on customer request.

Burnt, charred or stuck

Banks have the right to reject notes that are extremely brittle or badly burnt, charred or inseparably stuck, as these cannot withstand normal handling. However, these can be tendered at an 'issue office', where they will be adjudicated under a special procedure.

Can banks reject scribbled notes?

No. RBI has not passed such a directive. Banks cannot reject notes that are scribbled. Only those with slogans and message of a political nature written across cease to be a legal tender. Such notes are only as good as a piece of paper.

The [central bank](#) has also mandated banks not to accept notes found to be deliberately cut, torn, altered or tampered. While it's the discretion of the bank officer to judge if deliberately cut or not, RBI believes 'a close look at such notes will clearly reveal any deliberate fraudulent intention'. In fact, if a person offers a large number of notes that seem deliberately tampered, the regulator has mandated banks to report such cases to the local police station and also to the deputy/general manager in the area of jurisdiction.

Half the portion missing

Though RBI has not mentioned a clear procedure to deal with such notes, bankers say half a note gets half the value. For example, if a person offers half a portion of a Rs 100 note, banks can give Rs 50 to the customer.

Refusal to take a soiled/mutilated note?

It's compulsory that all bank branches display at their premises, at a prominent place, a board indicating the availability of a note exchange facility. RBI has gone to the extent of mentioning the words that banks should use - 'Soiled/Mutilated Notes are Accepted and Exchanged Here'. Banks should also ensure all branches provide this facility and even to people who are not bank customers.

If a bank does not abide by the rules, Narayanan Raja, former chief executive of the [Banking Codes](#) and Standards Board of India, says such rejection amounts to deficiency of service. He says the person should immediately approach the bank manager and complain about the employee who refused the exchange. "If the branch manager does not cooperate, the person should complain to the zonal or regional manager in charge of the branch in writing," says Raja. If no action is taken within 30 days, the person can approach the designated ombudsman.

HISTORY

STATESMAN, AUG 20, 2015

Reluctance to shame British

Kuldip Nayar

I am disappointed with my countrymen. The 69th anniversary of independence was celebrated with the usual enthusiasm. National flags were hoisted even in private homes. But there was no mention of the atrocities the British committed during their 200-year-long rule. Nor did I find any recall of Jallianwalla Bagh where the British-led soldiers killed hundreds of peaceful protestors after sealing all the exits.

I can understand that one should not carry rancour, but not to remind the British of their calculated brutality which even the Portuguese and the French did not commit in their possessions in Southern Africa or, for that matter, in India, defies imagination.

Till today, history taught in Indian schools avoids the instances of British zulum. True, we should not dwell on atrocities, but let not our children get the idea that the British regime was all goody-goody. London was like any other colonial power which suppressed the natives if and when they showed defiance.

Teachers should tell their classes that the weaving of famous Indian textiles was stopped to ensure that Lancashire textile mills flourished. This was exploitation, not free trade. Even worse was what happened in East Bengal where workers engaged in producing fine muslin had their hands chopped off.

Hardly surprising that so many revolutionaries later emerged from that part of Bengal. The brutalities committed against them are rarely told. Instead, we have British historians like John Keya who ran down former minister Shashi Tharoor because he spoke the truth during a speech at the Oxford University Union.

Tharoor commented, "India's share of the world economy when Britain arrived on its shores was 23 per cent, but by the time the British left it was down to the four per cent. Why? It was simply because India had been governed for the benefit of Britain. Britain's rise for 200 years was financed by its depredations in India. In fact, Britain's industrial revolution was actually premised upon the de-industrialization of India." Unfortunately, Congress president Sonia Gandhi pulled him up for attacking the British so fiercely.

What Tharoor said was the outpouring of how the average Indian feels. He really gave voice to the millions of voiceless. The problem with British historians or, for that matter, the British people, is that they did not feel they had committed anything wrong. They still live in that blissful ignorance and go on patting themselves on the back about how they united the different parts of India and created the world's most benevolent empire.

No less a leader than Churchill had this to say about India and Indians: "India is merely a geographical expression. It is no more a single country than the equator. Power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues and freebooters. All Indian leaders will be of low calibre and men of straw. They will have sweet tongues and silly hearts. They will fight amongst themselves for power and India will be lost in political squabbles. A day would come when even air and water would be taxed."

The fact is that we are a soft state and do not hit back to highlight the atrocities committed by the British. One possible exception was Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose who was schooled in a different way of thinking. His Old Testament idea of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth lay behind in establishment of the German and Japanese-backed Indian National Army (INA).

But Netaji was not liked by Mahatma Gandhi who led the national movement. True, his methods did not fit in with Gandhi's non-violence, yet Netaji was so popular that Gandhi kept him away from the Congress lest he should lead the party. He ultimately had to leave the country but unfortunately trusted the forces like the Japanese and the Germans. There is no doubt that he presented an alternative to Gandhi's methods. But the latter understood India better.

Gandhiji could foresee that violence against the mighty British would not take the country anywhere. Through the sufferings and sacrifices he could arouse the conscience of the British people and the world all over so that they would see how brutal colonial power was. There is no doubt that he succeeded despite Churchill's contempt in describing the father of the nation as "a seditious Middle-Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace... to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor."

To this day the British insist that the three and a half million strong Indian army was a volunteer army. At best they were mercenaries who would have fought for anyone who paid them, whether it was the British, the Maharajas or the Nawabs. London used them mercilessly as cannon fodder in both world wars. When the Germans in the First World

War released poison gas against the British lines, it was Indian soldiers who bore the brunt, not voluntarily but because they were pushed.

I wish that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission would bring out these Indian sacrifices and not project the two world wars as fought only or largely by white troops. The deaths of Indians are as shocking as the demise of any white soldier. They too have mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers.

In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is quoted as saying: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?" The Indians were never taken into consideration by insensitive British rulers.

The writer is a noted journalist, columnist and commentator.

JUDICIARY

STATESMAN, AUG 21, 2015

'Judiciary should not encroach into domain of legislature'

Against the backdrop of Allahabad High Court order asking UP government officials and politicians to send their kids to government schools, retired Supreme Court Judge Markandey Katju on Thursday said courts should not encroach into the domain of legislature.

Justice Katju was delivering a lecture on 'Judicial Activism and Judicial Restraint' at Amity Law School, Noida, University Campus here on Thursday.

