

LIST OF NEWSPAPERS COVERED

ASIAN AGE

BUSINESS LINE

DECCAN HERALD

ECONOMIC TIMES

HINDU

HINDUSTAN TIMES

INDIAN EXPRESS

PIONEER

STATESMAN

TELEGRAPH

TRIBUNE

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|--------------|
| BACKWARD CLASSES | 3-7 |
| CIVIL SERVICE | 8-12 |
| ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENN | 13-15 |
| EDUCATION | 16-23 |
| ELECTIONS | 24 |
| EMPLOYMENT | 25-27 |
| FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS | 28 |
| HUMAN RIGHTS | 29 |
| INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | 30-32 |
| JUDICIARY | 33 |
| LABOUR | 34-35 |
| NATIONAL FLAG | 36-37 |
| POLICE | 38 |
| POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT | 39-42 |
| PRESIDENTS | 43 |
| PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM | 44-46 |
| RAILWAYS | 47-50 |
| RURAL DEVELOPMENT | 51 |
| URBAN DEVELOPMENT | 52-54 |
| WOMEN | 55 |

BACKWARD CLASSES

BUSINESS LINE, FEB 29, 2016

Moving backwards

CHITRA NARAYANAN

If the issue is not addressed now, quota stirs will only increase

Nineteen people killed, nearly 200 injured, shops and property destroyed, around 17,000 trees felled and mindless mayhem. The Jat agitation over reservations has transformed Happening Haryana into Horrifying Haryana. With this kind of violence, it is hard to feel any sympathy for the demands of the Jats, a socially and numerically dominant community.

But behind the seemingly absurd demands lies a story of socio-economic problems brought about by the collapse of an agrarian system and a rapidly industrialising and urbanising society. If not addressed at the root, this will unleash many more agitations all over the country. The Patels in Gujarat, the Kapus in Andhra Pradesh, the Marathas in Maharashtra, the Gujjars in Rajasthan are already all on the warpath. The Jat case may be slightly different because the community is aggrieved at losing political power to a Punjabi Khatri, but rising unemployment is usually at the heart of quota stirs.

In many States where farming prospects are dwindling, the rural youth find themselves at a crossroads. Especially those whose families have sold out land holdings and are finding the going difficult. As the money runs out, they find themselves without skills. Given that urbanisation is a phenomenon that cannot be reversed, it's imperative to re-skill communities engaged in dying occupations.

But the issue cannot be addressed so simply. It's also time to bite the bullet and look at our reservation policy squarely in the eye. The original SC/ST quota system inspired by BR Ambedkar was meant to be a temporary scheduling. But the 1990 Mandal Committee report that also added OBCs to the mix ended up imbuing a permanency to it as well as opening the door to many more demands. Successive governments since then have shied away from reviewing the reservation policy because of the fear of polarising an already polarised society, but certainly it's time for a dialogue on this.

Chitra Narayanan Editorial Consultant

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated February 29, 2016)

HINDU, FEB 26, 2016

Quantifying the caste quotas

SONALDE DESAI

It is only when Jats, Gujjars or Muslims demand reservation, and particularly when these demands become aggressive, that our political system suddenly wakes up and takes notice. However, this notice is simply confined to ascertaining whether the specific group demanding

reservation is worthy of it or not. Little attention is paid to re-examining the global picture or viewing the conundrum of reservation holistically. Neither any established principles of positive discrimination nor the required data are available to tell us who deserves preferential policies and why.

The proportion of individuals identifying themselves as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) has steadily grown over the years. The National Sample Survey Office data show that in 1999-2000, about 36 per cent of the population fell in the self-identified OBC category; by 2011-12, this proportion had grown to 44 per cent. If combined with about 9 per cent of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) and 20 per cent of the Scheduled Caste (SC) population, the total proportion eligible for reservation comprises 73 per cent of the Indian population. If new claimants to the OBC category are added to this group, easily 80 per cent of Indians would be eligible for reservation of some kind. It would be impossible to provide effective benefits to this large a group. Thus, some choices within these categories will inevitably need to be made.

The shrinking pie

The external conditions which initially led to reservations have changed tremendously. Economic growth has resulted in a decline in poverty numbers from 37 per cent of the population to 22 per cent, which, in principle, should bring down the number of people seeking reservations, but over the same period, rewards to government jobs have grown sharply. Wage increases associated with the Sixth Pay Commission and the expected implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission have made government jobs highly attractive. Not surprisingly, many groups historically tied to the land are now seeking favourable treatment while seeking entry into non-farm work. Simultaneously, access to government jobs has been declining for all groups. The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) by University of Maryland and National Council of Applied Economic Research shows that although in 2004-05 15.3 per cent of men aged 22-39 with education level of class 12 or more had a regular salaried job in the government or public sector, this proportion fell to 11.7 per cent by 2011-12. This is because government jobs have stagnated while educational attainment has increased rapidly. Thus, it is not surprising that more claimants for these scarce jobs are aggressively staking their claims.

This brings the nation face-to-face with a serious dilemma. Like Abhimanyu, we have entered the Chakravayuh without having an inkling of how to get out of it. It is thus imperative to consider some sensible exit strategies.

First, we must try to identify the contours of the problem. Since the First Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar submitted its report in 1955, several attempts have been made to identify backward castes, resulting in frequent discordance between these lists. Lack of consistency and clarity lead to ambiguity in the entire process of reservation, leaving communities like the Jats dissatisfied. This is exacerbated by the lack of credible recent data. Since the 1931 Census, the only effort at collecting data on different castes and their socio-economic circumstances was undertaken by the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), 2011.

The National Commission for Backward Classes claimed, in a report dated February 2015, that these data are neither available nor usable for the purpose of establishing the economic condition of various castes. I am inclined to think that this is a correct assessment. If we cannot use the SECC data, then how can we access more accurate data?

Revising the numbers

Just before 2001 and 2011 Censuses were conducted, there were vociferous demands for including data on caste in them, demands that were, however, not met due to the lack of a preparation period. The present phase in the planning cycle of the 2021 Census is the ideal time for ensuring that comprehensive data about caste and religion for all the groups, including forward castes, backward castes, and SCs and STs, are included in this Census. Surely 90 years is a long enough period for India to have changed, and we may want to rely on more recent data while developing our preferential policies.

Second, these data should allow us to re-evaluate the eligibility of groups for inclusion in reserved categories every 10 or at least every 20 years. Much of the social stratification in India is linked to the occupational status of the various castes. With the changes in the economy, we can expect both the link between caste and occupation to weaken and the economic fortunes of various occupations to change considerably. Some of the unrest among the Jat and Patel communities is associated with the poor performance of agriculture in the country. It may well be that they are economically worse off than individuals engaged in other occupations. The opportunity for re-examination of the caste-wise economic status would facilitate the setting up of a structure for the redressal of grievances. However, since this is likely to be a massive exercise, simple criteria based on the housing census combined with the caste data from population enumeration could easily be used. If India can conduct a full Below Poverty Line (BPL) Census where each household is identified as 'poor' or 'non-poor', providing data for a caste group should be feasible.

Third, we must find a way of ensuring a churn in the number of individuals eligible for benefits to ensure that these benefits reach the widest segment of society. Albeit the creamy layer criteria exist, they are almost impossible to implement. With the advent of the Aadhar card, one way of ensuring that the same families do not capture all the benefits is to ensure that each time someone uses their reserved category certificate, their Aadhar number is noted down and linked with the certificate. Further, it may be stipulated that the reserved category certificate can be used only once in 20 years, thus allowing for the benefits to reach even the sections that have hitherto been excluded from their ambit. This would ensure that the same individual is not permitted to obtain both college education as well as a government job by using the same eligibility criterion, nor can one obtain an initial posting as well as promotion using the same criterion.

The key to dealing with the quota quagmire lies in shuffling people in and out of the eligibility criteria and ensuring that the benefits are not concentrated among certain groups and/or

individuals. All these principles are consistent with the democratic ideals and vision of social justice envisaged in India's Constitution. It may be possible to achieve a consensus across the political spectrum for adopting a non-political and pragmatic approach to reservations. If we expect to phase out the reservation policy 100 years after Independence, the time for finding a long-term solution is clearly upon us, and we need to act now.

(Sonalde Desai is Professor of Sociology at University of Maryland and Senior Fellow at the National Council of Applied Economic Research. Views are personal.)

STATESMAN, FEB 25, 2016

Haryana quagmire

The demand for reservation by Jats in Haryana, coming in the wake of similar demands by relatively affluent communities like the Patels in Gujarat and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh, has led Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak of 'conspiracies' being hatched by non-governmental organisations to destabilise his government. If indeed the NGOs are responsible for the current upheavals in the country, the Army is not an instrument to restore law and order. It ought to be the last resort but in Haryana it became the first. The Chief of the Army Staff has set a bad precedent by airdropping soldiers with unusual alacrity to fire on the agitators. A few years ago when P Chidambaram as Union Home minister wanted to deploy the Army in Naxal-Maoist affected areas, the Army chief of the day refused citing socio-economic factors being responsible for the situation and that the Army firing on its own civilians was not the solution. Law and order is clearly a state - read police - subject. The police and CRPF, if deployed, are sufficiently equipped to handle such situations. The Jats had announced their agitation well in advance and fixed the dates and venues. Meanwhile, a rival non-Jat MP of the ruling BJP announced a counter-agitation and issued threats to prospective Jat agitators. When the agitation began, it was peaceful the first four or five days. It turned violent and unruly only after anti-social elements entered the scene and projected the Jats in bad light. They are being accused for the loss of life and breakdown of essential services and supplies, including drinking water to Delhi.

The use of the Army in aid of civil authority is governed by Section 130 of the Criminal Procedure Code. If any assembly has to be dispersed for public safety and cannot be handled by the police, the district magistrate may enlist the help of the Army. The Army is expected to bring the situation under control quickly and hand it back to civil authorities. In the present case, the Haryana chief secretary spoke to the Army chief and Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar spoke to Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar calling the Army in the districts of Bhiwani, Hissar, Jhajjar, Jind, Kaithal, Panipat, Rohtak and Sonapat. It seemed like a coordinated plan to silence dissent. It may be recalled the Army chief as Eastern Army Commander took more than four days to move the Army when Kokrajhar and a few other districts of Assam were burning from communal violence and the death toll crossed 100. He cited procedures for the delay. As for the

demand of the Jats for reservation, the National Commission for Backward Classes had spelt out the reasons for excluding them in Haryana from the list of Other Backward Classes. Even though the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government through a notification in 2014 promised a special quota for the Jats beyond the 27 per cent reservation for the OBCs, the Supreme Court had quashed the notification. Khattar has run out of options.

STATESMAN, FEB 24, 2016

Jat reservation under special provision: Khattar

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Tuesday ruled out disturbing the 27 per cent quota meant for Other Backward Classes in the state and said Jats will be given reservation under a separate provision.

"The state government would not disturb the quota of 27 per cent reservation meant for the OBCs. The government would make a separate provision for their (Jats) reservation," he told reporters here.

As soon as he reached Rohtak, his official car was gheraoed by angry people who raised slogans like "Haryana police murdabad" over the state police's alleged failure in controlling the violent situation.

Referring to the surfacing of an audio clip purportedly of a close aide of former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Khattar said it would be thoroughly investigated.

"If the involvement of any person belonging to any political party or organisation is found, he will not be spared," he asserted.

Describing the incidents of arson and violence as "unfortunate", he urged the people to remain calm and patient.

The state government would estimate losses suffered by the people after gathering full information, he said.

Khattar also said ex-gratia of Rs.10 lakh would be given to the next of kin of "innocent persons" killed during the agitation after investigations.

Besides, government job would be given to one member of the family of the deceased.

