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BLACK MONEY

BUSINESS STANDARD, JAN 14, 2015

Subir Roy: The political roots of black money

Subir Roy

Cashless transactions are one of the very important solutions to tame [black money](#) and should be promoted, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has said. There is a problem of emphasis here. It is good for people to use as little cash as possible as non-cash (through book transfers in banks) transactions leave a trail that law enforcers like [income tax](#) authorities or those tracking money laundering find extremely useful. But going off cash does not offer a major solution to the problem of black money.

To understand what works best in fighting black money it is critical to understand what black money is and is not. It is income that is not declared for income tax purposes. This can be simply tax evasion by a businessman or a professional engaged in legitimate activity. It can also be much more serious criminal offences like handling money that fuels trafficking in drugs or humans.

An enormous amount of black money flows in and out of the banking system and still remains black. A government official can take his family out for a lavish meal at a five-star hotel or buy the choicest Scotch whisky from liquor shops with cash taken as bribe. Once these sales enter the books of the hotel chain or the legitimate foreign liquor importer who pay taxes, the black money becomes "white". Then if the hotel chain's or the liquor importer's liaison person pays a bribe to any official functionary (there are ingenious ways of cloaking it as a legitimate cashless transaction), the amount paid, which will not be declared by the official as income to the tax authorities, becomes black money again.

Before going any further let us get a red herring out of the way. During its election campaign the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had promised to bring back black money stashed away by Indians abroad. How this is any more black than black money that stays within the country (there was no similar emphasis on unearthing it) is unclear. It seems there is greater interest in grandstanding on black money than actually doing something serious about it. Had the latter been the case the primary reason why black money thrives would have been addressed.

Black money thrives because it plays a critical role in [Indian elections](#) and no [political party](#) of any consequence appears interested in putting an end to this. Had it been so the way elections are fought would have changed beyond recognition by now. It is widely

believed that it costs at least Rs 5 crore and often much more to contest a parliamentary seat today, whereas the Election Commission-approved ceiling for such expenditure by a candidate is a mere Rs 70 lakh. What is fascinating is that many candidates, going by their declared expenses, do not even spend up to the permitted ceiling!

The Economist, in a report in May last year, picked up a frequently cited quote of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying that "every legislator starts his career with the lie of the false election return he files". Closer to today, the late Gopinath Munde, then deputy leader of the [BJP](#) in the Lok Sabha, in 2013 publicly admitted that he had spent Rs 8 crore for his 2009 parliamentary election, and then, on being issued a show cause notice by the Election Commission, denied the statement by saying it was "rhetoric". Thus, how much gets spent in fighting elections is hardly a well-kept state secret.

It is easy to see what such electioneering lets loose. A person who has spent Rs 5 crore in getting elected will want to recoup that principal, plus inflation plus a reasonable return to create a corpus with which to fight for his re-election. Thus, in five years he will want to making close to Rs 10 crore in black money or more. If legislators who rule the country face this kind of compulsion to generate black money for their own political future, how can they be expected to put in place a system that will bring an end to the generation of black money?

It is, therefore, unsurprising that there is a big hole in the rules on permissible election expenses. While there is a cap on what a candidate can spend for his election, nothing like that exists for political parties. What is more, donations up to Rs 20,000 are not treated as donations and can be reported without any details. So all that a party needs to do to account for, say, Rs 1 crore, is to claim that it received it in the form of 500 donations of Rs 20,000 each!

Other rules, in this regard, are either of minuscule size and consequence (companies can now officially make political contributions) or routinely flouted (filing returns on expenses within 90 days of an election). There is no attempt to change the rules where they matter. The entire political class, across parties, is complicit in this.

CIVIL SERVICE

HINDUSTAN TIMES, JAN 15, 2015

Ex-CBI chief AP Singh resigns as UPSC member

Aloke Tikku, Abhishek Sharan and Mahesh Langa

Former CBI director AP Singh — who has been in and out of controversies in recent months — has quit as member of the Union Public Service Commission two years ahead of the end of his term.

Sources said Singh's resignation had been accepted and a formal notification would soon be issued.

Singh has been under the scanner for his association with Delhi-based meat exporter Moin Qureshi who has been under investigation by the Enforcement Directorate and the Income Tax department.

Singh said he had sent his resignation letter last week but suggested that the Qureshi case did not have anything to do with it. "I was extremely upset over a remark by a Mumbai special court that questioned my integrity," he told HT, refusing to elaborate.

However, government sources said that Singh "was asked to put in his papers immediately." "He was told to step down or else the government will go for his removal. Sensing the government's mood, he decided to step down," a top government official told HT.

A senior IPS officer said Singh was "disappointed" that the court — while giving a clean chit to BJP president Amit Shah in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh-Tulsi Prajapati killings while hearing the case — had called the CBI case against Shah "politically motivated".

"Singh took the observation too personally," the officer said, pointing that there had been unanimity within the CBI on naming Shah in its chargesheet.

A 1974-batch IPS officer, Singh retired from the CBI in November 2012. The UPA government had appointed him as a UPSC member in February 2013.

HINDU, JAN 13, 2015

Pay scale of Delhi subordinate services approved

The Centre has approved a proposal of the Delhi Government to revise the pay scales of Delhi Administration Subordinate Services (DASS).