"Courts are there to enforce the laws and there are no laws existing in this particular case to be enforced.

"There is a clear demarcation of powers laid down in the Constitution of India and judiciary, barring a few urgent cases, should not encroach into the domain of legislature, following certain legal principles.

"Judiciary can make laws where legislature fails. There have been numerous cases around the world when judges have made laws.

"Judges have the power to expand the law and play the activist's role but there should be a clear distinction between judicial outreach and judicial activism, keeping in view the betterment of society," said Katju.

Referring to the growing culture of same sex marriages in the country, Katju stressed that although they have become a "fashion" and people have the right to live their lives the way they want to, but he himself considers same sex marriages "unnatural".

Sharing his views on the hanging of Yakub Memon, justice (retd) Katju said that the evidences based on which he was hanged were very weak.

"His case was decided on the basis of retracted confession of the co-accused, his own confession and alleged recoveries," he said.

Katju blamed a section of the judiciary which he alleged became "populist and wanted to send a strong message of non-tolerance of terrorism that led to the travesty of justice in Yakub Memon's case."

"There are 32 million pending cases with judiciary and if there are no new cases filed then also it would take 360 years to clear the present backlog," the former Supreme Court judge said.

He expressed hope that the present generation of lawyers would take the reigns and work actively towards the betterment of judiciary as well as society.

LIBRARIES

BUSINESS LINE, AUG 17, 2015

Cyient Foundation launches digital library in Nellore to promote e-learning

Cyient Foundation has launched a Digital Library initiative at the Akshara Vidyalaya School in Nellore, with the aim of helping underprivileged students gain access to educational resources.

The launch coincides with the 14th anniversary of the Swarna Bharat Trust, a Chennai-based non-profit organisation, which runs the school. This initiative is expected to benefit more than 900 students.

Multiple formats

The digital library is equipped with e-learning tools to help students with their classwork, and provides educational material in a number of interesting formats.

BVR Mohan Reddy, Founder and Trustee, Cyient Foundation said, “Digital formats are enabling democratisation of information. Such technologies can benefit and uplift the bottom of the pyramid, by providing access to information resources and repositories irrespective of users’ status or location”.

This library has been named after former President of India, APJ Abdul Kalam, who held education and children very close to his heart.

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated August 17, 2015)

HINDU, AUG 18, 2015

Century-old library in Mysuru goes digital

SHANKAR BENNUR

OPAC kiosks set up to help in quick search of books

An Online Public Access Catalogue kiosk at the City Central Library in Mysuru.—
Photo: M.A. Sriram

Searching for books in the City Central Library (CCL) here has been made easy and fast with the century-old institution going digital.

Visitors can locate their favourite book among the over 1.2 lakh collection in a few seconds, thanks to Open Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), which was recently introduced marking its centenary fete.

The Department of Public Libraries has installed two kiosks for searching the books at the library.

B. Manjunath, Deputy Director, CCL, Mysuru told *The Hindu* that members of the library could now access the availability of books by visiting the CCL website — www.cclmysuru.org.

This facility is available only for members, who are now being given bar-coded plastic cards.

They must get their names registered for user ID and password to access the collection.

Importantly, members can even reserve the books online sitting at their home or office.

Mr. Manjunath said the OPAC kiosks had come in handy for library visitors as they could locate their choice of books at ease from the user-friendly machine. Each book had been given a unique ID for quick search.

“If they enter a keyword like the writer’s name or the name of the book, the three-digit classification (digitised list) will appear on the screen with the title and the shelf where it is located. In this way, the time taken to search the book manually is reduced,” he explained.

After the decentralisation of library membership for 30-plus public libraries here five years ago, over 5,000 active registered members had remained with the CCL.

“We have asked them to collect their user ID and password soon to access the facility.”

Fresh efforts

Claiming that the CCL’s effort had evoked appreciation from the readers, the Deputy Director said the library was also making fresh efforts to recover the books that had not been returned by borrowers.

MIGRATION

STATESMAN, AUG 17, 2015

The migration within Jaydev Jana

India's heart resides in its villages, and just like a doctor whose work begins with the diagnosis of the heartbeat, the planning and execution of any policy for the nation of a billion, has to begin with the learning derived from its 6 lakh villages.

APJ Abdul Kalam

This famous statement is axiomatic despite India's economic and spatial transformation towards the 'messy' urbanisation that the country had experienced during the 2001-11 decade. According to the Census 2011 figures, India has 6,40,867 villages and 7935 towns/urban centres. Out of a total population of 1210.2 million, rural population accounts for 68.84 per cent (833.1 million) and urban population 31.16 per cent (377.1 million). There are rural areas that resemble small towns; in certain parts of the country, the rural-urban divide is somewhat blurred. A clumsy expression, 'Rurban' (Rural-Urban), is often used by experts while referring to the transformation of villages.

There is an urban aspect of the village, much as there are rural aspects in cities, brought about primarily by migration from rural to urban areas. But India still lives in its villages as rural areas are potentially endowed with resources that can spur growth - both farm and non-farm.

Agriculture has been the focal point of rural life for centuries. For decades, poverty reduction was synonymous with rural and, in particular, agricultural growth. But since Independence, the rural economy has been diversified. The dominance of the agricultural sector in the overall economy has gradually declined. The share of agriculture and allied sectors in the GDP declined to 15.2 per cent during the Eleventh Plan period and further to 13.9 per cent in 2013-14 (2004-05 prices). The rate of growth in agriculture hovers around 2.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent per annum - well below the GDP growth figures for the country as a whole. Big farmers are now a rare sight in rural areas. Roughly 80 per cent of landholdings are below five acres, and about 66 per cent below three acres. In most areas, agriculture is rain-fed, leading to greater degree of yield variability and risk. Fluctuating weather, ground water depletion, poor marketing facilities and declining productivity are the other major problems.

Agriculture in India is now a highly risky profession. Close to three lakh farmers committed suicide over the past 17 years and another 42 per cent wanted to quit agriculture, if given a choice. Lack of livelihood opportunities and absence of modern amenities and services required for decent living in rural areas have resulted in a sense of deprivation and dissatisfaction among a large section of the rural populace. This is primarily due to the wide difference in the availability of physical and social infrastructure in rural and urban areas. It leads to migration of rural households to urban areas. In addition, political instability, agrarian unrest, climate change and environmental degradation, casteism and communal riots have also been major “push factors”. During the past 50 years, the rural population increased by only 12 per cent, while the urban population expanded by 31.8 per cent. For the first time since Independence, the absolute increase in population was larger in urban areas. It is estimated that approximately two million people are migrating from rural to urban areas annually and the percentage of the urban population is expected to jump to around 42.5 per cent of the total by 2025.