CIVIL SERVICE

ECONOMIC TIMES, FEB 27, 2016

Babus proficient in Hindi stand to win Rs 10,000 from Modi government

NEW DELHI: Proficiency in Hindi can now earn central government employees up to Rs 10,000 each in prize money if they score at least 70 per cent marks in the examination conducted at the completion of the 'Parangat' course introduced by the Narendra Modi government last year to promote use of the official language among bureaucrats. The home ministry, in a letter to all central ministries on Wednesday, proposed the payout as "encouragement" for employees undertaking the government's toughest Hindi proficiency course. The ministry proposed that the employees scoring 60-69 per cent marks be paid Rs 8,000 while those securing 55-59 per cent marks be paid Rs 6,000. The government had introduced the 160-hour course in April 2015 after it found that many officers were unable to carry out official work in Hindi despite passing training courses offered by the Centre such as Prabodh, Praveen and Pragya. The higher-level Parangat course is mainly based on practice, with as much as 80 per cent of the time scheduled for practice while the rest is kept aside for discussing theoretical aspects. In its letter, a copy of which has been seen by ET, the home ministry said that the ministries and departments to which the high-scoring employees belong will bear the expense from their own administrative budget and asked for their comments by March 10. Officials said the total payout could be significant since all central government employees possessing "working knowledge of Hindi" are supposed to undertake the Parangat course in batches. The course includes topics such as administration, finance, banking, science and technology, and glossary of terms. Employees are given a choice of completing the course in one go over 20 days and 160 hours of training or over five months with a one-hour training on alternate days.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, FEB 29, 2016

No paper call letters for civil services interview: UPSC to aspirants

No paper call letters for interviews will be issued to candidates who have cleared civil services main examination and they will instead have to download e-summons, UPSC has said.

Thousands of students appear for the prestigious civil services examination conducted annually by the Union Public Service Commission to select officers for Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), among others.

The examination is conducted in three stages--preliminary, main and personality test or interview.

The personality test for candidates is likely to commence from March 8, 2016, the UPSC has said in a statement.

“No paper summon letters will be issued for the personality test or interview by the Commission,” it said.

All candidates, who have cleared the civil services main examination, have been asked to download e-summon letters from the Commission’s website -- www.upsc.gov.in.

They should immediately inform the Commission, in case they are unable to download it, at least five days before the commencement of the interview, the UPSC said.

STATESMAN, FEB 25, 2016

President urges officials to show good conduct

Good conduct and behaviour towards the public are the best ornaments civil servants can have for rendering effective public service, President Pranab Mukherjee on Wednesday said while addressing IAS probationers.

A group of trainee Indian Administrative Service officers, including those from the Royal Bhutan Civil Services, called on the President at Rashtrapati Bhavan here.

The President, a Rashtrapati Bhavan spokesperson said, advised them to always remember that they represent the face of the government.

He reminded them that the motto of their academy was 'sheelam parambhushanam' (character is the highest virtue) and therefore, their best ornament should be their conduct and behaviour towards the public.

Mukherjee said the civil servants' attitude and approach towards their job was important as it would not only affect their own careers but also the future of the nation.

Pointing out that India not only celebrates diversity but also cherishes it, Mukherjee asked the probationers to be the change they aspire to see in society and this will then become a way for them to get immense satisfaction out of their work.

The probationers are in Delhi for training at Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training.

STATESMAN, FEB 24, 2016

Modi asks IAS officers to take pro poor decisions

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday asked IAS officers to keep in mind the welfare of the poorest of the poor people while taking decisions as they are in "service" and not "jobs". He made the comment while interacting with 181 IAS probationers of the 2015 batch.

He exhorted them to recall Mahatma Gandhi's talisman of keeping in mind the welfare of the poorest of the poor, while taking decisions, a PMO statement said.

Noting that several of these probationers had worked in the private sector before joining the IAS, he said that while their earlier assignments were "jobs", they are now going to undertake "service".

During the interaction, he talked about the Northeast and stressed the importance of progress and connectivity there, saying if the region develops, the entire country would march forward, the statement said.

In response to a question, Modi said his extensive travels across India for over four decades, and his experience as Chief Minister of a state, had helped him in his work as Prime Minister.

ECONOMIC TIMES, FEB 24, 2016

Government to screen '12 angry men' to train top bureaucrats

NEW DELHI: Hollywood legend Henry Fonda will soon hone leadership skills of top bureaucrats, emphasising on ethics and values, through his character in '12 Angry Men.' The government plans to screen Sydney Lumet's 1957 classic, often used by corporates to teach people about conflict management and persuasion skills, during its programme to train officials. The corporate style twoday 'highquality' training modules will be rolled out by the Centre in association with United Nations Development Programme. Many retired bureaucrats including former secretaries have been roped in to act as facilitators for such courses. Group A officers across the country will be asked to undergo these courses. Apart from the movie, the leadership course will include a briefing on understanding stakeholders of a government officer. 12 Angry Men is the story of how 12 jurors are asked to reach a unanimous decision on whether a person is guilty or not, with the accused set to receive a death sentence if the jury finds him guilty. The film shows how a lone juror who had doubts about the evidence manages to win over his 11 colleagues. It offers lessons on building consensus among persons with different personalities from different backgrounds. The focus will be on bureaucrats "comprehending the power of influence in the functioning of leadership, relate to the traits and behaviors associated with leadership and deal with multiple stakeholders in a complex and multicultural environment." The

UNDP has prepared a twoday module on leadership on request of DoPT. The module on ethics and values will impress upon bureaucrats the drawing up of a 'Life's Balance Sheet' relating to acceptable ethical conduct and any drop in the same, along with "listening to one's inner voice for direction". It will also stress on building relationships in the family and at work. "The entire programme will have the following ethos interspersing all sessions — accountability, creativity/possibility thinking, going within, positivity, positive vision and inspiring goals, actions: What is mine to do?" as per the course module. Leading a stressfree as well as a "wholesome life in all dimensions" will also be a part of the 'Ethics and Values' module. The Centre has told all Central Training Institutes and state institutes that the objective is to make available high quality modules designed by reputed institutes and delivered by National Facilitators to ensure better learning of skills. Among the facilitators on board are former coal secretary SK Shrivastava, former agriculture secretary Anup Kumar Thakur, National Shipping Board chairman Vishwapati Trivedi and former retired urban development secretaries Sudhir Krishna and Upendra Nath Bora.

INDIAN EXPRESS, FEB 24, 2016

DRDO tech staff wear black ribbons at work to press their demands

The revised pay scale of 7,500-12,000 has been approved by the government for the cadre in 1996. They are yet to get the benefits of this scale.

Written by [Sushant Kulkarni](#)

The scientists—technical officers Group ‘A’ and ‘B’ cadres— from the various laboratories of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), termed as ‘the backbone’ of the organisation, are up in arms against the management over pending demands.

Pune has three important laboratories of the DRDO — Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE), High Energy Material Research Laboratory (HEMRL) and Research and Development Establishment (Engineers). Over 450 technical officers of Group A and B from these labs have been sporting black ribbons at the workplace since last five days. Agitations were held for the demands which the scientists say, have been pending since last 20 years.

A senior DRDO Technical Officer said, “Three months ago, when Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar was in Pune, our delegation held a meeting with him in the presence of S Christopher, the Director General of the DRDO. The minister had told the DG that he had found demands to

be genuine and had assured concrete action within 15 days. It is now three months and nothing has happened.”

Speaking about the demands, another DRDO staffer said, “The revised pay scale of 7,500-12,000 has been approved by the government for our cadre in 1996. We are yet to get the benefits of this scale. Secondly, there is set of rules called Defence Research and Technical Cadre Recruitment Rules. These rules are very faulty. Some of the provisions facilitate nepotism and injustice to hard-working staffers. Several government orders, court rulings about the pay and promotions of our cadres have not been implemented by the management. The organisation runs on our technical skills, scientific knowledge and experience. We are the real contributors to development from basic weaponry to crucial propellant for missiles. This treatment is very disturbing.”

ECONOMIC TIMES, FEB 24, 2016

No officer to hold sensitive posts beyond 3 years: Central Board of Customs and Excise

NEW DELHI: No officer should remain posted on sensitive posts for more than three years to ensure probity among the government servants, the Central Board of Customs and Excise (CBEC) has said. "... it is stated that postings and transfers of all officers/officials are required to be done as per the guidelines... and no one should continue to hold posts declared as sensitive for more than three years," CBEC said in a communication to top officials of the indirect tax division. It further asked the cadre controlling authorities to send a quarterly report confirming that all "transfers/postings have been done as per guidelines". The report for the October-December 2015 quarter has to be sent to the CBEC by Friday. The instruction has been issued as part of review of mechanisms to "ensure probity among government servants". The CBEC is responsible for collection of indirect taxes customs, central excise duty and service tax. In the Budget, the government had aimed to collect Rs 6.47 lakh crore from indirect taxes during the current fiscal.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

INDIAN EXPRESS, FEB 27, 2016

Economic Survey Sees no Pick-up in Growth, Pushes Reforms

NEW DELHI: India's Economic Survey sees the growth rate for the coming fiscal to remain at 7-7.75 percent due to domestic factors and warns that the upcoming budget will have to contend with an unusually challenging and weak external environment.

The survey, tabled in parliament by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley here on Friday, also expresses concern over pan-India GST being elusive, the divestment programme falling short of target and recast of the distortive subsidy regime, especially for fertilisers, being a work-in-progress.

This apart, the survey says, balance sheets of Indian banks remain stressed, becoming a roadblock to the revival of private investments, adding to the anxiety that the country's growth potential of 8-10 percent in the long term.

"This year's survey comes against the backdrop of an unusually volatile external environment with significant risks of weaker global activity and non-trivial risks of extreme events," says the survey, authored by Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian.

"Fortifying the Indian economy against possible spill-over is consequently one obvious necessity. Another necessity is recalibration of expectations," it says, and warns that if the world lurches into a crisis or slides further into weakness, India's growth, too, will be severely affected.

On the positive side, though, the survey says India will remain the fastest-growing large economy and a refuge of stability with an outpost of opportunity, even as steps taken toward a stable tax system, ease of doing business and foreign participation have gone down well globally.

It also projects the retail inflation to ease further to 4.5-5 percent in 2016-17.

Coming as it does on the eve of the national budget for the next fiscal, and given its import in providing the direction the country's economic policy should take in the coming year, the survey also spells out its policy prescriptions, both broad and specific.

Among them, it wants as good an exit policy for industry, notably start-ups, as entry norms as it will remove impediments to investments, job creation and growth. It also wants focus to return

towards agriculture and human needs like health and education to reap the demographic dividend.

"While dynamic sectors such as services such as services and manufacturing tend to grab public attention, India cannot afford to neglect its agriculture. After all, nearly 42 percent of Indian households derive bulk of their income from farming."

On fiscal deficit, it says the target of 3.9 percent of GDP, which Jaitley set for this fiscal, was achievable. But it also says the coming year will be a challenging one, calling for improving tax compliance, tapping new revenue sources, re-look expenditure and recast subsidies.

It wants the income tax net to widen from 5.5 percent of earning individuals to 20 percent.

Notwithstanding the volatility and turmoil, the survey says the Indian equity markets have been relatively resilient compared to peers in other major emerging market economies, and potentially sees the country as the leading investment destination due to its robust economic fundamentals.

The survey also feels there is lot to be done so that policy-making is quick with public servants being able to decide without fear or favour. As of now, it says, the legal provisions are seen as draconian, and anti-corruption laws scaring the honest without deterring the corrupt.

"There is a widely held perception both within the civil service and among outsiders who interact with government, that civil servants have in recent times become increasingly reluctant to decide issues quickly and firmly. This has consequences for the economy."

On social aspects, the survey makes some worrisome observations and calls for corrective action. It says India still has the second highest number of undernourished people, warranting immediate action. Over 42 percent of its pregnant women are underweight.

"Despite recent progress, India generally under-performs on maternal and child-health indicators, it says, adding: "India is already half-way through its demographic dividend and taking the full advantage requires a healthy and educated population."

Subramanian also outlines what has been the theme and focus of this year's survey, given that the Indian economy is "richly complicated". He says the focus is to outline policies that will enable Indians to lead a better, richer and healthier life. On the whole, he remains an optimist.

"In sum, for now, but not indefinitely, the sweet spot for India is still beckoningly there."

ECONOMIC TIMES, FEB 24, 2016

NITI Aayog maps skill requirements, training gaps

NEW DELHI: NITI Aayog is mapping India's requirement for skilled workers and gaps in training in the country in key sectors, beginning with infrastructure areas such as telecom, power and highways. The exercise, which is to be completed in a timebound manner, will help the government plan its initiatives better for reaching its target of skilling 400 million people by 2022. As per data from the 2011 census and 68th round of the National Sample Survey, an estimated 10.4 crore workers will enter the labour market and require skill training by 2022, while 29.8 crore of the existing workforce will require additional skill training during this period. Accordingly, the government has set a target to skill 40.2 crore workers by 2022 through a number of fresh initiatives such as National Skill Development & Entrepreneurship 2015 and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana. A senior government official told ET that discussions are on with respective sector skill councils to map the requirement of skilled workforce in these areas over the next seven years as well as identify new skills that will be required in the sectors. The mapping exercise of all key sectors is likely to be completed in the next six months, after which NITI Aayog will prepare sectorwise roadmap with targets to be achieved across sectors in the given time. Infrastructure creation is a big focus area for the NDA government and it requires a large amount of skilled workforce to complete these projects in a timebound manner. "We have started with telecom and energy, but going forward we will also cover the 22 sectors identified by the government under the Make in India initiative," the official said, requesting not to be named. The ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship is partnering the Aayog in this initiative, he said. The Union government had allocated about Rs 5,040 crore for skill development across ministries in the previous budget and the amount is likely to be raised in the budget for 2016-17 in view of the robust targets set under the programme. The skills ministry has already outlined some 6,700 qualifications and 1,500 job roles.