"The Ministry of Home Affairs has approved the proposal of Delhi Government to revise the pay scales of Delhi Administration Subordinate Services. Both the DASS and steno cadre will be benefited by this decision," Principal Secretary (Services, Delhi Government) Anindo Majumdar said on Monday.

Mr. Majumdar also said that as per the decision, pay scale of DASS Grade-II/Steno Grade-II has been revised from Rs.5,000-8,000 to Rs.5,500-9,000, adding that the decision will be effective notionally from January 1, 1996, and actually from December 12, 2006.

“The Central Government has also approved the grant of Non-Functional Scale of Rs.8,000-1,3500 to DASS Grade-I/Senior PA notionally from January 1, 1996, and actually from December 1, 2006,” he said. —PTI

[ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 9, 2015](#)

Holy cow! Government offices may soon be cleaned using liquid made from bovine urine

By [Vasudha Venugopal](#)

Gaunyle is full of natural goodness, being derived from the urine of cows, containing neem and fragrant to boot, redolent as it will be with the scent of pine. New Delhi:Phenyl, usually the white variety, is the cheap cleaning liquid of choice for floors across India. Anyone venturing into the shopping aisles at the [Kendriya Bhandar](#) cooperative's stores in the Capital can testify to this. Kendriya Bhandar also supplies housekeeping products to central government offices, which use the chemical to keep floors clean. But with a new mop swabbing all before it, even phenyl has to give way... to Gaunyle.

That's the name of the cleaning liquid which will soon be making the Capital's government office floors sparkle. It's full of natural goodness, being derived from the urine of cows, containing neem and fragrant to boot, redolent as it will be with the scent of pine.

The development is being seen as a "win-win" all round, since the liquid is said to be safer than synthetic cleansers and the trade will generate income for the gaushalas that house cows, regarded as sacred animals by Hindus, translating into better care and comfort for them.

"It is a great product for the health of the safai karamacharis as well as for the cows," said Jagdish Bhatia, managing director of Kendriya Bhandar, which is awaiting a final proposal from the NGO that will be supplying the product, the [Holy Cow Foundation](#), after which the deal will be sealed. Bhatia told ET that his organisation wanted to encourage such NGOs that provide alternative options.

ET learns that it was women and child development minister and ardent animal lover [Maneka Gandhi](#) who first floated the idea. "It is a win-win situation for us — no harm to janitors by way of daily exposure to chemicals, and cows will be valued more," she told ET.

Anuradha Modi, who heads the Holy Cow Foundation, said [Gaunyle](#) has the "anti-microbial and antifungal" properties of cow urine and neem and is meant to "save cows

and serve the nation". She has been visiting gaushalas across the country for months now and has chosen a product that's made "most scientifically". The product is being sourced from gaushalas in Barsana near Mathura by Holy Cow.

While the urine-based liquid may not be as strong as phenyl, the absence of harmful side-effects makes the organic product preferable, said Virendra Kumar Vijay, professor, [Centre for Rural Development and Technology](#) at the [Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi](#).

This is not the first time the central government has shown interest in this regard, he said.

"In 2004, the government employed experts from leading research institutes to find out more about the disinfectant qualities of cow waste but the study was terminated even before the team could reach conclusive results," he said. "However, from the preliminary studies, we understood that cow urine can be a good alternative to phenyl if mixed with the right components of other herbal extracts and scientifically treated."

Modi said Gaunyle's efficacy had been established in tests.

"The product has been certified 'excellent' by labs in its pest-removing abilities. We have already submitted the certificate to the government and they have approved it," Modi said. The product's acceptance will lead to gaushalas putting the required infrastructure in place. "This will be a great impetus to gaushalas to have laboratory glassware including distillation ware to prepare the urine formulation to make cleaners from valuable cow waste that goes unutilised," she said.

The process involves a hydro-distillation unit isolating the active ingredients that are mixed with extracts of pine, neem and various herbs that have antiseptic and disinfectant qualities. "Cow urine has inherent medicinal components, which are not removed during the process. It only gets more concentrated," she said.

"The product has been mixed with pine essence to smell nice," Modi said, adding that the response of the government on the product's use in central government offices was encouraging. "We have some last-minute documentation work left with them. After that we will start stocking the products to be used in all offices," said Modi, who runs a cow farm at Delhi's Sainik Farms

Modi said products like this will also make cow protection viable commercially. "There is no doubt that waste from our native breed cows have medicinal properties. But because they are not marketed properly, there are few takers and piles of cow dung and cow urine go waste in gaushalas. Such products make gaushalas sustainable, instead of depending on donations," she said

Kendriya Bhandar officials said more than Rs 20 lakh is spent on phenyl in central government offices. The cost of an organic alternative such as Gaunyle might be on par with the current expenditure, they added.

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 9, 2015

A government employee fired as he skipped work for 24 years

Verma, an executive engineer at the Central Public Works Department, was fired after last appearing for work in December 1990.

NEW DELHI: Government jobs are considered to be for life in our country but A.K. Verma was pushing it.

Verma, an executive engineer at the Central Public Works Department, was fired after last appearing for work in December 1990.

"He went on seeking extension of leave, which was not sanctioned, and defied directions to report to work," the government said in a statement on Thursday.

Even after an inquiry found him guilty of "wilful absence from duty" in 1992, it took another 22 years and the intervention of a [cabinet minister](#) to remove him, the government said.