India’s pace of urbanisation has picked up. Census 1981 classifies urban areas as statutory towns and census towns. While the former includes areas with municipalities, corporations, cantonment boards, or notified town area committees, the latter are administratively rural (panchayats) but with urban characteristics. As a result, part of the urban growth in recent times has been due to the urban sprawl in which surrounding rural areas are subsumed. There has been a multiplication of these census towns in recent years, with 2542 of them created between 2001 and 2011, compared to 242 new “statute towns”. Thus rural areas are becoming urban. More than one-third of the recent increase in the urban population has resulted from the counting of census towns as urban areas. Hence, Indian urbanisation appears to be moderately ‘messy’ and subaltern in nature.

The earlier policy that separated the farmers from the non-farm workers is gradually getting erased. What was once a secondary occupation for most villagers is now often the primary one. Moreover, a recent census of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) confirms the presence of enterprises in villages. Figures show that 29 per cent of rural migrant households migrate from rural India and that 55 per cent of them do so for economic reasons, with self-employment playing a major role (Press Information Bureau 2010). Data furnished by the National Sample Survey (NSS) also shows that the percentage of non-farm households increased from 31.9 per cent in 1993-94 to around 42.5 per cent in 2009-10 and contribution of the non-farm sector to rural net domestic product was around 65 per cent. Indeed, the process of rural transformation to non-farm sectors has assumed a greater role in reducing rural poverty.

Admittedly, such transformation from farm to non-farm has been rather disappointing in terms of employment generation. From 2004-05 to 2011-12, the overall employment growth in the economy was only 0.6 per cent per annum, at a pace much below the annual growth rate (1.9 per cent) of the working age population that was not in school. In absolute numbers, of the 13 million potential entrants to the work-force every year during this period, only three million got jobs. In the rural areas employment in farming contracted by two per cent per year during the period, resulting in a loss 33 million jobs over the whole period. Moreover, the shift out of farming was not accompanied by an increase in manufacturing jobs. Rather, the share of employment in manufacturing declined.

The construction sector is the largest employer. There has been a shift from farming to construction in “census town areas”. And the striking feature of the transformation process has been the withdrawal of women in large numbers from the labour force.

It would be wrong to say that migration always acts as a negative phenomenon. Migration is essential for development. To help in equalising social status, cultural diffusion and cultural assimilation, people from diverse cultures share and exchange their values and ethos. It needs to be viewed as an opportunity being taken up by the people to improve their socio-economic status. But what is not desirable is the distressed migration. In developing countries like India, migration mostly takes place not due to the so-called “pull forces” of the destination as usually happens in case of developed countries, but because of push factors like poverty, starvation, unemployment, poor education and medical care etc. at the origin places (rural India).

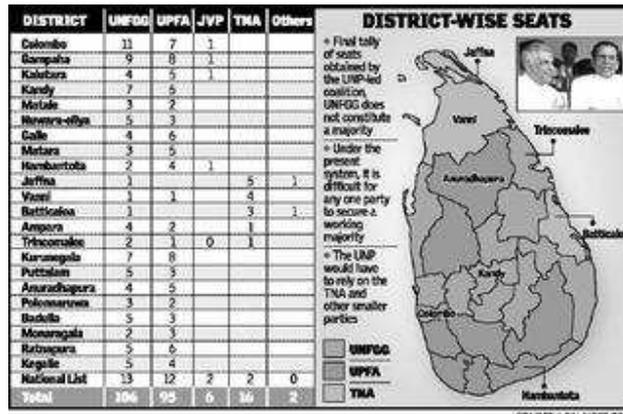
POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

HINDU, AUG 20, 2015

A vote for continuing change

JAYADEVA UYANGODA

The Sri Lankan electorate has voted to reject polarisation and reinforce the process of democratisation



here are two significant political consequences following Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections. First, the majority of voters have given a verdict in favour of completing the partial political change that began with the presidential election of January 8 this year. Secondly, and no less important, it has dashed the hopes of the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa to return to power as Prime Minister.

Parliament was dissolved on June 27 under some peculiar circumstances, although it could continue till April 2016. President Maithripala Sirisena and the coalition that backed him had promised during the election campaign to call fresh parliamentary elections after 100 days of assuming office. In any case, the new coalition was a minority government, with only about 65 members in the 225-member legislature. Regime stability required a parliamentary majority through fresh elections.

The final tally of seats obtained by the United National Party-led coalition, UNFGG (United National Front) does not however, constitute a majority — a minimum of 113 seats — in the new legislature. This was a scenario predicted by many analysts. Under the existing system of proportional representation and in the present balance of political forces in the country, no party or coalition could get a working majority unless there was a massive wave of support, as in 2010 when the Mahinda Rajapaksa-led United Peoples' Freedom Alliance coalition won the election with just two seats short of the two-thirds majority. That was under unusual circumstances of the Rajapaksa government having won the war against the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Political stability

In post-civil war Sri Lanka, electoral politics has reached a degree of normalcy that does not facilitate electoral waves, as evidenced by Tuesday's results. The UNP's coalition has managed the highest number of parliamentary seats, yet is short of a clear majority, followed by the Rajapaksa-led UPFA. The Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), the main Tamil party, has won 14 seats from the Northern and Eastern provinces, with one national list seat coming into its final tally. However, the ITAK is not likely to join any coalition and may support the government from outside. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has five seats and is most likely to follow the ITAK's stance by staying neutral in the post-election coalition formation. This makes it necessary for President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to invite at least a dozen MPs from the opposition UPFA to join their government. The idea of a national government, which both Mr. Sirisena and Mr. Wickremesinghe have been promoting for the past several months, will certainly provide the political cover for such crossovers in the run up to the finalisation of the new government and its cabinet.

The question that helps us to understand Sri Lanka's current trends in politics is not why the UNP-led coalition won the highest number of seats but why the Rajapaksa-led UPFA coalition failed to gain a majority. Two factors seem to have contributed to Mr. Rajapaksa's second defeat within just seven months. The first is a failure to learn political lessons from the January defeat and second is the erosion of Mr. Rajapaksa's personal electoral appeal.