EDUCATION

ECONOMIC TIMES, FEB 28, 2016

After central universities, all Kendriya Vidyalayas to hoist the Tricolour daily

ALLAHABAD: The Centre has made it mandatory for the 1,100plus Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) across the country to fly the Tricolour on their premises. The move comes a week after HRD minister Smriti Irani's suggestion that the national flag fly at a prominent place on the campuses of central universities was passed by vicechancellors as a resolution. In a letter dated February 24, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), which comes under the HRD ministry, asked all the schools to make arrangements for hoisting the Tricolour daily, and lowering it before sunset. "The flag should be positioned at a prominent point of the school so that all students shall be able to salute it every day," says the letter, which has been signed by KVS additional commissioner (academics) U N Khaware. KVS has also asked the principals to ensure that there is strict compliance of the Flag Code of India, 2002, and Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971. Schools will have to comply with the instructions immediately, said D T S Rao, deputy commissioner of the KVS regional office at Varanasi. He added that the sight of a rippling flag would remind students of the difficulties faced by freedom fighters. Stay on top of business news with The Economic Ti

STATESMAN, FEB 25, 2016

Politicians, please spare students

Kuldip Nayar

Should students take part in politics was the question even before independence. This same debate raged when I was studying law at Lahore. We would skip classes on the call of Mahatma Gandhi or some other national leader to show solidarity with the independence struggle. The agitation was against the British rulers and it never struck us that we were missing studies.

Even when Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, raised the slogan for a separate homeland for the Muslim community, we, the students, resisted the pull of religion. True, the Hindus and Muslims had come to have separate kitchens, but we ate together and were getting food from both kitchens. The polarized atmosphere had little effect on us.

Today, the Akhil Bhartiya Vidhyarti Parishad (ABVP) is advocating soft version of Hindutva in universities across the country. The ABVP is the Muslim League of today. The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) may be an island in the midst of a Hindutva sea. Yet, all credit to the university and its students that it has, more or less, preserved the idea of India - democracy, pluralism and egalitarianism. Unfortunately, the struggle to sustain secularism still continues.

A few days ago, some Muslim fundamentalist students, not more than five or six, spoilt the liberal image of JNU and raised slogans seeking India's destruction. JNU's vice-chancellor, Dr. Jagdish Kumar, told me that their number was not more than a handful. But they had tarnished the image of the university.

The electronic media, in their attempts to improve TRP all the time, spread the impression that JNU was the epicenter of activities by fundamentalists and separatists. It was suspected that even the video clip which was run throughout the day by a television channel was doctored.

Take, for instance, Vishwa Deepak's claims of grave lapses in the channel's coverage of the JNU sedition case. The journalist who resigned from the channel wrote: "We journalists often question others but ourselves. We fix others' responsibilities but not ours. We are called as the fourth pillar of democracy but are we, our organizations, our thoughts and our actions really democratic? This is not just my question but everybody else's too."

To a large extent, I agree with Deepak. We journalists often tend to preach more than practise. In his protest letter to his employers Deepak, while apologizing for the use of such words to describe the situation, asks: "Along with Kanhaiya (Kumar), we made many students appear to be traitors and anti-nationals in the eyes of the people. If anyone is murdered tomorrow, who will take its responsibility? We have not merely created a situation for someone's murder or to destroy some families but we have created the conditions ripe for spreading riots and brought the country to the brink of a civil war. What sort of patriotism is this? After all, what sort of journalism is this?..."

Yet, I do not rule out the audacity of separatists to pay homage to Afzal Guru, who had plotted the attack on the Indian parliament. It is deplorable. But the question is should they be allowed to set an agenda for the nation when India's population has overwhelmingly come to cherish democracy and pluralism? The incident at the JNU should not be allowed to dilute the arduous work done to sustain pluralism when the country was divided on the basis of religion.

In fact, JNU is like Oxford in the United Kingdom or Harvard in America. There is a liberal atmosphere and even the odd voices against general thinking are taken in stride. No one questions the motive because the basics are never doubted.

When then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi established JNU, the purpose was to inspire students by her father's thoughts. A product of the independence struggle, Nehru was the nation's icon, not of the Congress Party which no doubt led the movement to wrest country from exploitative British rulers. The purpose of Indira Gandhi, his daughter, was undoubtedly to perpetuate his

name. But he was the real architect of Modern India and deserved to be remembered and followed.

Bangladesh does not have a similar institution. But Pakistan has Lamus at Lahore, similar to JNU and with a similar reputation. My personal experience testifies to this. An engineering girl student asked me at a lecture in the campus why partition took place when people on both the sides were similar, ate the same food and wore the same dress.

The student was unbiased and indicated that the atmosphere remained unpolluted. And that was some 40 years ago. Today, the religious parties have hijacked society to reap political gains. The most unfortunate part is that religion has made deep inroads into the universities.

The RSS, which seems to guide the Narendra Modi government from its headquarters at Nagpur, is appointing to key posts such persons who are avowed followers of Hindutva philosophy. Distinguished scholars, known for their secular ideas, have been crowded out because the RSS does not want the students to be inspired by their example of not mixing state with politics. If a democratic polity has to have any meaning, it must stay away from religious identities which are now being refurbished.

Unfortunately, other fields are getting affected. Take, for example, the incident at Patiala House Courts. A few lawyers, affiliated to the BJP, created a rumpus and beat up the student leader and journalists when Kanhaiya Kumar was to be produced in court. Kanhaiya's statement that he had nothing to do with the students who raised anti-India slogans did not make the attackers relent, some of whom were said to be outsiders, wearing lawyers' robes.

It's time that all political parties put their heads together to consider steps which would leave the students only pursuing their studies instead of wasting their time in parochial politics. The nation will suffer if the students, who are idealists at that age, are not allowed to throw up such thoughts which in the long run will help the country to cherish its ethos.

The writer is a noted journalist, columnist and commentator.

TELEGRAPH, FEB 26, 2016

Limits of freedom: - Autonomy for universities does not make them liberated zones

Swapan Dasgupta

Among the unintended consequences of the storm over the separatist slogans chanted in Jawaharlal Nehru University has been the reinforcement of stereotypes.

Earlier this week, to take a random but quite telling example, a Bharatiya Janata Party legislator from Rajasthan fulminated against the degenerate student culture of a university that is perceived

to be pampered and (by Indian standards) over-funded by the State. He revealed to stunned television audiences that the hostels were witness to spectacular bouts of debauchery, including nude parties and orgies involving men and women students. He declared that some 3,000 used condoms and many hundreds of liquor bottles were to be found in the piles of garbage collected from the campus each day.

Not surprisingly, the colourful outburst of the member of the legislative assembly invited a great deal of mirth. Social media was flooded with asides from 'liberals' both tickled and angry over this needless caricature of a lifestyle that, while undoubtedly carefree (as most student lifestyles undoubtedly are), is hardly calculated to push the bounds of bohemianism. Indeed, I would like to hazard the guess that the disproportionate influence of Left thinking among the more politicized sections of the JNU student body has actually prompted a measure of contrived austerity. I could, of course, be wrong and the austerity may well be limited to economies in the purchase of quality liquor and the exhibition of sartorial scruffiness - disabilities that, more often than not, are fast cured the moment a student steps into working life.

Whatever the reality, it is quite clear that the indignant MLA had only the haziest notion of campus life. But such misconceptions are neither rare nor confined to those who are card-carrying members of the saffron brotherhood. I recall the trepidation of my parents in the early-1970s when I chose to leave Calcutta after finishing school and secure admission in Delhi's St Stephen's College. They had heard colourful stories of the widespread drug culture in the Delhi University campus and how students from respectable families ended up as long-haired *chassis*. In the United Kingdom, readers of the *Daily Mail* - a publication I hugely admire for its uninhibited portrayal of moral rights and wrongs and its journalistic craftsmanship - still presents students as irresponsible, hard-drinking louts. And a large section of Middle England believes this portrayal of dissolute youth playing havoc with taxpayers' money.

Jawaharlal Nehru University, much more than other universities in India, has an image problem that is by no means confined to people who swear by the prime minister, Narendra Modi. First, it is perceived as a university where socially useful knowledge - such as disciplines that dominate the various Indian institutes of technology and the medical and engineering colleges - has been relegated to the background. The priority given to the arts (alas, now described as the social sciences) and the sheer longevity of student stays in the campus, has made it an object of suspicion in a society that values skills over pure knowledge. In the Indian tradition, there is a monastic rigour attached to the pursuit of knowledge. With its public face being presented by those who pursue studies in disciplines such as history, politics and even aesthetics, a perception has grown that JNU is an institution dedicated to the self-indulgence of a few. Ironically, the adherence to a so-called "scientific temper", paraded as a defining hallmark of modernity, has come to haunt JNU's emphasis on the liberal arts.

Secondly, the scholastic reputation of universities has invariably depended on the reputation of its faculty. It is interesting that the public image of JNU has been forged, not on account of the seminal contribution of its faculty to their disciplines, but on the uniqueness of its campus life in an Indian context. The various interventions made by the friends of JNU - usually alumni in the media - have invariably stressed the so-called openness of campus culture, the 'awareness' underpinning student activism and the social diversity of the student body. All these attributes

are important and, indeed, in most world class academic institutions are a given. However, as recent events quite vividly demonstrate, the glare on the political energy of its students has also served to highlight the relative silence on faculty contributions to particular academic disciplines. Indeed, it would seem that the alumni who have made a mark in their chosen fields have done so outside JNU. What Indira Gandhi envisaged as a "centre of excellence" when the university was established, hasn't entirely lived up to that promise - unless the success rate in civil services examinations is the yardstick. Unfortunately, it is also true that this particular shortcoming isn't confined to JNU alone; it extends to nearly all Indian universities.

Finally, there has been a lot of talk in recent days about the need to promote and defend the autonomy of universities. In so far as autonomy emphasizes the need to insulate higher education from an overdose of State interference and meddling politicians, it is welcome. Unfortunately, the notion of autonomy that is being projected in the past fortnight in JNU and, for that matter, Jadavpur University, seems rather limited in scope. In effect, it has come to imply the establishment of a self-regulated campus fortress. In Jadavpur, the faculty joined students in creating a human chain to keep out 'outsiders' chanting *Vande Mataram*. In JNU, following the dramatized arrest of the Students' Union president on a charge of 'sedition', staff and students are maintaining a vigil to prevent the police from entering the campus and apprehending other student leaders involved in the '*azadi*' kerfuffle. The implication of both these developments is that the normal law of the land does not (or should not) apply inside the campus. There have also been muted protests to the suggestion by the Central government that a large national flag should be permanently flown inside all Central universities. Whether in the matter of free speech or the definition of illegality, the underlying suggestion is that the campus is a sacred space that somehow falls outside State jurisdiction.

As a loose statement of belief that heavy-handed policing should be avoided and that universities should resolve disputes without outside involvement, the principle of autonomy is unexceptionable. The problem arises when the position is taken to absurd extremes and the campus is declared a *de facto* 'liberated zone' where consensual decencies can be disregarded. It is instructive to recall that in the 1970s, the hostels of Jadavpur became armed fortresses, with Naxalites calling the shots. It was also the campus where the vice-chancellor was hacked to death by students proclaiming "China's chairman is our Chairman".

Clearly no two situations are alike. But to prevent the law from taking its course because the campus community has prejudged otherwise, strike me as extending the notion of autonomy from the sublime to the ridiculous. There is a compelling case against policemen unable to appreciate the convergences and divergences of the far-Left *vis à vis* Kashmiri separatists. But one case of overkill cannot be countered by alternative grandstanding, as is happening in both Delhi and Calcutta.

Mocking the philistinism of the 'Right' makes good copy, especially when it is twinned with a larger battle to bring down a regime through a thousand cuts. But the liberal intelligentsia and its young fellow-travellers must seriously ask whether the populist distaste for spoilt brats is based entirely on 'false consciousness' or, worse, 'Hindu cretinism'.