India's labour laws, which the [World Bank](#) says are the most restrictive anywhere, make it hard to sack staff for any reason other than criminal misconduct.

States, led by Rajasthan and [Madhya Pradesh](#), have recently changed the law to make it easier to hire and fire staff, in a move welcomed by industry leaders but opposed by labour unions.

[Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#) has cracked down on rampant absenteeism by making New Delhi bureaucrats sign in at work using a fingerprint scanner. The results are publicly available online - at www.attendance.gov.in - in real time.

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 8, 2015

VRS opting employees can't be on same footing as others: SC

SC said the employees, who took VRS, are not entitled to enhanced pensionary benefits which are being given to others with retrospective effect.

NEW DELHI: There is no violation of principle of equal pay for equal work if persons, retiring in normal course, are treated differently with those who opt for special voluntary retirement scheme (VRS), the [Supreme Court](#) has said.

The bench comprising Justices [Anil R Dave](#) and Shiva Kirti Singh said employees, opting for VRS, form a separate class in relation to those retiring in normal course.

It said the employees, who took VRS, are not entitled to enhanced pensionary benefits which are being given to others with retrospective effect.

"True, that those who retired under the Scheme did the same work which was being done by those who retired in normal course, but one cannot forget the fact that those who retired under the Scheme got substantially higher retirement benefits," the bench said.

"The employees who retired under the Scheme form a separate class of employees who were given many benefits, which are not given to employees retiring in normal course. If they all form a separate class, by no stretch of imagination it can be said that all those who retired under the Scheme and those who retired in normal course, are similarly situated," it said.

The bench passed the verdict on a bunch of petitions filed by employees of five nationalized general insurance companies who prematurely retired on certain conditions with some special benefits under a scheme called "General Insurance Employees Special Voluntary Retirement Scheme, 2004".

After retirement of several employees under the scheme, the insurance companies, on December 21, 2005, came up with a notification giving benefit of revision of pay with retrospective effect from August 1, 2002, provided the employees were in service on or after August 1, 2002.

The retired employees under the scheme sought revision of their pension saying that they were in service on August 1, 2002 and they are entitled for higher pension.

CONSUMERS

BUSINESS STANDARD, JAN 12, 2014

Consumers find smart devices too complicated to use

Most [consumers](#) experience challenges using smart high tech devices such as wearable fitness monitors, smart watches, smart home thermostats, in-vehicle entertainment systems, home connected surveillance cameras, according to a recent report from Accenture titled "[Engaging the Digital Consumer](#) in the New Connected World".

The biggest challenges consumers face are that the [smart devices](#) are "too complicated to use" (21 per cent), "set-up did not proceed properly" (19 per cent), and "did not work as advertised" (19 per cent).

Across all age groups and geographic regions surveyed, 33 per cent cited 'ease of use' as an important criteria when deciding which of these products to buy. Twenty-nine per cent said "product features and functionalities" are important.

Brand continues to be a key factor. It is a key selection criterion when consumers purchase new devices - and the top criteria when they select a new smartphone. When asked to provide major reasons they are thinking of buying a particular smartphone, 49 per cent said

"I like this brand."The survey found that trust is a big concern for consumers. More than 54 per cent are not always confident about the security on the internet of their personal data, such as email addresses, mobile phone numbers, and purchasing history.

DEFENCE, NATIONAL

TIMES OF INDIA, JAN 14, 2015

Govt sacks DRDO chief 16 months before end of tenure

[Rajat Pandi](#)

NEW DELHI: The Modi government has sacked DRDO chief and missile scientist Avinash Chander, who is also the scientific advisor to the defence minister, almost 16 months before his tenure approved by the previous UPA regime was to end.

The move is seen as an attempt by the Modi government to usher in systemic reforms in DRDO — which has a vast empire of 52 labs, 7,800 scientists and over 530 R&D projects worth over Rs 48,000 crore — but has a long history of failing to deliver cutting-edge weapon systems to the armed forces in time.

Chander had retired in November last year on turning 64 but, in keeping with the order passed by the UPA regime in May 2013, was scheduled to continue as DRDO chief till May 2016 on a contractual basis. But on Tuesday, an official notification said the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet had "approved the termination of his contract" with effect from January 31.

Chander himself was clueless. "I have not received any letter or order terminating my services till now. I cannot comment on the reasons but it's the government's prerogative. I joined DRDO in August 1972 and would consider the missile programme my biggest achievement," he told TOI on Tuesday evening.

But sources said DRDO's tardy performance and unwillingness to reform, coupled with the growing greying profile of its scientists, was probably seen as an obstacle to the government's 'Make in India' policy. India has the dubious tag of being the world's largest arms importer, with its armed forces getting over 65% of their requirements from abroad, which also makes it strategically-vulnerable.

PM Narendra Modi himself had earlier asked DRDO to shed its "chalta hai" attitude, and become pro-active in delivering top-notch defence technologies in time. He had also asked DRDO to empower young scientists by making them heads of at least five labs to begin with.

Just a fortnight ago, defence minister Manohar Parrikar had promised "major changes" in DRDO within a couple of months. As a first step, the DRDO chief's financial powers have been delegated to "cluster heads" (vertical heads of aeronautics, missiles, electronics, life sciences, naval systems etc) for more flexibility and authority.