Minority alienation

The Rajapaksa camp should have learnt one crucial lesson from the January defeat — the need to erase the trust deficit between the former President and the ethnic and religious minorities. When Mr. Rajapaksa lost the presidential bid in January, he still polled the highest number of total votes from the Sinhalese-majority districts, but he received virtually no support from the minority-dominant electorates. On the other hand, the victory of Mr. Sirisena, Mr. Rajapaksa's challenger, was facilitated by the ethnic and religious minority voters throughout the country and particularly from the Northern and Eastern provinces. Mr. Rajapaksa and his political managers do not seem to have acknowledged the crucial need to address the minority alienation. Their parliamentary electoral strategy was primarily based on the nationalist appeal to Sinhalese Buddhist voters, wrapped in the language of national security and patriotism. They also seem to have calculated that they could emerge as the party with the highest number of parliamentary seats on the strength of Sinhalese votes alone and then poach UNP members to secure parliamentary majority, as Mr. Rajapaksa had successfully done in the past. In fact, during the two final weeks of the election campaign, the Rajapaksa camp intensified its communal appeal to the Sinhalese electorate in subtle and not so subtle ways. The results of the election clearly indicate that in almost every electoral division with sizeable presence of ethnic and religious minority populations, the UPFA has fared even worse than it did in January.

The loss of Mr. Rajapaksa's personal appeal is also a factor that found no acknowledgment in the UPFA camp. He was immensely popular only among the Sinhalese voters and even that suffered a setback after his defeat in the January presidential election. Then, the investigations that the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration launched into allegations of corruption, abuse of power and even murder, although some of these investigations had a political agenda, had severely damaged his image as a political hero. What emerged during the election campaign was that Mr. Rajapaksa was not the brand he was — no longer the easily marketable electoral commodity. In fact, the UPFA campaign failed to generate any new wave of support for the coalition, or its prime ministerial candidate.

This failure has now become clear even in districts where the UPFA won comfortably. In almost all those districts, the UPFA's share of votes has been reduced and some have shifted to the UNP. In the final count, the total number of votes that the UPFA could get is a little over 4.73 million, a significant drop from 5.79 million votes which Mr. Rajapaksa polled as the presidential candidate, just seven months ago.

Cracks in the UPFA

Meanwhile, the power struggle between President Sirisena and Mr. Rajapaksa for control of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and UPFA too may have worked against the latter's electoral fortunes. In that power struggle, Mr. Rajapaksa put a great deal of pressure on Mr. Sirisena to declare him the prime ministerial candidate of the UPFA of which Mr. Sirisena became the leader when he was elected President in January.

The antagonistic personal and political relations between the two intensified when the UPFA, effectively controlled by Mr. Rajapaksa, tried to derail Mr. Sirisena's reform programme. During the height of the parliamentary election campaign, Mr. Sirisena publicly declined to appoint Mr. Rajapaksa as prime minister, even if the UPFA won the majority of seats. Two days before the election, Mr. Sirisena sacked the secretaries of the SLFP and the UPFA, who were Rajapaksa loyalists. This battle for control of the SLFP and the UPFA obviously created an unanticipated crisis within the Rajapaksa camp. While it may have closed the ranks of the hardcore supporters, many demoralised SLFP/UPFA sympathisers may have stayed home on the day of election.

The final figures of the strength of each political party and coalition have not yet been officially declared. With its national list seats, the UNP-led UNFGG is likely to have the final tally of about 105 seats, still short of a majority in parliament. The UPFA, on the other hand, will emerge as a very strong opposition with about 92 seats. A strong opposition is not a bad thing for good governance which Mr. Sirisena and Mr. Wickremesinghe have been promoting as their patented brand of politics. However, if they want to introduce any new constitutional reforms, they will need the UPFA's support to secure the two-thirds majority. If the kind of hostile politics of the enemy-

friend bi-polarity, in an almost Carl Schmittian paradigm, that the two camps advanced during the past few months continues, the reform agenda might suffer once again.

Among the new government's immediate challenges will be the handling of the UN Human Rights Council report on the alleged war crimes, due in September, just in a few weeks. The UNHRC and the government are likely to cooperate on an agenda of compromise, but at the risk of provoking anger among Tamil activist constituencies, at home and abroad. Effective devolution of power to the North and East and constitutional reforms in that direction too will return to the political debate sooner than later. During the election campaign, the UNP and its coalition partners took an exceedingly cautious stand not to commit to a political solution along a federal framework. With new signs of radicalisation of politics in the North, and despite its impressive electoral gains in the province, the ITAK may find it difficult to openly back the government if it tries to down play the political reform and reconciliation agenda.

(Jayadeva Uyangoda is Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo.)

A majority of Sri Lanka's voters have given a verdict in favour of completing the partial political change that began with the presidential elections

POVERTY

TRIBUNE, AUG 7, 2015

S Subramanian

Controversy over poverty line

The term should not be bandied about frivolously

WHY does the phrase ‘the poverty line’ generate so much disagreement and controversy? Are the quarrels on the subject akin to, and of no more significance than, disputations on how many angels can dance on a pin’s head? Is the frequently encountered concern with the notion no more than an affectation, a waste of time, an insensitive preoccupation with definition-mongering, a cynical hobby of the hyper-specialised professional, an instance of what Camus once called ‘sterile exercises on great subjects’? There is, in my view, something of truth in these charges; and to the extent that this is the case, one must feel free to turn one’s back on the subject and engage with issues that one considers to be more urgent and relevant and meaningful.

But there might also be a strong case for not treating everybody that deals with the subject with scorn and suspicion. For lurking behind the seemingly arcane and cold-bloodedly abstract debates surrounding the subject are substantive issues of political economy, moral concern, and practical import. The essay titled ‘How Not to Count the Poor’ (versions of which should be

This is the first part of a three-part series Prof Sreenivasan Subramanian has written on the Poverty Line. Because of an inexcusable mix-up, the [second part](#) got published on July 24. Our apologies to the Professor and The Tribune readers. The third and last part of the series will appear on August 21.

easily accessible through some purposive googling on the net) is an example of this proposition. The authors of the essay are Sanjay Reddy, an economist at the New School of Social Research in New York, and Thomas Pogge, a philosopher at Yale University. Their work is one of the few bulwarks available against a complete swamping of perspective on global income-related poverty by the World Bank over the last twenty-five years or so. So there might, after all, well be something to be said for not judging too harshly some at least of those that have been involved in a principled engagement with the meaning, the (ab)uses, and the significance of the phrase ‘poverty line’.