STATESMAN, FEB 26, 2016

Crisis offers window of opportunity

Tuktuk Ghosh

Under the present dispensation, the government-supported higher education sector has continued to draw negative publicity towards itself and not without valid reason. It started with the contested suitability of the helmsperson of the administrative Ministry and hurtled through several controversies. Since 2014, much toxic stuff has floated down the Ganga and Yamuna.

The latest flashpoint, as is very well known by now, centres around a cultural programme themed “a country without a post-office” in JNU, the iconic central university on 9 February. The allegedly irresponsible and provocative sloganeering there has sparked a tumultuous chain of events, almost unstopably still unfolding, churning out complex challenges and ramifications that do not sit neatly within accepted frameworks.

One of the most mesmerising spin-offs is what can aptly be described as an intriguing definitional game. It has at its heart a highly charged, centuries-old intangible concept of nationalism. All that is called for, by way on an unstated rule to enable participation, is to swear by the Constitution of India and its framers. By the way, no polygraph tests are required beyond this simple oath. There is a tacit acknowledgement, too, though grudging, that winners may not be declared anytime soon. The sheer speed with which this game has hit the popularity charts and the immersive intensity of the players are truly fascinating. We just cannot appear to have enough of it. Taking the liberty of assuming a time-out in this game and a sneak peek at the trends, they are, quite simply, stunning. Shorn of seductive academic stardust and pugilistic hubris, nationalism can now be redefined as the most favoured catch-all concept, in ever-evolving mode, gracefully fluid, fetchingly imagined to be still at an ideational stage, allowing for multiple interrogations, including that of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India and its multi-layered legal and administrative architecture. And the best incubators and stomping grounds for this novel exercise are the public universities which must, therefore, remain free from the tainted law enforcement authorities and their heavy shackles. A re-engineered ecosystem, shot through with that elusive quality of autonomy, can then let its deepened understanding soar to great heights and effectively beat down monstrous forces, parading in the garb of various isms. Till such time there’s much darkness to battle in solidarity.

Alongside this, an ugly and highly disturbing facet has surfaced in the game. This shamelessly cheers vitriolic abuse and actively lusts for extreme violence at locations of choice - be they courts of law or public universities - against those who do not share the same ideological hue, in the firm belief that a rare immunity stands bestowed on them from those holding the levers of political power. It perversely manipulates and fabricates information and twists institutions without compunction, to enforce its brute will.

The only thing common between the two broadly discernable aggregations is that there are no non-negotiables in the redefinitions. This makes for a quirky and dismaying convergence. That the game is still in progress is, of course, immensely important as such a confusing, bewildering state of affairs does not augur well for the future.

This is the emerging backdrop in which to attempt to appreciate the celebrated MIT professor, linguist, philosopher and social commentator, Noam Chomsky's deep concern about what he perceives as the crisis in JNU. He attributes it squarely to the Government and the university administration. Those genuinely concerned about the future of Indian universities are urged to mobilise and protest in condemnation of the alleged culture of authoritarian menace that the Government has generated and the crass attempts to persecute with anachronistic provisions of sedition law in the Indian Penal Code those whose views do not conform to the narrow narratives of nationalism, nationhood and Indian culture promoted by it.

Chomsky's views may not receive immediate and all-round acceptance. What is important is that they are highly influential views, with far reaching resonance. If not for any other reason they should, therefore, be particularly important to the Government of the day, which promotes India as a knowledge superpower - never mind that it has no place at the high table of the world's most prestigious academic institutions-and sets great store by its showcasing acts, zealously profiling its efficient driving of the world's only economy in growth mode, far ahead of the sluggish greats of yesteryears.

The razzmatazz of the Make-in India event at Mumbai could not, unfortunately, have provided a more stark contrast to its egregious mishandling of the JNU problem. The disconnect is overwhelming.

Instead of undoing the damage, or steering the redefinitional game or detailing well thought through strategies, there are stentorian accusations from the highest levels of conspiracy to destabilise the Government by vested interests facing the heat of its pioneering and path-breaking reforms. On display is anguish at the laceration inflicted on Mother India. The utterly inadequate response also mandates hoisting of a humungous tricolour, pending receipt of the Enquiry Report from the University. One wonders if this is all a ploy go buy time or the old tale of Governmental floundering in choppy waters.

Disappointingly, we seem to be stuck in a cul-de-sac. However, the energy that has been built up has to be maintained and channelized to achieve a balanced public narrative to effect much needed policy interventions. This should not go down the path of the intolerance debate of 2015.

The most positive and enduring intervention of the Government could be in the form of a special package for the stressed higher education sector, encapsulating excellence with equity. Incidentally, these are inscribed in its formally declared Citizens' Charter for clients and stakeholders. The maladies of institutional assault, decay and decrepitude need to be surgically excised. Laying down enhanced standards of educational governance and ensuring their strict compliance are urgently called for. They will work if Government establishes that it means business. A purposeful, professional relationship between the educational administrators and the Government, anchored in mutual respect, which is singularly lacking, needs to be put in place. Endless pummelling alternating with supreme indifference to deep-rooted pain points that institutions are subjected to have to stop. Those in Government, holding funding and oversight responsibilities, cannot remain supremely inaccessible and convey the unsavoury message of playing favourites with obsequious non-performers.

In the ongoing Budget session of Parliament, this has been flagged as a priority issue. Because of the din and noise, it was anyway unavoidable. Its articulation and handling will, however, have to be observed closely. Possibilities of its getting ensnared in the maze of the redefinitional game are very high. The political stakes are enormous.

But if the crisis is taken as a window of opportunity to revitalise our institutions of higher education, the Government would have found its place in history. Let's root for illumination in discourse and envisioning for the future.

The writer is a retired IAS officer and comments on governance issues.

ELECTIONS

STATESMAN, FEB 26, 2016

LS passes bill to give votes to Cooch Behar residents

The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed a bill to enable grant of voting rights to people in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal who became citizens of the country following the exchange of enclaves between India and Bangladesh.

The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2016 was passed by the house after a reply by Law Minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda.

The bill seeks to amend the Delimitation Act, 2002 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950 to empower the Election Commission to undertake limited delimitation in areas amalgamated in the Cooch Behar.

The enactment of the Constitution (One Hundredth Amendment) Act 2015 resulted in exchange of 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in Indian territory and 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladeshi territory with effect from July 31, 2015.

The bill's statement of objects and reasons says that persons who have opted to acquire or to retain Indian citizenship are required to be given voting rights in India.

The term of West Bengal assembly will come to end in May this year.

EMPLOYMENT

STATESMAN, FEB 25, 2016

Budget and jobs

Bharat Jhunjhunwala

It is heartening that the Government is planning to provide incentives to business enterprises in an effort to generate employment. The incentives may include a rebate in income tax or Provident Fund contributions. The Government also hopes that its flagship “Make in India” programme will lead to the creation of jobs. While the intent cannot be faulted, success will require a change in the underlying economic policies. If a malnourished person consumes ghee, it could harm his health. The same ghee is ambrosia to a healthy athlete. Similarly, the health of the economy needs to be set in order if these well-intentioned policies are to attain fruition.

The basic problem is that “development” and unemployment are two sides of the same coin. Development can lead to unemployment, not employment. “Development” means creation of wealth which, in turn, means plentiful availability of capital. Business enterprises can borrow at zero rates of interest in developed countries like Japan and the United States. “Development” also means higher wages. Workers in developed countries earn about Rs 6,000 per day. Business find it cheaper to use robots than human beings to manufacture goods. Some new factories do not employ even a single worker in the line of production. As a result, the number of jobs is being curtailed while production is increasing. Therefore, unemployment is a natural consequence of development.

We should not confuse this job-eating nature of development with the creation of jobs in the United States. On the whole, the job situation in developed countries is dismal. Nearly one half of the youth in Spain are unemployed. Thus the developed countries are in the grip of the development-and-unemployment syndrome although selected countries like the US, Britain and Germany are bucking this overall trend. Unemployment spreads from the outlying areas to the centre just as the Islamic State attacks the fringe areas before targeting cities like Baghdad.

“Make in India” will not create jobs if development and unemployment go together. The manufacturing sector has created few jobs in the recent past. Employment grew at the rate of about 1.5 per cent per year in the private manufacturing and construction sectors between 2006 and 2012. The growth rate of GDP in this period was about 8.5 per cent. The GDP growth rate is far higher than the employment growth rate, the reason being that manufacturing is being undertaken increasingly by machines. Thus more “Make in India” means greater use of robots and less generation of jobs.

According to the grapevine, the Government proposes to provide a 30 per cent rebate in income tax to industries adding more than two per cent jobs. This will lead to huge manipulation in job data. An industry employing 1000 workers and paying Rs 20 crore as income tax will find it hugely profitable to show employment of 20 additional persons and claim a huge rebate in income tax. Sons, daughters and cousins will be “employed” in the books of the company to fulfil the requirement on paper. The Government must cross-subsidize employment generation instead of providing such unworkable incentives. The way forward is to rank all industries in the country on a value-added to labour ratio, that is, number of jobs created per Rs one crore of value-addition. The industries can be divided into three groups - capital intensive, medium, and labour intensive. A surcharge on excise duty can be imposed on capital intensive industries and a parallel discount can be provided to labour intensive units. This will lead to growth in labour intensive industries and create real employment. The tendency to use robots will be curbed through such cross-subsidization.

The Government proposes to provide incentives to Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs). Indeed most jobs are being created by this sector. However, these industries are under severe pressure from large units. The local bread- and-biscuit manufacturing industries have downed their shutters in the face of competition from big companies. My ophthalmologist tells me that all small units that manufacture eye-glass frames have folded up. This is because big companies use automatic machines and provide cheaper frames. The Make in India programme proposes to take this policy forward. It will kill jobs because big companies will manufacture goods with automatic machines and MSMEs will perish. It is necessary to impose high levels of excise duty on large industries that kill the MSME sector. This, however, will require us to simultaneously impose high levels of import duty on imported goods manufactured with machines. That, in turn, may require us to walk out of the WTO. There will be no employment generation in industries - big or small - without such strong measures.

The Government hopes that its efforts to impart skills to the workers will lead to greater employability and create jobs. Indeed, imparting of skills will reduce the cost of skilled workers in the market. However, the impact on employment may be negative. A skilled JCB operator may be available at Rs 8,000 per month instead of the present Rs 12,000. The number of JCBs in operation might increase. More JCBs will mean fewer jobs for manual labour such as digging. The increase in the number of JCB operators will be a fraction of the jobs lost in digging. The overall impact will be negative. It is necessary to distinguish between job-eating skills like JCB operators and job-creating skills like the handloom factory. Once again, this requires a distinction in the economic construct - between the “labour intensive” and “capital intensive” sectors. Imparting of skills in the labour intensive sector alone will help in employment generation.

Industry in general has been clamouring for labour reforms. The difficulty is that reforming labour laws will enable businessmen to reduce the size of their workforce. The way out is to exempt only those industries from labour laws that generate large-scale employment. Industries will try to employ more workers so that they can get themselves exempted from labour laws.

The Government has already completed one-third of its tenure. The budget provides an opportunity to change the direction of the economy. The Finance Minister must divide the economy into “labour intensive” and “capital intensive” sectors. Lower rates of taxes, imparting of skills and exemption from labour laws must be provided only to the “labour intensive” sector. Conversely, higher rates of taxes must be imposed on the “capital intensive” sector and also on the import of goods manufactured with machines. Such a strategy alone will lead to large-scale creation of jobs.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

DECCAN HERALD, FEB 29, 2016

Govt sets up Bank Board Bureau

Under fire for soaring bad loans of banks, the government announced setting up of a Bank Board Bureau just a day ahead of Budget, thus fulfilling last year's commitment.

Former CAG Vinod Rai will be its new chairman. Anil Khandelwal, former chief of the public sector Bank of Baroda, H N Sinor, ICICI Bank's former joint managing director and Rupa Kidwa, former chief of CRISIL, will be members.

Besides recommending appointment of directors in public sector bank, the board will advise on ways of raising funds and dealing with stressed assets of public sector banks. It will act as a link between the government and banks and strive to limit political interference in the day-to-day functioning of the lenders.

"As a first step towards a bank holding company that will hold all government investments in public sector banks, we had proposed a Bank Board Bureau and its structure will be announced," Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had said late last year after the Cabinet cleared the BBB.

Banks require Rs1,80,000 crore in the next four years to meet their capital requirements. The government will provide Rs 70,000 crore to them, the balance they are expected to raise from the market.