Many critical DRDO projects, including the high-profile Tejas light combat aircraft, are running years behind schedule with huge cost overruns. Ironically, the strategic missile

programme -- personally overseen by Chander — is one area in which DRDO has managed to do better with different nuclear-capable Prithvi and Agni missiles being inducted into the armed forces.

As reported by TOI earlier, the Rama Rao Committee (RRC) in 2008 had held that DRDO should focus only on 8 to 10 "critical technologies" of "strategic importance", instead of making everything from dental implants and mosquito repellents to nuclear missiles and fighter jets.

But many of its recommendations are yet to be properly implemented. Two key RRC recommendations, for instance, to establish a new Defence Technology Commission and a commercial arm for DRDO (as a private limited company with Rs 2 crore as seed capital) are yet to take shape.

[ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 12, 2015](#)

'Government will keep its promise of one rank, one pension'

To counter the breakout of Modi sarkar (military lingo for rapid expansion), the self-styled generals of Congress have been scoring countless self goals.

If social media enhances and expedites reach, it also exposes people twice as fast. I recently came across an online article on 'One Rank, One Pension' (OROP) written by a suave former diplomat-turned-politician, which had little thought and no action behind it. To counter the breakout of Modi sarkar (military lingo for rapid expansion), the self-styled generals of [Congress](#) have been scoring countless self goals. As I write, I look up intermittently to skim through the TV news channels, and see the Congress taking the contrarian view on the 'Pakistan boat issue' demonstrating a decade-old mentality -wait for Delhi to sanction action. Old habits die hard.

That is not how the Indian military and paramilitary have been trained. Being one of the best and most selfless in the world, a warrior's code of conduct is driven by his 'farz' or duty, honour of his 'Paltan', and his nation's 'izzat'. The monthly remuneration can in no way compensate these sacrifices, as a soldier routinely and regularly goes beyond the call of duty for the 'izzat' he holds so dear. And this fact is closest to the heart of the BJP.

[BJP](#) has a common thread with the armed forces -that of the ideology of nation first. Narendra Modi declared his commitment to stand by servicemen, veterans and OROP at a rally in Rewari in 2013. Congress, sensing a potential vote bank did not want to miss the bus so they hurriedly announced OROP and dished out a meagre sum towards it. Therein lies the difference, the uniformed forces are not a vote bank but a value bank for us. Our defence minister went on record, committing to deliver OROP and the finance minister did so in his budget speech. Assurances on the floor of the House are sacro sanct and only in rare circumstances does their completion go a little beyond the financial year.

The departments involved in ROP are defence, defence f i n a n c e, f i n a n c e and

personnel. To get them to speak in one voice and have one view may take time but it will be done. This in itself may lower the satisfaction levels of a few impatient ones and that's when the defence minister spoke of delivering 80% satisfaction he did not say 80% pension. When we have waited for decades, what are a few months more? The armed forces can rest assured that the OROP is perfectly within the credible sights of the PM, FM and 'RM' of this government.

So what's taking time?

OROP implies an officer of the same number of years of service and same rank gets the same pension irrespective of the year of retirement. But officers with the same years of service and same rank do not usually get the same salary. This is due to the number of years spent in each rank, or in other words, because of staggered promotion. For example, one colonel could spend more time in the rank of 'colonel' while another colonel may take longer to reach the rank, thus getting less time in the rank of colonel itself. Both may have the same number of total years of military service, but their salary itself will be different.

The one reaching colonel first gets a higher salary. Since pension itself is a derivative of salary, pensions will be different too. There will be thousands of variations in each rank, and we have not even begun counting. This is just one of the many challenges but the government is committed to finding a solution and, without penalising anyone, bringing in a harmonious and simple methodology for calculation of pensions as prescribed in the spirit of OROP. Will my honourable colleagues from the Opposition show some patience and wait for the end of the financial year or will they play spoilsport? It is in this government that the service chiefs have direct access to the political leadership. In the first 200 days itself, meetings between civil and military leadership far outnumber the total number of meetings held in the last decade of [UPA](#). Protocols are for formal occasions; when the tigers meet, the lambs have no place. Supremacy is of leadership; military and then political, period.

This government has faith in every field commander and soldier to do what's right for the country. Congress weakened the armed forces, reduced fighting capability. Its political indecisiveness and hesitation dulled the sharpness and led to beheadings, embarrassment and lowered morale. In 200 days, critical procurements stuck for the last several years have been cleared. Our responses on the border are with befitting ferocity. War memorial ordered. OROP will be delivered. Modi was also the first PM to celebrate Diwali with soldiers in field.

Congress needs to stop doubting the veracity of the very forces that protect us. They are indeed the wall between heaven and hell. It's thanks to social media that citizens pay rich tributes to our warriors in uniform. And it's from the social media I quote for the benefit of my Congress colleagues: "If you cannot stand behind our troops, feel free to stand in front of them".

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 14, 2015

Government may eventually scrap five-year plans

By [Yogima Sharma](#)

Panagariya, who took charge on Tuesday, was of the view that a market economy should not be driven by plans, several advisors told ET.

NEW DELHI: Having dismantled the [Planning Commission](#), the [Narendra Modi](#) government may also eventually do away with the tradition of five-year plans that the Nehru-era institution produced, advisors to the erstwhile body felt after their first meeting with [Arvind Panagariya](#), the vice -chairman of NITI Aayog, which has replaced the commission.