What does ‘poverty line’ mean? It is very interesting to note that the definitions suggested by Oxford dictionaries and by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (both available

on the net) are so different. According to the former, the poverty line is ‘the estimated minimum level of income needed to secure the necessities of life.’ According to the latter, the poverty line is ‘a level of personal or family income below which one is classified as poor according to governmental standards.’ The difference between the two definitions resides in the fact that the poor are identified, in the first definition, according to some external and presumably objective norm encompassed in the term ‘necessities of life’; and in the second definition, according to some internal and possibly subjective and bureaucratic norm encompassed in the term ‘governmental standards’. As citizens who have a stake in the responsible use of language, all of us should have a legitimate concern that key concepts, which have a profound bearing on our well-being and that of our compatriots, are not bandied about frivolously. And this certainly goes for the phrase ‘poverty line’.

What, then, is actually involved in all of this? A major clue is afforded in a piquant conversation that occurs in Lewis Carroll’s *Through The Looking-Glass*: “‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean?neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master? that’s all.’” Much of what Carroll wrote can be read at the level of ingeniously provocative and side-splittingly humorous children’s literature. Much of it is also profound and deadly serious — after all, Lewis Carroll, in real life, was Charles Dodgson, who taught logic and mathematics at Christ Church College in the University of Oxford. It is significant that decades later, the great philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, was, effectively, to espouse the cause of Humpty Dumpty, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, in opposition to his own earlier views on language (comparable, one supposes, to Alice’s), as contained in the younger Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. To simplify drastically, for the earlier Wittgenstein, the function of language is to represent a reality which is out there; for the later Wittgenstein, language is a ‘game’, in which ‘the meaning of a word is its use’, and which therefore allows for subjectivism in its employment? what Wittgenstein called ‘private language.’ Thus, Alice would have no use for a description of a horse as a creature with eight legs, whereas Humpty Dumpty would be able to get away with it by simply pronouncing that when he says ‘horse’ he means what other people have in mind when they say ‘spider’: the meaning of his words is the use to which he puts them.

I must say I prefer the earlier Wittgenstein to the later one, Alice to Humpty Dumpty, the Oxford dictionaries to Merriam-Webster's! In this reckoning, the poverty line must be based on an objective and reasonable assessment of what it costs to achieve the minimum 'necessities of life', and not—self-referentially—on a subjective and possibly arbitrary assessment determined by 'governmental standards.' For official standards can—and in the absence of vigilance, must—be expected to be informed by vested interest, by considerations of convenience rather than justice, by respect for the expedient rather than the right and the good. That's possibly a cynical view, but certainly not a lazy one: it suggests that all of us have a right and a duty in the matter of participating in the activity of arriving at a reasonable understanding of the meaning and magnitude of the poverty line. This in turn enjoins on us a stance of alertness to, and engagement with, what at first blush might seem like an esoteric issue that is best left to the economic expert to decide. And leaving it up entirely to the economic expert is also to abandon the path of democratic deliberation. In the bargain, it is a way of upholding a notion of language that accords the status of 'master', as Humpty Dumpty puts it, to the official expert.

For the poverty line is crucial in determining how much poverty there is in a society at a given point of time, and how it has changed over time; in determining who, and how many, will be eligible for state assistance on grounds of poverty; in determining how well or badly the state has discharged its responsibility toward mitigating the burden of deprivation on its people. These are questions that must be addressed with truth and courage. And if that is admitted, it would not be a good idea to confer exclusive power and authority on official experts to decide the answers to them. The types and dangers of the arbitrariness that can arise from such a concession will be discussed in concrete terms next.

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TRIBUNE, JUL 24, 2015

S Subramanian

Identifying the poor

There is a built-in incentive for official poverty lines to be pitched 'low'

The global poverty line is less than 10 per cent of the US poverty line.

IT was our contention, in the previous column on this subject, that in commonly understood terms which are compatible with a responsible use of language, the term 'poverty line' should refer to 'the estimated minimum level of income needed to secure

the necessities of life' (the definition suggested by Oxford dictionaries). The language of the 'poverty line' therefore suggests a view of income in which it is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. (Not that there is anything intrinsically objectionable to a view of income as an end in itself: it is just that the notion of a 'poverty line' is incompatible with such an interpretation of income.) The 'poverty line' approach to conceptualising income-deprivation therefore sees income (or resources in general) as a means to the end of avoiding deprivation in the space of what the economist Amartya Sen has called human functionings. A 'functioning', in Sen's view, is 'a state of being or doing', such as is reflected in a person's nutritional status, or status in respect of access to shelter, or clothing, or good health, or knowledge, or the ability to move about freely, or the ability to 'appear in public without shame' (a desideratum much stressed by the eighteenth-century political economist Adam Smith, and repeatedly endorsed by Amartya Sen.)

There are certain unavoidable implications for identifying the poor which a poverty-line approach to conceptualising poverty entails. Implication 1 is that the logical way of deriving a poverty line is the following one: first, identify a set of human functionings in respect of which escaping deprivation is necessary to qualify for not being judged poor; second, agree on minimally acceptable levels of achievement for each of these functionings; third, assess the commodity requirements for attaining these minimal levels of achievement; fourth, compute the reasonable cost of the commodity requirements for each valued functioning; fifth, add up these costs to arrive at the poverty line.

Implication 2 is that individual-specific poverty lines derived in accordance with Implication 1 are most unlikely to be identical across individuals. This is because of heterogeneities that must be expected to obtain, across both individuals and 'contexts' or 'environments'. What does one mean by this? Some examples should help to illustrate the point. Consider two individuals A and B who have the same income but who have one important non-income characteristic in respect of which they are very different: A is physically handicapped, but B is not. Typically, to achieve the same level of functioning in the matter of 'mobility', the physically handicapped individual A will require more resources (in the form of a wheel-chair, say) than individual B. This is another way of saying that it is much more difficult for A to convert income (or resources in general) into functionings than it is for individual B. But since it is functionings that ultimately matter — as we have argued earlier — A must be judged poorer than B even when both persons

have the same income. Or putting it differently, the income poverty line for A must be judged to be higher than for B.