The bank bureau is also expected to help lenders raise capital from the market. Rai, who was recently named as a recipient of Padma Bhushan award was the CAG from 2008-2013, during which he exposed the 2G and coal sector scams.

HUMAN RIGHTS

DECCAN HERALD, FEB 24, 2016

Ex-CJI Justice Dattu is NHRC chairman

Former Chief Justice of India H L Dattu has been appointed Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The decision came a little over two months after Dattu's retirement on December 2 last year and nine months after former NHRC chief Justice K G Balakrishnan retired on May 11, 2015. Justice Cyriac Joseph has been the acting chairperson during the interim period.

The committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi cleared the name of Dattu. The meeting was attended by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad and Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha P J Kurien.

Leader of Congress party in Lok Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge did not attend the meeting. The panel's decision will now be sent to President Pranab Mukherjee for his assent. Dattu will have a tenure of five years.

Justice Dattu, who joined the Supreme Court on December, 17, 2008, presided over the bench hearing the 2G case, black money case and Gujarat riot cases among others. Born on December 13, 1950, he started his practice as an advocate at the age of 25 in Bengaluru. He handled matters relating to civil, criminal, tax and Constitutional issues.

He worked as government pleader for sales tax department from 1983, besides appearing in various capacities before the Karnataka High Court. He acted as senior standing counsel for I-T department between 1993 to 1995.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TELEGRAPH, FEB 25, 2016

Panchsheel and realpolitik: - 'Principles' are tools of foreign policy, not constraints

Chandrashekhar Dasgupta

This may come as a surprise to many Indians but Panchsheel, or the Five Principles, was authored by Zhou Enlai, not Jawaharlal Nehru. The Chinese premier proposed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence for the first time when he received the Indian delegation for the talks on the Tibet agreement on December 31, 1953.

The Chinese premier was not pursuing an abstract philosophical goal. He forged the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as an instrument to advance specific political objectives. Towards the end of 1953, the Korean war was drawing to a close and global attention was shifting to the struggle in Indochina. The United States of America was taking the initial steps to build an Asian alliance to 'contain' communist China. Beijing's role in Korea and the vivid display of its military power had given rise to serious concern in many Asian countries. In this situation, Beijing required a major image makeover to assuage the apprehensions of its neighbours and to play upon the differences between the US and its European allies - the United Kingdom and France. Declassified Chinese documents reveal that in a meeting with senior Chinese diplomats on June 5, 1953, the Chinese premier, Zhou, explained that the aim of the new strategy was to weaken the ties between the US and the two 'intermediate zones' comprising western Europe and the third world countries, respectively. The strategy was immediately relevant in the context of a peace agreement in Indochina and US moves to build up new military alliances in Asia.

During the Tibet negotiations, both India and China recognized the significance of the Five Principles in the bilateral context as well as the wider context of the Cold War. For China, the latter was more important; India, with the border issue in mind, laid emphasis on the bilateral dimension. Thus, while India wanted the Five Principles to be included as an operative article of the Tibet agreement, China pressed for embodying it in a separate press communiqué. The two sides finally reached a compromise and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were incorporated in the Tibet agreement in the form of a declaratory statement in the preamble (as distinct from an operative article).

Zhou Enlai lost no time in pursuing his new strategy in the Geneva conference on Indochina. His aim was to obtain a cessation of hostilities in Vietnam, and the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia in order to prevent the US from establishing military bases on China's south-east Asian periphery. After the famous Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu, France was increasingly reluctant to continue the colonial war in spite of US efforts at persuasion. The conference resulted in the Geneva Accords, providing for a cessation of hostilities, the temporary division of Vietnam, and a neutral status for Laos and Cambodia. The signatories to the accords were the Soviet Union, China, France and the UK; the US merely "took note" of the agreements but declined to sign. Mao Zedong explained the Chinese negotiating posture to the politburo as follows: "In Geneva, we have adhered to the slogan of peace, thereby portraying an image of

being for peace; whereas the US refuses to adhere to such a slogan and thus forges an image of being for belligerency which makes no sense..."

What did India expect to gain from Panchsheel? Jawaharlal Nehru hoped that Panchsheel would, *to some extent*, restrain China from launching aggressive actions along the frontier. As he explained in the Lok Sabha: "...in the final analysis, no country can trust another country...therefore it is a question of our following a policy which... makes it more and more difficult progressively for the other country to break the trust. We need not live in a fairy world where nothing wrong happens ... but we can create an environment where it becomes more dangerous for the other party to break away from the pledges given". This is hardly the gullible Nehru caricatured by his critics.

India's advocacy of Panchsheel had a second dimension. In early 1953, Washington announced that it would offer military aid to Pakistan and promote new defence pacts in Asia. The induction of Pakistan into the US military alliance system brought the Cold War to India's doorstep.

The change in US defence policy created a significant degree of convergence in Indian and Chinese interests in south-east Asia. Both favoured neutralization of Laos and Cambodia and saw Panchsheel as an instrument for consolidating the non-aligned 'zone of peace' in Asia. Thus the joint statement issued after Zhou Enlai's visit to India in 1954 declared that Panchsheel will "help in creating an area of peace which, as circumstances permit, can be enlarged".

Nehru was also concerned that even non-aligned stalwarts like Burma (now Myanmar) and Indonesia might weaken in their commitment due to misgivings about China's intentions. He therefore urged Zhou Enlai to assuage these concerns. On his urging, U Nu agreed to issue a joint statement with Zhou affirming that Panchsheel should also guide Sino-Burmese relations.

Panchsheel reached its zenith in the mid-1950s. By the end of the decade, India-China ties were seriously damaged on account of border clashes and unfounded Chinese suspicions of Indian involvement in the Tibet uprising. Panchsheel was dropped from the India-China lexicon. It reappeared only after the thaw achieved during Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988. Today, its periodic reiteration evokes neither the high expectations nor the passionate opposition of yesteryear.

The alienation of India impaired the efficacy of Panchsheel as a tool of China's Asian policy. However, Beijing displayed remarkable resourcefulness in evoking the Five Principles in very different contexts. In the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese foreign policy underwent more than one dramatic shift. The Sino-Soviet split was followed in course of time by a rapprochement with the US. Each shift occasioned an invocation of the Five Principles.

At the height of the Sino-Soviet split, in the wake of armed border clashes on the Ussuri river, Zhou Enlai proposed to Alexei Kosygin that bilateral relations might be stabilized on the basis of the Five Principles. Not surprisingly, given China's unpredictable behaviour during the Cultural Revolution, the proposal failed to elicit a positive response.

Zhou Enlai fashioned the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in 1953 as an instrument to

counter US policies in Asia. China had little interest in applying the principles to its relations with Washington. Indeed, at the end of the decade, it actively opposed Moscow's position on peaceful coexistence between the rival blocs, issuing strident calls for world revolution. In a dramatic turnaround, China and the US agreed to normalize their relations in 1972. The decision was set out in the Shanghai Communiqué, which included a paragraph reciting the Five Principles, with a mutual pledge to apply these to Sino-US relations.

Thus, within a space of two decades, the Five Principles completed a full circle. Originally conceived as an instrument for opposing the US, it was re-invented as the foundation stone of Sino-US relations.

China's supple diplomacy illustrates the fact that principles may be immutable, but not their interpretation. States typically reinterpret principles to suit shifts in foreign policy. Public opinion in a democracy needs to be educated to distinguish between *dharma*, the ethical code that should guide our personal actions, and *rajdharmā*, the compulsions of national interest that must shape the actions of States.

The author is a former ambassador

JUDICIARY

HINDU, FEB 29, 2016

Reworking the Supreme Court's role

By admitting a Special Leave Petition that seeks the setting up of a 'National Court of Appeal' to hear routine appeals in civil and criminal matters from the High Courts, the Supreme Court has signalled its willingness to grapple with a question that has been raised unsuccessfully in the past. The question is whether the apex court should be burdened with the responsibility of examining the correctness of every case decided by the High Courts, and whether it should not be allowed to devote its time entirely to settling questions of constitutional importance. The underlying issues may include the accumulating backlog of cases in the Supreme Court, and the need to separate pending cases into those that touch upon constitutional questions and other routine matters. Constitutional questions may refer to the validity of a statute or a rule, or to issues that require interpretation of the Constitution. A third concern relates the oft-cited difficulties of litigants from different parts of the country for whom New Delhi may be too far. The solutions put forward include dividing the Supreme Court into a 'Constitutional Division' and a 'Legal Division'; having the principal Constitution Bench in Delhi and creating four regional Benches to hear appeals on High Court orders; and, third, creating a National Court of Appeal that will have four 'Cassation Benches' for the adjudication of non-constitutional matters.

According to the Union Law Ministry, which recently rejected a lawyer's demand for a National Court of Appeal, successive Chief Justices of India have been against the establishment of Benches outside Delhi. Further, it has obtained legal opinion that a Constitution amendment to revisit the Supreme Court's role would be impermissible as it would change the court's character under the Constitution. The opinion appears to disfavour a suggestion by the Law Commission in its 229th Report (2009) that if necessary Article 130 ("The Supreme Court shall sit in Delhi or in such other place or places, as the Chief Justice of India may, with the approval of the President, from time to time, appoint") may be amended to implement its suggestion that Cassation Benches may be set up in four regions, while the Constitution Bench sits in Delhi. Courts of Cassation are courts of last resort to reverse decisions of lower courts. A key issue to be settled is whether it will be advisable for the highest court to share with a possibly inferior court of appeal its power under Article 136 to grant special leave to appeal on High Court orders. Also, in recent times the Supreme Court has been conscious of its role as the interpreter of the Constitution, and holds a sitting of a Constitution Bench virtually every day. Even within the present structure, regional Benches may help address the problem of access to justice but not that of accumulation of cases. The idea of a National Court of Appeal requires consideration, but in a manner that would not undermine the undoubted authority of the Supreme Court of India.

LABOUR

ECONOMIC TIMES, FEB 28, 2015

Pay interest on retained PF or give entire amount:

NEW DELHI: Trade Unions including RSSbacked Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) have demanded that retirement fund body EPFO shall either allow unemployed subscribers to withdraw their entire PF or give interest on retained amount.

"We will demand from Labour Minister that either EPFO pays entire amount in PF account or pay interest on the retained amount to unemployed subscribers opting for withdrawal as per new norms," Indian National Trade Union Congress VicePresident and an EPFO trustee Ashok Singh told PTI.

Earlier this month, Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) tightened the norms for withdrawals of PF accumulations for its over five crore subscribers.

Now the subscribers can withdraw only 90 per cent of their own contributions to PF account and interest earned on that after pleading over two months of unemployment.

Earlier they were allowed to withdraw entire PF accumulations after showing two months of unemployment.

Under the new norms two months unemployment condition shall not apply in cases of women subscribers resigning for getting married or on account of pregnancy or child birth.

BMS General Secretary Virjesh Upadhyay said, "The EPFO must give interest on the retained amount in case unemployed subscribers opts for withdrawal. They should not make the account inoperative."

The new norms are silent on crediting interest to such accounts where subscribers opts for withdrawal due to unemployment and does not contribute to his account for a period of more than three years.

A PF account becomes inoperative after no contribution is made for continuous 36 months period. This provision was made in the scheme to avoid parking of funds with EPFO.

Under the new norms there could be a situation where subscribers opt for withdrawals of his PF accumulation pleading unemployment and does not get a job even after three years. In those cases the account will become inoperative and no interest will be credited.

The new norms also provides that subscribers will not be able to claim withdrawal of PF after attaining 54 years of age. They would have to wait till attaining the age 57 years.

As per the earlier norms, subscribers were allowed to claim 90 per cent of their accumulations in their PF account at the age of 54 years and their claims were settled just one year before their

retirement.

The earlier clause was relevant because there were establishments where retirement age was 55 years or 56 years. But this will create a problem in private as well as public sector where people opt for voluntary retirement.

The big change is that now under this facility, the subscriber would be able to withdraw his contribution and interest earned on it unlike 90 per cent of the total accumulations earlier.

In another change, EPFO has made it mandatory to wait till attaining the age of 57 for claiming PF withdrawal for transferring that to the Life Insurance Corporation of India for investment in Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana.

Earlier norms used to allow subscribers to claim 90 per cent of their accumulations for investing in the scheme after attaining the age of 55 years.

NATIONAL FLAG

INDIAN EXPRESS, FEB 24, 2016

VARANASI Sanjay Singh among several AAP leaders booked for insulting national flag

FIR lodged on BJP complaint, AAP denies charge, says have video proof.