Panagariya, who took charge on Tuesday, was of the view that a market economy should not be driven by plans, several advisors told ET on the condition of anonymity after the interaction. "No government can abandon a plan as such. However, if they formulate their targets based on their own policies, it eventually means end of the 12th plan," said a senior official, who participated in the meeting.

Two other officials, however, said Panagariya spoke in the capacity of an economist and not as vice chairman of [NITI Aayog](#) because he is of the opinion that his views should be in sync with those of [Prime Minister](#) Modi. Following his meeting with the advisors, Panagariya went to meet the Prime Minister, who is the chairman of the National Institution for Transforming India or NITI Aayog as it is commonly called.

The mid-term appraisal of the ongoing 12th plan (2012-17) should have been over by December 2014, going by the past practice. However, since Modi himself has been critical in the past of the concept of five-year plans, his government did not do undertake the mid-term review of the plan.

Besides, all of Modi government's social sector initiatives, such as housing for all and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, have their own deadlines, once again signalling that this government wants to reset the targets and not follow those prescribed in the 12th plan prepared by the previous government. Commenting on the slowdown in the Indian economy, Panagariya praised the policy regime during the terms of PV Narasimha Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying that it had led to high growth for nearly a decade, which is unprecedented for a developing economy.

Panagariya also refuted the notion that the slowdown in growth was because of global uncertainty. Instead, he said that the slowdown was largely because of policy paralysis and poor governance of the UPA government that resulted in sub-5% growth, officials told ET. Had the former been the case, why did the Indian economy rebound in 2010 after the financial crisis triggered by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, Panagariya asked.

The government had announced the appointment of vice-chairman, two full-time members, four ex-officio members (Union ministers) and three special invitees for the Aayog on January 5.

Economist Bibek Debroy and former DRDO chief VK Saraswat, appointed as full-time members by the Prime Minister, are expected to join shortly.

Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley, Suresh Prabhu and Radha Mohan Singh will be the ex-officio members while their colleagues Nitin Gadkari, Smriti Zubin Irani and Thawar Chand Gehlot are special invitees to the Aayog.

[ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 8, 2015](#)

NITI Aayog to financially empower states: Arun Jaitley

NITI Aayog, which has replaced the 65-year-old Planning Commission, would help financially empower states, Arun Jaitley said.

KOLKATA: NITI Aayog, which has replaced the 65-year-old Planning Commission, would help financially empower states, [Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley](#) said here today.

Jaitley, who attended the Bengal Global Business Summit, said that the Planning Commission was relevant in a command economy structure.

"Now a particular scheme can be relevant for one state but not suitable for another state. In the process, the states will be more financially empowered and get more central [funding](#)," Jaitley said.

Regarding implementation of GST, Jaitley said no state would stand to lose a single rupee as revenue, and West Bengal, being a 'consuming' state, substantial amount of revenue would accrue in the first year of [GST](#) rollout.

There was [no doubt](#) about that, he emphasised. [West Bengal](#) had objected to GST fearing revenue loss. He also said that proceeds of coal block auction would benefit West Bengal since it was a coal-producing state.

EDUCATION

HINDUSTAN TIMES, JAN 15, 2015

Need to improve primary school education

All is not well on the education front, especially in the quality of state-run schools. This is clear from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), which is facilitated by Pratham, a non-governmental innovative learning organisation. The key findings of its 10th year report, which was released in New Delhi on Tuesday, was not different from the earlier ones. The enrolment levels are 96% or higher for the 6-14 age group for the sixth year in a row, the proportion of children enrolled in private schools has increased slightly from last year. Interestingly, a higher proportion of boys go to private schools, which are perceived to be better than State-funded ones by many parents, as compared to girls.

The reason for such a slow but steady shift towards private schools is easy to decipher: The quality of State-run schools is poor and this, as the report shows, reflects on the performance of the students. In the last 10 years, the report says, the overall situation with basic reading continues to be extremely “disheartening” in the country. For example, in the latest report, only a fourth of children in Class 3 can read a Class 2 text fluently. The ability to read English is unchanged for lower primary grades. In 2014, about 25% of children enrolled in Class 5 could read simple English sentences. This number is virtually unchanged since 2009. However, the decline is visible in upper primary grades. Math also continues to be a serious and a major concern. One of the main reasons why this dismal trend continues is that while the state governments have invested hugely in infrastructure and teaching personnel, the emphasis has always been on enrolment and not on learning-related activities. The thrust is always on finishing the syllabus and not on improving the learning abilities of students. However, the Right to Education (RTE) Act says it’s the duty of the teachers to assess each child’s learning ability and provide additional instructions if required.

After years of dilly-dallying, the erstwhile Planning Commission had emphasised on learning outcomes in 2012. The NDA’s Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, a sub-scheme of the RTE, has now set an outcome goal of 85% children in Class 1 and 2 reaching specified learning levels. This is a good move but what about older children who have huge deficits in basic skills? One way out of this mess could be to group students according to the level of learning capabilities. On the input side, teachers need better training and motivation. Like the UPA, the NDA too is focused on excellence rather than good quality learning at the basic level. This is the reason why we hear governments talking so much about building more IITs and IIMs but not enough quality primary schools. This thrust on excellence at the cost of every child is not what governments should aspire to.

HINDU, JAN 13, 2015

School teachers to undergo refresher course

School teachers will now have to undergo a refresher course to keep abreast with the latest developments in the fast-changing world.