Consider another example involving a variation in ‘environment’. Suppose A lives on the plains of Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu, where it is always warm (or at least never particularly cold), while B lives in the hills of Kodaikanal, where it is almost always cold. For both individuals to achieve the same level of functioning with respect to ‘adequacy of clothing’, clearly B will require access to more warm clothes than A. Even if both the income and the non-income characteristics of A and B were identical, the income poverty line for A must be judged to be lower than for B. Variations in the objective environment, or ‘context’ in which life is lived, again ensure that there are inter-personal differences in the ability to convert resources into functionings. Implication 2 of adopting a meaningful poverty-line approach to conceptualising poverty therefore goes against the grain of postulating a unique income poverty line for all individuals and all environments. Implication 2 can be pithily stated in Amartya Sen’s terms as the proposition that it is sensible to view poverty as an absolute concept in the space of human functionings, but — because of inter-personal variations in the ability to convert incomes or resources into functionings — as a relative concept in the space of incomes or resources.

It should be mentioned here that there is one logical situation in which deferring to Implication 2 is still compatible with violating Implication 1. This is the situation in which we advance a unique poverty line, but one that is yielded by the largest of the individual-specific poverty lines derived through deference to achievements in functionings space: we can be sure, in such a situation, that no one who is poor will be left out of the count of the poor. This is a cautious — and therefore liberal — approach to identifying the poor. By contrast, a conservative (or crabbed and niggardly) approach would advance a poverty line that is yielded by the smallest of the individual-specific poverty lines: we can be sure of excluding all non-poor persons from the count of the poor in such an approach, but we cannot be sure of including all poor persons within the count. It should be noted that identifying the poor is only the first step in measuring poverty. The second step is aggregation: the process of combining information on the poverty line and the distribution of incomes with a view to coming up with a number which is intended to signify the amount of poverty that obtains in a society. The simplest such measure of poverty is the headcount ratio, or proportion of the population below the poverty line. It does not require rocket science to deduce that, other things equal, the

headcount ratio will increase as the poverty line is increased. There is therefore a built-in incentive for official poverty lines to be pitched 'low'.

How does the World Bank global poverty line measure up to Implications 1 and 2, as discussed above? First, the bank proposes a unique 'dollar-a-day' poverty line for all countries of the world and over time. (The line is approximately one US dollar per day, expressed in 'purchasing power parity terms', to correct for variations in country-specific currencies' purchasing power.) This is by no means the maximum of country-specific poverty lines, derived in accordance with functionings-inspired calculations. Rather, it is the minimum of country-specific poverty lines, based on the actual poverty lines (some of which have in fact been recommended by the World Bank itself!) employed by a few of the world's poorest countries. The global poverty line by the World Bank is less than 10 per cent of the US poverty line. It is with reference to such a low poverty line that the Millennium Development Goal of poverty reduction has been set. The philosopher Thomas Pogge has demonstrated that global achievements in poverty reduction become altogether less impressive if the poverty line is raised to a less modest, but nevertheless modest, \$2.50.

Briefly, the World Bank's global poverty estimates are based on a conceptually dubious and un-generously spartan reckoning of the poverty line.

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TRIBUNE, AUG 21, 2015

S Subramanian

'Price-corrected' poverty lines

The official methodology has thrown the door open to anarchy

IN the two earlier columns on the 'poverty line', it was argued that when we speak of such a line we mean — or should mean — a level of income which is adequate to secure the necessities of life, or to secure satisfactory levels of achievement with respect to a set of identified and basic human functionings, such as the ability to be well-nourished, decently clothed, sheltered against the inclemency of the weather, free of ignorance and ill-health, and reasonably mobile. In such a view, income or resources or commodity bundles are a means, which might well be variable across individuals and contexts, to the end of achieving a certain absolute freedom from deprivation in the space of human functionings, conceived of as states of being and doing.

For any measure to be consistent and amenable to comparison across contexts, the norm or standard of measurement must be unchanging in a relevant space. So suppose I am comparing the lengths of two objects, say the longer sides of two tables, and I measure the length of the first table in feet by means of a foot rule, then I must measure the length of the second table also by means of a foot rule (made of any material): that is, the measuring rod must be identical in the space of length, and it would be meaningless to seek constancy of the measuring rod in the space, say, of weight. (A wooden foot rule may be twice the weight of a plastic foot rule. If the first table is 10 plastic foot rules long, and the second table is 10 wooden six-inch-rules long, then the first table is twice the length of the second table even though we have preserved invariance of the measuring rod in the space of weight — which just happens not to be the relevant space in which to preserve invariance when we are measuring length.)

As with length, so with poverty. The poverty line may be specified in terms of the monetary value of some given commodity bundle. But for comparisons of poverty across space or over time to be meaningful, we must preserve invariance of the poverty standard in the space of functionings, not of incomes or commodity bundles or resources in general. In the previous piece on the poverty line, we noted that the World Bank's 'dollar-a-day' global poverty line preserves invariance in the space of 'real income' (or income adjusted only for price variations). This is not unlike preserving constancy of the measuring rod's weight when we are comparing lengths. What about India's official poverty lines?

Over the last twenty-five years there have been three expert committees that have overseen the determination of a consumption expenditure poverty line for India. There was the 1993 expert group headed by Prof DT Lakadawala, the 2010 expert group headed by Prof SD Tendulkar, and the 2014 expert group headed by Prof C. Rangarajan. Alas, all three expert committees seem to have got the space in which invariance of the poverty norm must be sought wrong: all of them prescribe invariance of the commodity bundle corresponding to the poverty line level of consumption expenditure (although a different commodity bundle in each case).

How is the 'poverty line commodity' bundle to be determined? Without getting into complications of detail, the official Indian practice has been to fix the commodity bundle in terms of that package of goods and services which corresponds to the level of consumption expenditure at which a norm of nutritional adequacy is observed to be

achieved in some chosen ‘reference’ year. For the 1993 expert group, the reference year was 1973-74; and the poverty line was selected as that level of consumption expenditure at which a calorific consumption of 2400 kilocalories per person per day in the rural areas and of 2100 kilocalories in the urban areas was observed to be realised, on the basis of survey data on the distribution of calorific consumption and of expenditure across expenditure size-classes. By this reckoning, rural and urban consumption expenditure poverty lines for 1973-74 were arrived at. Through a similar procedure, the 2010 expert group arrived at poverty lines for 2004-05 as the reference year, and the 2014 expert group arrived at poverty lines for 2011-12 as the reference year. The poverty lines in subsequent years were (effectively) derived by re-valuing the reference year commodity bundles at contemporaneously ruling prices. What was to be kept unvarying across contexts of comparison was therefore the ‘poverty line commodity bundle.’