Written by [Lalmani Verma](#)

The Varanasi police Tuesday lodged an FIR against Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including its national spokesperson Sanjay Singh, for dishonoring the national flag outside the party office in Nevada area during Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's visit on Monday. The charge has been denied by AAP.

AAP's Purvanchal zone convener Sanjeev Singh and other leaders including Chhotu Kanaujia, Sandeep Singh, Shyam Babu Kanaujiya and over a dozen unidentified workers have been booked in the FIR under Prevention of Insult to National Honour Act along with IPC sections of 147 (rioting) and 323 (voluntarily causing hurt).

The FIR has been lodged at Lanka police station on the complaint of [BJP](#) mandal president Deepak Rai, Station Officer Sanjeev Mishra confirmed.

Mishra said that another FIR has been lodged against BJP leader Vineet Singh and four others under IPC sections of 147 (rioting), 336 (endangering life or personal safety of others) and 352 (assault), on the complaint of an AAP leader.

Kejriwal was then on way to seer Govardhanpur to offer prayers at Ravidas temple on Ravidas Jayanti. AAP leaders had also alleged in the complaint that BJP workers had assaulted AAP workers.

A clash had taken place between BJP and AAP workers outside AAP's district office on Monday at a time when Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) was attending the convocation ceremony at BHU after offering prayers at Ravidas temple.

“AAP workers were walking on the national flag that they had thrown on the road near their party office. When some BJP workers, who were passing by, tried to take pictures using mobile phones, hundreds of AAP workers attacked them at the behest of Sanjay Singh and Sanjeev Singh,” BJP said in a press statement.

AAP’s Varanasi Mahanagar convener Rakesh Pandey said that BJP has made a false allegation. “We have the footage, which shows that national flag was lying on the ground but AAP workers were far from it,” Pandey said.

POLICE

DECCAN HERALD, FEB 24, 2016

5.42 lakh vacancies in police forces, says study

Shemin Joy

The number of policemen in service across the country has decreased by 1,685 in 2015 compared to the previous year even as 24 per cent of the posts remained vacant, a latest government report showed.

This has left the police forces in a situation where they have only 139 personnel for a lakh population, when the standard set by United Nations is way above at 220 police per lakh population. The figure for the United States is 256 while that of United Kingdom is 307 and Pakistan 207.

The latest “Data on Police Organisation” showed that there are 5.42 lakh vacancies as on January 1, 2015 in police forces across the country at a time there were 22.63 lakh sanctioned positions. States could fill only 17.21 lakh personnel while it had 17.22 lakh strength as on January 1, 2014.

The report prepared by the Bureau of Police Research and Development showed that Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of vacancies at 1.99 lakh followed by West Bengal with 45,430 posts where there are no personnel. Karnataka also finds itself in the top-five list with 33,307 vacancies while Bihar has 41,696 and Gujarat 26,110. The vacancies are adding to the burden of police forces in the country as personnel are forced to work without a break and affecting the efficiency in policing. A government-sponsored study had last year said that 75 per cent of police personnel claim they rarely manage to get a weekly off while Inspectors acknowledge that their subordinates work more than 11 hours a day.

Among the vacancies, the highest are among lower levels. There are 3.61 lakh vacancies in the post of Constables while it is a little over one lakh in Head Constable rank. There are 24,710 posts vacant in the rank of Assistant Sub Inspector, 47,271 in Sub Inspector and 5,527 among Inspectors.

In the state intelligence apparatus, there are 11,102 vacancies while the sanctioned strength is 39,375. Ninety per cent of these vacancies are in the lower ranks between Constables and Inspectors.

There are 3,578 vacancies in Constable rank in intelligence apparatus in the state police forces, 1,950 in Head Constable, 1,121 Assistant Sub Inspectors, 3,491 Sub Inspectors and 643 Inspectors.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

PIONEER, FEB 26, 2016

UNSTOPPABLE OR WANING?

Manan Dwivedi

Donald Trump is the new star on the American horizon. He wishes to be, brazenly so, the President. So what!

Donald Trump has emerged as a novae, effective and all-rampant voice on the American political and electoral firmament. His numerous book titles make for an interesting series of nomenclature, such as *Trump: Surviving at the Top*; *Trump: How to get rich*, which objectifies one aspect of the American Dream, and finally a corrective for the nation in *Trump, The America We deserve*. 2016 can be conveniently earmarked as the withdrawal year of the American Overarch, wherein, the American establishment chose to mend fences with the Arab world and take imminent steps to solve the Syrian imbroglio. Stefan De Misruta emerged as a sane voice in West Asia where Russia and Iran pitted against Saudi Arabia and its allies in order to stifle the opposition forces espoused by the opposition to Bashar al-Assad, which is the Syrian National Coalition.

In such a down phase, devoid of the American hyper-puissance in the global polity and various regional theatres, the Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump etches out a new trajectory and a new 'red line', re-defining the domestic churning and the narrative in United States. Though he does not negate the 'Old Reagan' line as espoused by other Republican candidates such as Mr Ted Cruz, but, the year-old showcasing of an intently aggressive and assertive-campaign-run till the Primaries in South Carolina, have cemented his perch as a prominent presidential candidate. He might be placed to confront the 'statist' candidature of Democrat hopeful, Ms Hillary Rodham Clinton, despite the bumptiousness associated with him. Ms Clinton too has made a return to winning ways in the Nevada Caucuses after her crushing defeat in the New Hampshire Primary where myriad polls prognosticated about her concession speech, too soon akin to the one delivered by Republican candidate Ted Cruz after his defeat in the South Carolina Primary and as a consequence of his string of losses.

According to a *New York Times* report, "Ms Clinton devoted her campaign to 'hotel and casino workers who never wavered' and 'the thousands of men and women with kids to raise, bills to pay and dreams that won't die'. She used plural pronouns like 'we' and 'us' more than usual, as opposed to leaning on 'I', a clear attempt to make her campaign about voters as Mr Sanders has done powerfully, thus, making her intent clear to meet the chosen Republican candidate."

Mr Trump is everybody's Putin, who, too has succeeded in being the power Czar in Moscow with his Boxing days strength. In a characteristically charged report in *CNN*, the Republican trumpeted that he would punch one of the haranguing protests during one his meetings. At a Las Vegas rally recently, a protester raised a dissenting voice, "Veterans to Trump: End hate speech against Muslims". Despite the remarks about women and on the immigrants along with the rabidity of his personal vituperations, Mr Trump might be the person to look out for in the savage electoral trail of 2016. He also is not well informed about the 'rising stature' of the Indian juggernaut, as it became evident in the Davos round of talks earlier on. Still, he expressed his Asiatic concern referring to that fact that "India is doing great and nobody is talking about it". It's that maverick-like streak and brashness coincidental with an American cowboy which makes him into a difficult pushover. The US is a nation recently recovering from the economic downturn and question marks are being increasingly raised on America's West Asia policy. It is here that Mr Trump might emerge as a personage who might yet fill the void.

An article in *Huffington Post* says, "In 1997, Haley had been arrested for stealing a calculator from a Wal-Mart in Texas. Under the law, Haley should have been sentenced to no more than two years in prison, even with prior convictions. However, another statute reserved for habitual offenders was mistakenly applied to his case, resulting in a sentence of sixteen years. Then, Ted Cruz's advice was sought as the Solicitor General of Texas few years back. This might be a flash in the pan but Trump supporters have made a lot of light out of this act of 'cruelty and want of humanity.'"

Though, Mr Cruz won the Iowa Caucuses narrowly, he has been trending second to Mr Trump on most of the occasions, according to US media reports. The latter leads in the context of 'expectations' and is a true blue conservative apart from Ted Cruz, despite Mr Trump's recently aired difference with the Pope on the issue of building walls between Mexico and the United States. An *ABC/Washington Post* poll reported that 42 per cent citizens expect Mr Trump to win the Republican nomination and 43 per cent respondents gave the best chance to win the presidency to him, followed by the neurosurgeon Ben Carson, Mr Jeb Bush, Mr Marco Rubio, Mr Cruz and Ms Carly Fiorina. According to the same poll, "Trump also continues to garner greater support among less educated potential voters — 46 per cent among those who haven't gone beyond high school, vs 23 per cent among those who've attended college."

The question is: Is Mr Donald Trump unstoppable? The direct fallout of the South Carolina result is that all the candidates are under pressure to demonstrate 'strength and chutzpah'. This Gotham City corporate appeal of a mature candidate like Mr Trump is all-pervasive with a bright sparkle of a tuxedo and a silk tie, with him being the founder of the conglomerate of Trump Entertainment Resorts. His net worth is four billion dollars, in the estimates of *Forbes* magazine. Thus, it is the satin sheen and brash bravado of his candidature which can make him pip others to the post. The question again is: Has, his 'other' side already done lasting damage to his long-term electoral fortunes?

(The writer teaches at Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi)

STATESMAN, FEB 25, 2016

Citizens all

The anxiety to reap the demographic dividend cuts across party lines. Exactly a decade after the Congress-led UPA dispensation distributed identity cards to both the fake and genuine citizens in the states bordering Bangladesh, the West Bengal government is overly anxious to reinforce the hospitality that has been extended to immigrants since the late 1970s. In the net, the Trinamul dispensation is set to finetune the praxis of the CPI-M in doling out ration cards and voter I-cards to those who had crossed over in course of the “quiet influx”. It was a certain Left Front minister who had organised the “state guest” initiative; this time, the proposal has been readily endorsed by the cabinet. If the Chief Minister’s announcement is any indication, the state will urge the Centre to grant citizenship to all Bangladeshis who have been residents of West Bengal for “five years”. The number is as indeterminate as it is huge, covering as it does a generation of settlers. The only certainty is that the initiative is bound to have an impact on several districts during the Assembly elections. Most particularly in a state where the Muslim vote is known to have influenced the outcome. Beyond the electoral factor, the proposal will almost certainly institutionalise illegal immigration. It is one thing to grant citizenship to those who have recently crossed over to the Indian enclaves in terms of the Land Boundary Agreement; they do deserve to be rehabilitated with other facilities as well regardless of whether the state is going to the polls. Such exchange of population, specifically in Cooch Behar district, lends no scope for a general extension of citizenship rights under a one size-fits all formula. A clear-cut distinction between the new residents of enclaves and illegal migrants is imperative.

Also questionable is the method that will be adopted; it flies in the face of the fundamental certitude that citizenship or asylum has to be granted by the central government. West Bengal would rather that District Magistrates be allowed by the Centre to issue citizenship certificates. This has already caused a flutter in the diplomatic roost; questions have been raised over how DMs can issue certificates to the Bangladeshi settlers. Admittedly, the DMs had the power to issue “refugee certificates” in the immediate aftermath of the 1971 liberation. Thirty years after this power was withdrawn by the Home ministry in 1985, there is no call for it to be revived. Furthermore, a certificate granting “refugee status” ought not to be confused with a citizenship document. The matter calls for serious reflection not least because of the very real danger of cross-border terrorism. The political and/or electoral underpinning cannot decide all and everything.

ECONOMIC TIMES, FEB 24, 2016

Demand for Union Territory status: Cooch Behar 'rail roko' enters fourth day

COOCH BEHAR: The 'rail roko' agitation led by Greater Cooch Behar People's Association (GCPA) demanding Union Territory status or C category statehood for Cooch Behar entered the fourth day today, as rail traffic to from the northeastern region continued to be disrupted. GCPA held a meeting with Cooch Behar District Magistrate P Ulaganathan last night but no breakthrough was achieved. GCPA chief Bangshi Badan Barman said they were not satisfied with the meeting with the DM and would not lift the blockade till a Home Ministry representative arrives here for talks. Barman said they would hold a central committee meeting of the GCPA later in the day. The agitation began at 6 AM on Saturday when the activists squatted on tracks near New Cooch Behar station on Cooch BeharNew Jalpaiguri section, affecting railway link to the northeast region. All trains from the region except the Dibrugarh GuwahatiNew Delhi Rajdhani Express were cancelled today, a spokesman of the North Eastern Frontier Railway said in Guwahati. The Rajdhani Express is being diverted via SiliguriNew Jalpaiguri section, the spokesman said. Besides inconveniencing thousands of commuters, the agitation has so far claimed one life. A 29yearold man had died on Sunday after falling ill in the Kanchenjunga Express which was stranded for several hours in Cooch Behar due to the stir. Meanwhile, the NF Railway spokesman said the blockade sponsored by Adivasi National Convention Committee at Kokrajhar railway station in Assam was called off yesterday afternoon. They were demanding ST status for Adivasis of Assam. Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu had on Sunday appealed to the protesters in Cooch Behar and Haryana not to block railway lines or harm railway properties as it caused inconvenience to the common man.