The government on Monday said it is working on introducing refresher courses even as teacher training programme is being revamped to create quality educationists as per the thrust laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“The National Council for Teachers Education is working on a refresher programme. This is being done to ensure that teachers are navigated through a huge maze of knowledge and information developing in this fast-changing world,” School Education Secretary Vrinda Sarup said at an event here.

The government had earlier announced that two teaching degrees — B.Ed and M.Ed — would be two-year courses from the next academic session.

At a State Education Ministers’ conference last week, Ms. Sarup had said that an integrated four-year course leading to B.A and B.Ed degree will be introduced after Class XII to attract bright minds from an early age into the profession.

Those who want to be primary school teachers can get into a two-year diploma in education course after Class XII.

Pursuing the M.Ed programme under the open and distance learning mode has been dropped.

The Prime Minister, on December 25 last, had made a strong pitch for producing quality teachers in large numbers who could be exported, saying there is a large demand globally. —PTI

[TELEGRAPH, JAN 12, 2015](#)

A decisive shift: The changing concept of the public intellectual Prabhat Patnaik

The term, "public intellectuals", used to refer simply to intellectuals who addressed the public at large, instead of confining themselves to addressing only a small group of professional peers. They had their own specific views, their own political leanings, and even affiliations to particular political parties. The public was supposed to know these leanings and affiliations, but whether it knew these or not was not considered to be of any particular significance. The presumption was that the public, exposed to different views coming from intellectuals of different persuasions, would sift through them to make up its own mind on major issues. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, both ardent Leftists, were public intellectuals *par excellence* in this sense during my student days.

Whether these intellectuals were professionally "front-ranking", whether they were "morally upright", whether they had "impeccable integrity" were matters which were *ideally* supposed not to affect the public's receptivity to their views; all that was supposed

to matter was the intellectual substance of these views themselves. This, no doubt, was not the case in reality, where the intellectual's *persona* did matter; but the public being influenced by the *personal* qualities of an intellectual in assessing the worth of his or her *intellectual* position was seen as a shortcoming, an instance of a thoroughly avoidable *ad hominem* reasoning.

Of late, however, a very different concept of a public intellectual has begun to emerge, which believes that a public intellectual must not have any affiliation to a political party, for that undermines the "autonomy" and "objectivity" of the intellectual. But "affiliation to a political party" can take a multitude of forms including even implicit ones, such as mere sympathy for a party, or making common cause with it, or refusing in principle to make common cause with its enemies (as Sartre had done *vis-à-vis* the French Communist Party); hence this second concept of a public intellectual which demands lack of affiliation with a political party must entail in practice that such an intellectual should have *no notable political leanings*.

What this means is that a public intellectual in this sense must take positions on each issue *separately*, and entirely on the basis of "rational arguments" and "unassailable" ethical considerations, without having any "ulterior" motive of any kind. And since the absence of ulterior motives must be demonstrably so, such an intellectual must strive for "credibility" with the public at large, which necessarily means *inter alia* being even-handed in his or her attitude towards the failings of both the Right and the Left.

When Left intellectuals, like myself, are attacked for showing "selective righteousness" over violations of public interest, in the sense of being softer on Left transgressions than on Right transgressions, those doing the attacking, who are public intellectuals in this second sense, are necessarily insisting upon even-handedness. And as the essence of politics is to make distinctions (which may keep shifting over time) between "my side" and the "other side", that is, *to eschew even-handedness*, public intellectuals in this second sense are not just opposed to political affiliations; they are *epistemically* against politics.

We thus have three immediate and obvious differences between the two concepts of a public intellectual. One, unlike the first, the second concept holds that a public intellectual must be not just without political affiliations, but also even-handed in his or her dealings with political parties and formations. Two, unlike the first, the second concept believes, even though this is not necessarily made explicit, that the intellectual's engagement with public issues must be shorn of any overarching theoretical position (for otherwise it might lead to a violation of the criterion of even-handedness, as the Left intellectuals under the influence of Marxism are accused of doing), and must be based on a case-by-case micro-level use of "rationality" and "ethics". He or she must, in other words, exhibit an atomistic occupation with issues. And three, unlike the first, the second concept holds that a public intellectual, since he or she avoids the route of a personal engagement with politics for effecting desirable social change, must believe in doing so by seeking to arouse public opinion directly, for which his or her "credibility" with the public becomes an important pre-requisite. A public intellectual in this second sense,

therefore, must necessarily rely on *ad hominem* reasoning on the part of the public, the fact that it is impressed by the "honesty", the "integrity", and the "professional standing" of the intellectual in question.

I shall not dwell on my obvious differences with this second concept of the public intellectual arising from my general acceptance of the validity of the Marxist analysis of capitalism, and of our modern times being shaped by it. I reject epistemically any atomized perception of issues, and shrug off the charge of "selective righteousness" as an effort at best to impose on me a liberal world-view which I consider scientifically unsound and ethically unacceptable (since it amounts to making peace with, and "adjusting" to, the capitalist system that fundamentally negates human freedom through a process of commoditization).