This procedure has been a recipe for complete confusion. It has been discovered that as we move forward in time, the officially ‘price-corrected’ poverty lines progressively fall short of the calorific norms on the basis of which they were initially rationalised. This phenomenon has come to be described as a ‘calorie drift’. In some ways such a drift is perhaps inevitable, if relative prices should move against food items over time, or if resources such as firewood for fuel should become transformed from common pool resources to marketised and priced commodities, or if people’s ‘preferences’ (or more realistically and ironically, ‘needs’) were to shift more urgently toward non-food items vis-à-vis food items. The basic ‘demand theory’ predicts as much, and official procedures of fixing the poverty line have been, and continue to remain, impervious to basic theoretical considerations.

On the basis of its dubious methodology, official poverty lines have displayed a pleasing time-trend of declining headcount ratios of poverty. But the choice of the reference year is essentially arbitrary. We discover that, as we move the reference year forward in time, the declining trend is preserved, but at embarrassingly larger and larger magnitudes of the headcount ratio. What is worse, and as economist Utsa Patnaik has demonstrated, if each year in our time-series is treated as the ‘reference year’, that is, if the poverty line in each year is directly reckoned as the level of consumption expenditure at which the chosen calorific norm is observed to be realised in that year, then we obtain a profile of increasing headcount ratios! What does this imply? It implies that the official methodology has thrown the door open to complete anarchy. What magnitudes and trends

of poverty ratios obtain becomes a function of what year(s) we choose as our reference year(s), not a function of actual poverty-related events on the ground.

What is more, and as Marx observed in *Capital*, the socially necessary means of subsistence in any society at any point of time are always 'practically known'. Most people with some experience of living in a city such as Chennai would recommend a poverty line of Rs.15,000 per month for a family of five. The official poverty line works out to only around 60 per cent of this figure. Is poverty then best tackled by understating magnitudes and trends through expert fiats and official bluff? Or, rather, through active state intervention which is responsive to public demands that sense and scruple must not be sacrificed in the interests of convenience and expediency?

— The writer is National Fellow, Indian Council of Social Science Research

PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

TIMES OF INDIA, AUG 19, 2015

Digitization of ration cards in 26 states to plug PDS leakage

[Dipak K Dash](#)

NEW DELHI: In significant progress made by states to check leakage of foodgrains under the public distribution system (PDS), 26 states and Union Territories have completed 100% digitization of ration cards in the past one year. Six states have digitized the supply chain for better monitoring of grain moving from godowns to the doorstep of consumers.

According to food ministry sources, the overall digitization of ration cards across the country is about 92% and they expect the process to be completed in the next 6-7 months. The states that have achieved 100% progress include Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh.

They added Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have recorded 98% progress in linking Aadhar while Delhi has completed 100%. The achievement is more than 80% in the case of Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Puducherry and Kerala.

"Once we have the complete digitization and beneficiaries' Aadhar numbers are linked, it will plug the leakage of highly subsidized grains that are meant for the needy. Completing these tasks will also ensure better implementation of the National Food Security Scheme (NFSA)," said a ministry official.

Different estimates suggest that the diversion of subsidized food grains in India is about 44%.

NO WASTAGE

MOVING TOWARDS ZERO LEAKAGE OF FOODGRAINS

Supply chain management
Implemented in 13 states/ UTs

Transparency portal
Implemented in 26 states/ UTs

Online grievance redressal
Implemented in 21 states/ UTs

Toll free no.
Implemented in 28 states/ UTs

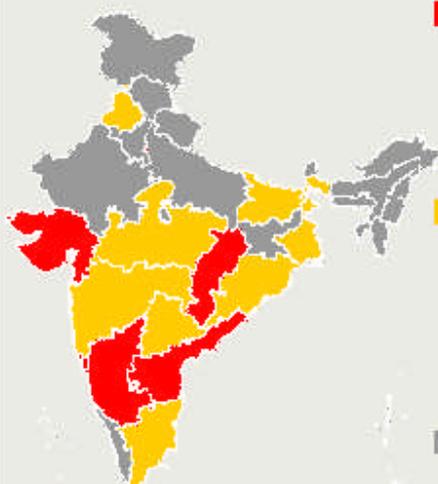
Online allocation
Implemented in 13 states/ UTs

Digitization of ration cards

100% completed in 26 states/ UTs, 0 progress in Meghalaya



PERFORMANCE OF STATES TILL DATE



■ Advance stage

Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka & Andhra Pradesh

■ Significant progress

Bihar, MP, Maharashtra, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Telengana, West Bengal, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Odisha & Punjab

■ Initial stage of implementation

Rest all

The ministry had earlier asked all states to finish the processes including digitization, identification of beneficiaries, removal of bogus ration cards and better tracking of food subsidies for effective implementation of NFSA. So far over a dozen states and Union Territories have either fully or partially rolled out the scheme. The deadline for implementation of the scheme has been extended thrice since it came to effect. The latest deadline is September 30.

The ministry also plans to launch the direct benefit transfer (DBT) for foodgrains in three UTs of Puducherry, Chandigarh and Dadra and Nagar Haveli from September. In these cases, government will transfer cash to each family in place of providing subsidized grains. All these UTs have made substantial progress in linking the ration cards with the bank account numbers of beneficiaries.

PUBLIC SECTOR

BUSINESS LINE, AUG 17, 2015

Govt under fire for ‘unceremonious’ removal of PSU independent directors

Former ONGC chief writes to Modi, also asks why PSU heads are not getting extensions

Questions are again being raised on ‘corporate governance’ in public sector undertakings. The latest salvo comes from former ONGC Chairman R.S. Sharma, who is a member of various task forces and government committees.

Raising the issue in a note to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, Sharma questioned the ‘unceremonious’ removal of independent directors and the government’s policy on not giving extensions to PSU chiefs after completion of their initial five-year term, even though they may have many years of service left before their normal superannuation at age 60.

After the Modi Government came to power last year, an informal communication from ‘higher authorities’ had gone to government departments and ministries that all appointments on PSU boards made under the previous UPA regime would be reviewed.

This resulted in many independent directors appointed under the UPA regime losing their positions without being given a valid reason.