PRESIDENTS

TRIBUNE, FEB 24, 2016

The President's priorities: An Address (and a budget?) for rural India

Going by the President's customary Address to Parliament on Tuesday, the Union Budget for 2016-17 may have a rural bias. The BJP has paid a price in Bihar for the neglect of the countryside. The Jat unrest turning violent in Haryana, continuing farmer suicides pointing to agrarian distress, two consecutive years of deficient monsoon rains, low farm commodity prices and the coming state elections will drive a largely urban-focused BJP to pay attention to rural India where 70 per cent of the country's 130 crore people reside.

The President devoted a considerable part of his one-hour speech to efforts towards poverty eradication, revival of the farm sector, creation of infrastructure in the rural areas, housing for all and job growth. An initiative that could change the way farm products are marketed related to the setting up of an e-market platform. The Modi government is likely to spend more on building rural infrastructure. Given the state of rural unemployment, the job guarantee scheme, once dismissed as a "monument" of the UPA's failures, is back in favour. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has hinted at putting more money into it and taking up "more productive projects". That makes good political sense too. The BJP leaders' rural concerns are understandable. Nine states will have assembly elections in the coming fiscal year. These will have a bearing on the Modi government's economic agenda.

Since the Opposition seems determined not to let go the recent incidents — the killings and arson in Haryana during the Jat protests, the JNU row, the Dalit youth's suicide in Hyderabad — without making political capital out of them, the President made it a point to emphasise that Parliament was a place for "debate and discussions" and not for "disruption or obstruction." Prime Minister Modi has said that at the pre-session meetings "friends from (the) Opposition have shown a positive attitude." Few believe that politicians would change so soon, and so easily. In public neither the BJP nor the Congress has indicated any change of heart on key issues. Reforms may have to wait because the national political discourse remains confrontational.

PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

STATESMAN, FEB 27, 2016

The Food Court

Jaydev Jana

There is a Spanish proverb that “the belly rules the mind”. The hungry are left with three unacceptable options - they spark food riots, they emigrate or they die. Indeed, a hungry state is a failed state. India presents the worst statistics on terms of hunger though as per the latest Global Hunger Index (GHI) Report 2015, the country has been able to improve its position from 63 to 55. However, eradicating hunger through food security for all still remains a distant dream. Around 190 million people in the country go to bed hungry each day.

According to the National Family Health Survey - 4 (NFHS-4) figures, 29 per cent of the children under five are underweight and 32 per cent are stunted. An estimated 24 per cent of child mortality (under 5) are reported in India. The problem is not one of availability of food, but of accessibility. In the words of Amartya Sen: ‘Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat’.

In India, the Public Distribution System, a product of both political will and economic exigency, is acknowledged as a mechanism for catering to the needs of the under-privileged. It provides highly subsidised food and fuel to a large number of people. Affordable food is a source of sustenance for a large section of the population; affordable fuel (kerosene) is used for cooking and lighting by the poor. However, the PDS has not worked effectively enough not for lack of good intentions but because of inadequate attention to the delivery mechanism. It has been widely criticised for mis-targeting, wrongful exclusion and inclusion, unavailability and poor quality of commodities, chronic corruption and failure to deliver benefits in a systematic manner. Till 1992, PDS was ‘semi-universal’. Given the poverty-alleviation mandate of the programme and high transaction costs of subsidising those above the poverty line, the scheme was modified, first in 1992 into the ‘Revamped PDS’ (all in geographically poor areas) and then, in 1997, into the ‘Targeted PDS’ (all poor in all areas). Under the TPDS, households are classified in accord with the socio-economic parameters and provided with ration cards on this basis. Originally, the changes implemented through TPDS classified households into APL and BPL groups. Since 2001, additional subsidies have been extended to the poorest of the poor families, under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), which is rooted in the Gandhian concept - ‘Antyodaya’ literally means development of the ‘last persons’ in society. Through TPDS around three crore ration cardholders categorised as APL, BPL and AAY beneficiaries are provided subsidised foodgrain. In fact, the TPDS equipped with around half-a-million government- licensed Fair Price Shops (FPSs) is the largest distribution network of its kind in the world.

The switchover from comprehensive PDS to TPDS happened at a time when the central government was anxious to reduce the burden of food subsidy, even through the subsidy bill did not go above one per cent of the GDP. The TPDS was severely criticised by left-wing intellectuals. The officially accepted poverty line and the list of the poor thus identified generated a political controversy. Even the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO) of the Planning Commission in its report, Performance Evaluation of TPDS - 2005, admitted: 'The implementation of TPDS is plagued by large Errors of Exclusion (of BPL families) and Inclusion (of APL), and by the prevalence of ghost BPL cards.' In West Bengal, for example, the selection of the BPL list was blotted with 31.74 per cent "exclusion error", which was the third highest in the country. In his submission before the Supreme Court Justice DP Wadhwa, the Chairman of the Central Vigilance Committee on PDS, admitted that a large section of the population who are marginally above the official poverty line are dismally poor. The Wadhwa Committee referred to this group as 'Marginally Above Poverty Line (MAPL)' and advocated extra allocation of foodgrains for MAPL under TPDS. The Centre temporarily allocated extra food grain accordingly but without any long-term effect on food security. However, the evaluation findings of the PEO clearly suggested that the transition from PDS to TPDS has neither benefited the poor, nor helped reduce budgetary food subsidies in the desired manner.

In August 2013, the National Food Security Bill (NFSB) was passed by both Houses of Parliament, marking a paradigm shift in addressing the problem of food security - from the welfare approach to a right-based approach. The National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA), notified on 10 September 2013, increases the convergence of TPDS and converts various existing food security programmes of the Government of India into enforceable and justifiable entitlements, such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) for children in schools up to the elementary level, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) for children in the age group 0-6 as well as pregnant and lactating mothers, and the much maligned staple of the Indian polity - the PDS. It guarantees every person belonging to 'eligible household' five kg of foodgrain every month at highly subsidised rates Rs.1/2/3 per kg millets/wheat/rice. Under the current AAY Scheme the poorest household is entitled to thirty-five kg of foodgrain per month at the same prices. Though the Act itself does not specify the eligibility criteria, it does specify the mandatory coverage of PDS - 75 per cent in rural areas and 50 per cent in urban areas at the national level, to be adjusted state-wise by the central government. The Centre has evaded what would have been a contentious issue by passing the responsibility for identification of the target group to the states. The states have been made fully responsible for determining the eligibility criteria. They can expend additional resources to widen the coverage, the entitlement level and range of commodities offered to beneficiaries.

In West Bengal, the NFSA has been enforced as ‘Khadya Sathi’ project from 27 January this year. Going by the commitment of the government, AAY households will get 35 kg of foodgrains (rice and wheat) per month at the rate of Rs.2 per kg. Priority Householder (PHH), Specially Priority Householders (SPHH) and Rajya Khadya Surakhya Yojana-1 (RKSY-1) cardholders will get five kg of foodgrain per head per month at the subsidised price. Nearly 7 crore people of West Bengal will get foodgrains at Rs.2 per kg.

Protests over erroneous identification of beneficiaries and distribution of defective digital cards are spreading from one district to another. The list of beneficiaries published under NFSA appears to have excluded a substantial number of cardholders who used to get BPL and AAY benefits.. Subsequently, to clear the confusion over beneficiaries, the Chief Minister announced that all 9.2 crore people of Bengal would be eligible for subsidised rice. With the available resources and infrastructure, execution of the ‘Please all’ PDS appears to a herculean task.

Leakage remains a major problem. Highly subsidised foodgrain, earmarked for the poor, gets pilfered or sold in the open market. The system works like cash transfers. Arguably, if the subsidy is handed over directly to the beneficiaries, it is certain to reach them. To rise above the rhetoric of the opponents of direct cash transfers that the cash would be spent on liquor, we need to look at the consumption patterns of different economic classes. It would be a giant step and go a long way in alleviating poverty. As Amartya Sen once remarked: ‘Starvation, clearly, is the most telling aspect of poverty’.

RAILWAYS

INDIAN EXPRESS, FEB 29, 2016

Delhi Metro to ferry cargo on Airport Express Line from March 1

The service will be implemented on an experimental basis for three months between New Delhi and IGI Airport Metro stations.

The Delhi Metro is set to start a cargo service on its high-speed Airport Express Line from March 1 to transport non-perishable and e-commerce items.

The service will be implemented on an experimental basis for three months between New Delhi and IGI Airport Metro stations. It is expected to be a move towards cutting down fuel emissions with fewer cargo vehicles plying on city roads.”

“This will be the first ever occasion when a metro system in the country will be used for the transportation of cargo. These trials will help in accessing the cargo volumes that could potentially be generated on this route on both directions, especially e-commerce cargo. Based on the experience, a tender for a long-term arrangement shall be floated,” said an official spokesperson.”

“The DMRC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a specialised cargo agency for the purpose. Prohibited items as per statutory rules or as notified by DMRC from time-to-time shall not be allowed and the cargo will be transferred after the necessary security checks,” he added.

Officials said that the initiative is expected to help ‘reduce the consumption of fossil fuels, CO2 emission and improve air quality as less number of cargo vehicles will ply on the roads’.

DECCAN HERALD, FEB 26, 2016

Rail budget: Prabhu sticks to business

Suresh Prabhu's Railway Budget for 2016-17, proposing no hike in either passenger fares or freight charges while announcing a bagful of passenger amenities should not be seen as 'populist' budget which can then be conveniently be linked to assembly elections due next year in key states. With a huge fall in the fuel prices and drop in traffic, there was anyway no case for increase in passenger fares. Just because it is a government-owned monopoly does not mean that fares can be revised in the name of reforms. If at all there was a case for tariff revision, it should have been decreased. But that would have been possible if the Railways' finances were in good health. Even though it continues to fulfill social obligations like cross subsidisation of the suburban passengers and operating on some unviable routes for the sake of connectivity, it largely depends on the business of freight movement comprising mainly of coal, iron ore, steel etc. Unfortunately, these sectors are facing severe downturn in demand, hitting the bottom line of the Railways as well. That explains shortfall in realisation of the gross traffic revenue by Rs 15,744 crore in 2015-16.

The most convincing part of the Railway Budget is that Prabhu has stuck to his medium term objectives of making available reserved seat on demand by 2020 with significant improvement in passenger amenities, but without making grandiose announcements of dozens of new trains which would have remained on paper and in the headlines for a few days. With fuel prices expected to remain subdued, it should be possible for the Railways to operate without any mid-year revision in tariff which in any case would come under the domain of an independent regulator, sought to be established by Parliament. While the operating ratio has been pegged higher at 92% (ratio of expenses against revenue), it has factored in the additional salary burden on account of Seventh Pay Commission.

As for the passenger services and cleanliness, a great amount of detailing is visible in the budget, taking into account the needs of senior citizens, poor and migrant labourers who travel mostly in unreserved coaches. Announcements of unreserved express trains along with those for the better-offs are smart business strategies. At the same time, increasing use of e-ticketing and other Internet-based services should help reduce corruption in allocation of scarce seats. A similar customer-friendly approach is promised for the freight customers. On the flip side, Prabhu has not been able to execute the projects as per his ambitious targets though funding has not been an issue with Life Insurance Corporation and other multilateral institutions willing to lend to a business which can only grow, riding on huge passenger traffic and unfulfilled needs of the industry across wider sectors.

ASIAN AGE, FEB 26, 2016

Rail Budget 2016: Suresh Prabhu to speed up trains, rail network expansion on

[MANISH ANAND](#)

Fares untouched as state polls loom; big freight push

Breaking free from years of status quo, railway minister Suresh Prabhu on Thursday piloted Rail Budget 2016-17 on the course of change with promises of a financial turnaround, raising the speed of trains, a qualitative improvement in passenger amenities and reforms in the Railway Board's functioning. Not falling to the lure of increasing passenger fares and freight rates in a year when four states are heading for Assembly elections, Mr Prabhu promised a massive expansion of the rail network along with steps to move towards international standards in the running of trains.

Besides the National Rail Plan (2030) for an integrated multi-modal transport system in India, Mr Prabhu listed seven missions to win back freight share lost to the road sector, ensuring zero accidents, doubling the speed of goods trains and adding 25 kmph more to the speed of mail and express trains over the next five years.