I shall, however, make three other points against this second notion of a public intellectual which are not directly concerned with any specifically Marxist tenets. The first is that such an intellectual in the strict sense does not exist. All of us, including even those who seek to shun them, have political leanings. Hence the insistence on the absence of political affiliations boils down in practice to something quite different, namely subscribing to a sort of "middle path". Saying that the public intellectual must avoid any affiliation to a political party boils down in practice to the public intellectual being sympathetic to a middle-of-the-road position, which can lay no greater claims to "objectivity" than the position of those affiliated to some political party or the other.

Second, aloofness from politics, with its corollary of the need for "credibility" and even-handedness, implies that such a public intellectual cannot afford to ignore any issue that happens to occupy centre-stage at any time. Such a public intellectual, therefore, gets inevitably reduced to the role of a ritual protester. Anyone who does not rank "injustices", who is not selective between them (or, in Mao Zedong's words, does not distinguish between the "principal" and the "secondary" contradictions), but protests uniformly against *all* "injustices" (for otherwise he or she would lose "credibility"), actually protests in effect against *none*; he or she becomes a ritual protester. But ranking "injustices" requires an overarching theory which such a public intellectual makes a point of rejecting as a necessary condition for avoiding political affiliations. The rejection of politics, in short, makes one a ritual protester.

Third, and most important, underlying this concept of a public intellectual is a "substitutism" that should be a cause of concern. The first, old-fashioned, concept of the public intellectual was premised on the "public" having a subject role, and intellectuals providing inputs for it to play that role. They could do so notwithstanding their "warts", that is, whether or not they had ideological positions, whether they subscribed to this or that ideology, whether they were professionally successful, whether they were paragons of virtue, and so on. But the second concept of the public intellectual, which emphasizes the "credibility" of the intellectual, the need for him or her to be without "warts", implicitly assumes that the public is incapable of making up its mind on intellectual matters, that it needs to follow certain "credible" intellectuals in whom it can repose its trust; it, therefore, implicitly downgrades the subject role of the people.

It does, in short, what critics of Bolshevism even within the ranks of Russian social democracy used to accuse it of, namely a "substitutism" where the party "substitutes" for the class (and, further, the central committee for the party and a leader for the central committee). The merit of this criticism against Bolshevism *per se* need not detain us here. But the idea of a group of public intellectuals not just placing their views before the people as inputs for their decisions, but also trying to be acceptable to the people in the sense of the latter reposing trust in their judgments, in short, a group of intellectuals seeking a place above politics and the people, has a whiff of this very "substitutism". It marks a decisive, and in my view unwholesome, shift in the conception of a democratic polity.

In the course of the student uprisings of the late 1960s, the students had demanded of their teachers that they should make their political-ideological positions explicit, so that the students could judge better the intellectual worth of what was being taught to them. Making political positions explicit seems to me to be a better demand than the demand for eschewing political positions altogether -which is impossible and generates pretence.

The author is Professor Emeritus, Centre for Economic Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

[TIMES OF INDIA, JAN 12, 2015](#)

All universities must have grades, semesters, orders UGC

[Pavan M V, TNN](#)

Students must pursue core subjects every semester they can pick electives from a pool of subjects unrelated to their disciplines.

BENGALURU: In a move that will benefit lakhs of students and impact over 400 universities across the country, the University Grants Commission has mandated the introduction of grading system from 2015-16. It has directed universities to standardize their examinations and follow a semester pattern in curriculum.

Currently, many universities follow the numerical marking system. The new move will provide wider options for students to learn and ensure their seamless mobility across institutions. The move comes following a meeting last week between state education ministers and HRD minister Smriti Irani.

The regulatory body has directed universities to introduce the choice-based credit system (CBCS) and credit framework for skill development (CFSD). Currently, some universities follow the credit system for courses at different levels.

Under CBCS, students will pursue three types of courses - foundation, elective and core. Students must pursue core subjects every semester, and can pick electives from a pool of subjects unrelated to their disciplines.

HOW STUDENTS WILL BE GRADED

MARKS	GRADE
90.1 to 100	O (outstanding)
80.1 to 90 s	A+ (excellent)
70.1 to 80	A (very good)
60.1 to 70	B+ (good)
50.1 to 60	B (above avg)
50 to 55	C (avg)
40 to 50	P (Pass)

**Note: F for failed candidates;
Ab for absentees**

The foundation courses may be of two kinds - compulsory and elective. Compulsory

courses, mandatory for all disciplines, help students gain knowledge. Elective courses are value based.

Bangalore University registrar (evaluation) Ninge Gowda KN told TOI that BU has implemented both CBCS and CFSD from 2014 and will switch to grades from 2015. His Mangalore University counterpart, PS Yadapadithaya, said they introduced CBCS for PG courses two years ago. "We're awarding both marks and grades. From next year, we will stick to grades," he said.

"CBCS will enhance the knowledge of students as it will expose them to different subjects. It has been introduced in our university and we will start giving grades instead of marks from the next academic year," said Meena Chandavarkar, vice-chancellor of Karnataka State Women's University.

HINDU, JAN 12, 2015

DU to hand over medical college to Delhi Govt.

The Delhi University executive council members on Sunday criticised the varsity over its acceptance of a decision for transfer of the University College of Medical Sciences (UCMS) to the government. The members called the move "unilateral" and "undemocratic".

"The decision [was] communicated to the [Union Human Resource Development] Ministry on November 25 and the executive council was informed about it on January 9. How can such a decision be taken without the council's consent?" said member Abha Dev Habib.