Companies that have been affected include Indian Oil Corporation, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation and Coal India. Even today, independent director positions in Indian Oil and Coal India, among others, are lying vacant.

Appointment process

The process for appointment of an independent director to a public sector company’s board is similar to that for a functional director of such entities. The nodal ministry selects the name from a Department of Public Enterprises list for such directors, and sends it to the search committee.

The committee scrutinises the people on the list and finally recommends the name/names to the nodal ministry, which then approaches the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), chaired by the Prime Minister, for the final notification. The only other member of the ACC is the Home Minister.

Sharma, who himself was nominated as an independent director in Steel Authority of India last year, was informally told that his name would not be considered at the annual general meeting (AGM) and that he need not attend the same.

In fact, Sharma was given the option to resign, which he declined. But by virtue of his name not being considered at the AGM, he ceased to be an independent director.

Other instances

More recently, the decision to not extend former SAIL Chairman and MD CS Verma's tenure despite having enough years of service and reports that NTPC CMD Arup Roy Choudhury is not getting an extension at the end of his tenure, have created uncertainty.

Sharma said in his letter that these moves raise questions over government interference in the functioning of the PSUs.

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated August 17, 2015)

TAXATION

BUSINESS STANDARD, AUG 19, 2015

Centre notifies tax rebate for 21 backward districts

These districts have been put under section 32 and 32 AD of the IT Act for the period April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2020

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), the apex policy-making body of the income tax department, has notified 21 districts of Bihar, including capital Patna, as "backward areas" where entrepreneurs will pay 15 per cent less income tax on investments in buildings, new plants and machinery.

These districts have been put under section 32 and 32 AD of the IT Act for the period April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2020. These districts are Patna, Nalanda, Bhojpur, Rohtas, Kaimur, Gaya, Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Nawada, Vaishali, Sheohar, Samastipur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Araria, Jamui, Lakhisarai, Supaul and Muzaffarpur.

FINANCIAL EXPRESS, AUG 18, 2015

Finance ministry mulls 1% Income Tax rebate for credit/debit card payments

Credit or debit card users may get to claim 1% of their annual transactions as deduction from income, if a proposal made by a section of the finance ministry is implemented.

By: [Prasanta Sahu](#)

Credit or debit card users may get to claim 1% of their annual transactions as deduction from income, if a proposal made by a section of the finance ministry is implemented, reports Prasanta Sahu in New Delhi. The move could marginally reduce the income tax liability of credit and debit card users. For example, if a person pays bills worth Rs 5 lakh electronically in a year, her annual income would be reduced by Rs 5,000 for calculating the tax liability.

Similarly, merchants could also get a rebate on their income tax and service tax liability for promoting electronic transactions if the department of revenue (DoR) agrees with views expressed by the department of economic affairs (DEA), sources said. Following a

Budget announcement to incentivise electronic transactions and disincentivise cash transactions, the DEA unveiled a draft scheme on June 18 listing out the proposals to achieve this objective.

It suggested giving an income tax “rebate” to end consumers for paying a certain proportion of their expenditure through electronic means.

The amount of rebate was not specified. The DEA also suggested merchants could get a tax rebate if at least 50% of the value of their transactions is through electronic means or, alternatively, benefit from a 1-2% reduction in value-added tax (VAT) for all electronic transactions.

Sources said a meeting between the top officials of the DEA and DoR would be held in a few days to work out the exact nature of the tax incentives for e-transactions. While the DEA wants the tax relief proposals to take effect without delay, sources said that since Parliament’s approval is needed for changes in direct taxes, these might have wait for end-2015 or till the next Budget.

Besides tax sops, the incentives for electronic transactions also include a slew of non-tax incentives to reduce cost of services to citizens. Waiver of convenience fee/service charge/surcharge levied by government entities on card payments to utility service providers, petrol pumps, gas agencies and railway tickets was also mooted.

WOMEN

ECONOMIC TIMES, AUG 19, 2015

Women constitute just 6.11% in police force, says study

Women constitute as low as 6.11% of India's police force, as a result of deep-rooted systemic deficiencies including gender bias, stereotyping and segmentation of duties, says CHRI study.

NEW DELHI: Women constitute as low as 6.11 per cent of India's police force, as a result of deep-rooted systemic deficiencies including gender bias, stereotyping and segmentation of duties and lack of a common cadre during recruitment, a first-of-its kind study on [Women Police](#) in [South Asia](#) has revealed.

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), the body which conducted the study, will release its full findings tomorrow in the presence of Minister of State for Home Affairs [Kiren Rijju](#) here.

The study titled--Rough Roads to Equality - Women Police in South Asia-- puts the total number of women in police forces, across states in India, at 1,05,325. The overall strength (civil and armed) on the other hand stands at 22,83,646.

"Apart from the institutional limitations, this is also due to the fact that men are always equated with tough policing, especially with a force that is largely perceived as masculine and militaristic," [CHRI](#) Director Maja Daruwala said.

Other South Asian Countries that were part of the study were Bangladesh, Maldives and Pakistan while Kerala, Haryana, Meghalaya, Rajasthan and [Jharkhand](#) were the Indian states.

Devika Prasad, coordinator of the study team, said the pace of change in the policing structure was "glacial" and attributed it to condoning the demand for a "common cadre" for recruitment of men and women among other factors.

"There's still no common cadre for recruitment at the level of Constables. Separate posts for women are often very less and it also affects their promotion in the hierarchy," she said while sharing the gist of the findings.

She said the systemic deficiencies in terms of infrastructure namely lack of ladies toilets were also among the major hindrances in increasing the abysmally low presence of women.

Former DG NHRC Kanwaljit Deol, former Kerala top cop Jacob Punnoose, and former director of National Police Academy [Kamal Kumar](#) were also part of the initiative.

Among Indian states, Chandigarh tops the chart with 14.16 per cent women in police force while [Assam](#) is at the bottom with just 0.93 per cent.

Interestingly, Kerala, which is often held up as a model state in terms of better management, "not a single police station has a female Station House Officer," the report said.

"The general perception maybe that women need policing. But the fact is policing needs women more because of the unique sets of skills and personalities they bring to the table namely patience, compassion, sincerity, empathy and devotion," Kumar said.

He also lamented the lack of efforts towards "mainstreaming" women, and slammed the prevailing practises of restricting women by assigning them duties such as escorting women prisoners and interrogating women suspects among others.