Mr Prabhu also said he would soon ask Parliament to set up a Rail Development and Tariff Authority, which among other things will propose passenger fares and freight rates. Partially accepting the Bibek Debroy Committee's report, Mr Prabhu proposed the long-awaited restructuring of the Railway Board, with its chairman suitably empowered to function on corporate lines and the setting up of cross-functional directorates.

Showing a cash surplus of Rs 8,720 crores in the current fiscal, Mr Prabhu pegged the operating ratio (expenditure against earnings) at 92 per cent. He proposed a plan outlay of Rs 1.21 lakh crores against the revised budget estimate of Rs 1 lakh crores last year. He also set a target to mop up revenue of Rs 1,84,820 crores (2016-17). Laced with many Hindi terms, which appeared to show the stamp of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr Prabhu gave the slogan of "Chalo milkar kuch naya karen" (Let's do something new together), which essentially captured the new theme of partnering with state governments, private players and PSU firms for taking up new projects. "Three pillars of the strategy for us is Nav Arjan (new revenues), Nav Maanak (new norms) and Nav Sanrachna (new structures)," said Mr Prabhu in his 75-minute speech that was delivered at his characteristic "bullet" speed.

Seeking an image makeover to endear the Narendra Modi government to the poor, Mr Prabhu proposed a new train, Antyodaya Express, meant for unreserved passengers, to run at superfast speed. Also, he unveiled DeenDayalu unreserved coaches with potable water and higher number of mobile charging points. Besides, there will be new trains Humsafar (totally 3rd AC), with optional meal facilities, Uday, which will be overnight double-decker service, and Utkrisht, which too will be a double-decker AC Yatri Express for the busiest routes.

The minister laid an ambitious target to provide assured berths on demand by 2020, while saying two dedicated freight corridors (DFCs) [Dadri to Jawaharlal Nehru Port, and Ludhiana to Dankuni] would be completed by 2019, to throw open additional tracks to run more passenger trains. Mr Prabhu also proposed three more DFCs on the New Delhi-Chennai, Bhubaneswar-Mumbai and Bhubaneswar-Visakhapatnam routes to win back the lost freight traffic.

The Railway Budget was further sweetened with a strong dose of passenger amenities, including e-cancellation of tickets, SMS-based demand for cleaning of coaches and toilets, Sarathi Seva in the Konkan Railway to help the old and disabled, installation of 30,000 bio-toilets, providing portable structures with bio-toilets at all platforms of key stations for senior citizens, provision for baby food, milk, and over-the-counter medicines at stations, travel insurance on demand and hourly booking of retiring rooms. In addition, Mr Prabhu proposed unveiling smart coaches, ranking of A1 and A2 stations, Radio FM in most trains and infotainment services in select trains.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

DECCAN HERALD, FEB 29, 2016

Rurban Mission can ease cities' burden

The National Rurban Mission, which was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently, is yet another welcome scheme from the NDA government, aimed at development of the most important section of the country's population. The programme is targeted at the rural population and is intended to provide urban facilities to rural areas, without their losing the milieu and atmosphere associated with them. The plan is to make centres of growth in rural areas, creating smart villages to complement the smart cities envisaged in another government scheme. This had been discussed about 10 years ago under the PURA (Provision of Urban Facilities to Rural Areas) concept. The idea was to create rural clusters linked by roads which would have modern facilities and would become hubs of development. The Rurban Mission has evolved from this idea.

The mission plans to develop 300 rural centres, each catering to four villages in remote parts of the country as urban clusters with modern facilities. The clusters will have good education, health, transport and communication facilities. They will also be provided with facilities for industrial activities like agro-processing and skill development programmes and services required to support these activities. Such growth centres can give a major boost to development. About 70% of the country's population lives in villages and without involving them, development will not be real and complete. Uneven development can aggravate inequalities and increase social conflict. The country has seen increasing migration from rural areas to urban centres by people seeking employment and better life. That strains cities also which are unable to provide basic facilities even to its residents. If the rurban plan works well it can slow down such shifts of people and enhance the quality of life in villages.

The plan is to set up 100 centres this year and expand the programme in phases. As in the case of other missions launched by the government, implementation is the key to the success of this programme too. Even year-old programmes like Swachh Bharat mission have not worked the way they were expected to. While the prime minister has criticised past governments for their attitudes, approaches and methods, his own claims and aims are yet to be vindicated. Unfortunately, national life and discourses are also badly vitiated by unwholesome controversies which do not provide a congenial atmosphere for development. As the government and those close to it have a role in the vitiation of the atmosphere, its claims and intentions may even sound unreal to many. The implementation of the programmes may suffer too.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

TELEGRAPH, FEB 24, 2016

Pioneering initiatives - Jawaharlal Nehru was the original messiah of 'Make in India'

Diplomacy

K.P. Nayar

A turning point during the week-long "Make in India" events in Maharashtra appeared just before Sweden's prime minister, Stefan Löfven, walked in to meet Narendra Modi in Mumbai on February 13.

Sujata Mehta, who had only a month earlier assumed charge of the region that includes Sweden as secretary (West) in the external affairs ministry, handed over to Modi a monograph with the curious title of "Sweden Makes in India". Clever bureaucrats never give their bosses notes which are longer than one page: in exceptional cases, two pages. Cleverer bureaucrats, who want to get things done, give ministers pictorial representations of what they want politicians to grasp.

Since Modi is curious by nature and inquisitive by habit, he used the few minutes before Löfven's arrival to leaf through the monograph. "Sweden Makes in India", brought out by the embassy of India in Stockholm, opened up vistas for Modi about his pet idea - "Make in India" - which no amount of briefings or talking points could have equipped him during the week-long programme in Mumbai which the prime minister inaugurated.

It is the story of pioneering, if challenging, initiatives by Swedish companies to manufacture in India long before "Make in India" assumed its current status as a national mission, and, therefore, fashionable. If only Sweden's official name was 'United States of Sverige', each story of Swedish companies, which struggled to get their production lines off the ground, would be eulogized, almost immortalized. It is not very well known that Swedish firms took up base in India well before this country's independence, in fact, as early as 1903.

Nor is it very well known outside western India that Pune has long been a Swedish outpost of sorts, beginning with commerce but expanding and taking roots in diverse ways. Today, 33 per cent of all of Sweden's investments in India is concentrated in and around Pune. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who first saw the potential for a newly-independent country in courting Sweden and offered land in Pune for industrial development. Nehru was the original messiah of the idea of "Make in India."

Although Nehru coined the memorable term, "temples of modern India", at the inauguration of the Bhakra Nangal dam, it became synonymous later with new steel plants and other "Make in India" projects to which the first prime minister dedicated a great deal of his time and effort. Nehru's allotment of land for manufacturing in India brought in a second wave of Swedish companies to Pune.

This month, after meeting Modi in Mumbai and attending a crowded schedule of "Make in India" events, Sweden's prime minister travelled to Pune to see for himself his country's

manufacturing hub there which has taken deep root. Löfven must have been puzzled how Nehru was able to find land for the Swedes to make their products in India 60 years ago, something that the present government is unable to do for the same purpose - or even legislate on matters of land - when industrial job creation has become ever more critical.

Sweden is a country which successive Congress-led governments handled with kid gloves ever since the Bofors scandal. India has been a huge loser from such a myopic policy. Once Modi grasped the importance of Sweden for his "Make in India" initiative, he passed on the Indian embassy's "Sweden Makes in India" monograph to Löfven within minutes of their meeting.

But the Swedish prime minister merely nodded in acknowledgement. At the first opportunity after his arrival in Mumbai, Löfven had already been presented with a copy of the monograph by the brain behind the project, Banashri Bose Harrison, India's ambassador in Stockholm.

Chief Executive Officers of global conglomerates are among the most difficult people to pin down unless they are convinced that their time is worth their effort in business terms. But several of them from Sweden, including those of Volvo, SAAB, Ericsson, IKEA and H&M, were in Mumbai during the "Make in India" week. A joint statement issued at the end of Löfven's meeting with Modi in Mumbai was, therefore, appropriately themed, "New Momentum, Higher Ambition." The theme aptly sums up Indo-Swedish relations after the change in government at the Centre in 2014.

Another European country which turned a new leaf in bilateral relations with India during the "Make in India" week was Poland. The visit by its deputy prime minister, Piotr Glinski, to Mumbai has opened up possibilities of fundamental changes in relations between Warsaw and New Delhi.

Ties between India and Poland have had their special chapters, which are borne out by historical episodes of connections with Modi's home state of Gujarat. The story of a shipload of Polish Jews who found shelter in the then princely state of Nawanagar during World War II needs a column in itself, so it shall only be mentioned here in passing as an example of the underplayed nature of Indo-Polish relations.

The "Make in India" week has resurrected the possibility that this relationship could once again be anchored in freedom. When they meet, Indian and American officials talk so much about their shared ideals of freedom and democracy that such talk has become boringly clichéd. Not only is it not so with Poland, it is set to acquire a level of substance in Indo-Polish ties, which have long ebbed away from Indo-US relations.

Like every other major country, Poland has strong political and economic ties with China. Indeed, its new president, Andrzej Duda, chose China late last year as the destination for his first state visit abroad. But Indians, both officials and businessmen, who interacted with Glinski's large 60-member delegation to Mumbai this month found out to their surprise that a new, post-Communist generation of Poles - at any rate that country's *laissez-faire* businessmen - are more comfortable dealing with India than with China.

Poland is relatively new to democracy in action at home. It is anxious to leave behind any remaining vestiges of communist rule and one-party dictatorship. But this was never so conclusively demonstrated in any recent Indo-Polish engagement as it did in Mumbai.

In the first decade and a half since the end of communism in eastern and central Europe, Poles were obsessed about reintegrating with the rest of Europe. That charm has now considerably worn off, partly because of western Europe's current woes and because expectations within the European Union of a big country like Poland have been belied. Although Poland will continue to be an integral part of Europe, Warsaw is looking for greener pastures and India clearly is one major choice.

With Finland, another country whose prime minister, Juha Sipilä, was at the "Make in India" week, a spurt in bilateral relations will be in the unconventional sectors of production of fuel grade ethanol, acetic acid, furfural and bio-coal. Because of an initiative by Finland, India will soon have its first bio-fuel refinery in Assam with fuel being made from bamboo.

What is planned is a Rs 950-crore "Make in India" project for the production of fuel-grade bio-ethanol. With the mandated requirement for blending of petrol and diesel with bio-fuels expected to target a minimum of 20 per cent soon, this refinery is a critical necessity. The planned projects with Finland have the potential to remake Assam's countryside with bamboo cultivation expected to be streamlined for fuel needs.

After talks with Sipilä's delegation, there is hope that severe winter pollution in Delhi - contributed in part by the burning of harvest waste in northern states - will be reduced. Punjab alone is estimated to annually produce 25 million tonnes of paddy plants which are not in demand and are therefore burnt by farmers. Finnish technology can help use such paddy for producing bio-fuels.

WOMEN

TRIBUNE, FEB 25, 2016

Women in combat: A major signal towards gender parity

President Pranab Mukherjee has announced the government's intention to induct women in all military combat roles. Since time immemorial, men have apportioned to themselves the leading role in fighting and hunting. It has stayed that way with a variety of arguments and customs barring women entry into the armed forces of nation states. The main arrow in the quiver is the primordial fear of the enemy 'violating' captured women warriors. The other argument is of a modern make and makes the point that India is not culturally as advanced as the Nordic countries to have mixed dormitories and common toilets.

Both fears against the entry of women in combat roles, one old and another of recent make, ignore the history of their participation in modern warfare. Lyudmila Pavlichenko was one of the deadliest snipers in World War II with 309 confirmed hits. Armies of the post-revolution Soviet Union, China and Cuba have accommodated women in combat roles. And women guerrillas have taken on men-only armies in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Colombia. Recently, women fighters of the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Syrian YPJ successfully took on the ISIS known for press ganging captured women into sex slavery.

The third argument is that men are genetically programmed to kill and women balk at shedding blood. As women guerrillas and soldiers have shown, this is a misplaced notion. Candidates are selected after a gruelling psychological examination for aptitude and the ones falling short are winnowed. Though women have been inducted into the fighter stream of the Indian Air Force, this was an easier decision. Air force bases are family stations and pilots operate from the cockpit where issues of cohesion, etc. are absent. It will be tough to create space in infantry and combat units or on warships. If the example of other countries is an indication, the number of women in combat units will be miniscule. This means the costs of additional facilities will not be much but the President's declaration has succeeded in sending a clear signal that India will embark on the path of full gender parity in the armed forces.