The Ministry had written to DU in October, reminding it of the decision on UCMS taken by the Union Cabinet in 2005. The university was asked to complete the formalities within a month.

"The Cabinet, in its meeting held on August 25, 2005, had taken a decision that the Delhi Government will make a proposal to the Department of Secondary and Higher Education to take over UCMS [which will remain affiliated to DU], [to] enable the government to run both the college and hospital on the pattern of Maulana Azad College and associated hospitals," the Ministry Deputy Secretary had said in the letter.

The DU Registrar had written to the Ministry in November confirming that the varsity had decided to comply with the order. — PTI

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 9, 2015

BJP government in Haryana to introduce Gita in curriculum

The BJP government in Haryana proposes to introduce Bhagwad Gita in school curriculum in the state.

CHANDIGARH: The [BJP government](#) in [Haryana](#) proposes to introduce Bhagwad [Gita](#) in [school curriculum](#) in the state.

"A consultation process will be set in motion soon to work out the modalities for introduction of Bhagwad Gita in school curriculum in the state," Haryana Education Minister Ram Bilas Sharma told the media today.

On being asked by when it would be introduced, Sharma said a committee of eminent educationalists would be formed soon to work out the details for inclusion of Bhagwad Gita and expressed hope that the plan would be implemented in the next [academic session](#).

"The thought (of including Bhagwad Gita in curriculum) would be considered threadbare before taking a final decision," he said.

Sharma said the "thought" was getting support from various quarters, including from Islamic seminary Darul Uloom.

"The Darul Uloom at Deoband has also supported the thought," the Education Minister claimed.

"I am getting thousands of messages from across the world extending support on the proposal to introduce Bhagwad Gita in the curriculum," he said, adding, all the suggestions and messages being received would also be placed before the committee after which a final decision would be taken.

He said that he had suggested introducing Bhagwad Gita in the school curriculum at the Education Ministers seminar organised by Union HRD Minister Smriti Irani in Delhi on January 6.

"I hope the issue will also be considered at the central level," he said.

ELECTIONS

ASIAN AGE, JAN 15, 2015

HS Brahma will be CEC for 3 months

Election commissioner H.S. Brahma is all set to take over as chief election commissioner from V.S. Sampath, who will retire Thursday after less than six years in the post, that saw him conduct two Lok Sabha elections.

Mr Brahma, 64, will assume charge as CEC on Friday after Mr Sampath demits charge on turning 65 on Thursday. Mr Brahma will be CEC till April this year, when he attains the age of 65.

Mr Brahma's first major test will be to conduct the Delhi Assembly elections, that is due to be held on February 7

HINDU, JAN 14, 2015

Another election in Delhi

Alot has changed in Delhi in the last one year. Between the last election in December 2013 and the next in February 2015, Delhi would have seen the ups and downs of both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Aam Aadmi Party. After the hung Assembly of 2013, when the AAP made a brilliant debut and formed a government with the support of the Congress, Delhi voted overwhelmingly for the BJP in the Lok Sabha election in 2014. Now, however, the contest seems more even in the Assembly election, called after no party was able or willing to form a government. What was without doubt a vote for the BJP and its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi last year in the Lok Sabha election is unlikely to be repeated this year in the Assembly election, when the issues and the candidates are very different. AAP firebrand Arvind Kejriwal is not taking on Narendra Modi, but just another BJP leader. Unlike in a Lok Sabha election, when the AAP could not have expected to be accepted as a serious contender, in the Assembly polls the fast-growing party is attracting more volunteers and resources. Mr. Kejriwal and his advisers, who messed up their chance in government by first pursuing unsustainable populist measures and then opting out of governance, seem to have learnt from their mistakes. After raising doubts in the public mind over their ability to govern, AAP leaders now appear keen to demonstrate that they are more than a bunch of anarchist protesters and that they intend to back systemic changes and push for Delhi's development in a practical manner. In 2013 they rode on the promise they held; in 2014 they paid for failing to deliver; and this year they have more of a programme to offer.

As for the BJP, whether in Maharashtra, Haryana or Jharkhand, it has been unable to rise to the levels of its Lok Sabha success in Assembly elections. Mr. Modi seems to find it harder to win individual States for his party than he did to win the Lok Sabha election. Of course, some of the difficulties have been on account of the BJP's own chosen strategy of ditching alliance- partners in the search for absolute glory. In Delhi, a traditional stronghold, no ally could have added greatly to its vote share, and the party is preparing for a straight contest with the AAP. In 2013 the BJP had to fight the Congress and the

AAP almost with equal vehemence; now, however, the Congress, no longer in power at the Centre or in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, is seen as a lesser threat. The AAP, with a more sober style that is very different from the idealistic foray of 2013 and the overambitious leap of 2014, is seeking to close the gap with the BJP. In any case, this election is likely to be more decisive than 2013.

BUSINESS LINE, JAN 13, 2015

Delhi goes to polls on Feb 7

By-elections in four States on Feb 13

The Assembly polls in Delhi, touted as a face-off between the BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party, will be held on February 7, the Election Commission announced on Monday.

Announcing the poll dates, Chief Election Commissioner VS Sampath said counting will take place on February 10. The Delhi Assembly was dissolved by the President on November 4 last year.

Sampath said that 1.3 crore voters will be eligible to vote at 11,763 polling stations and the Model Code of Conduct comes into immediate effect.

By-elections for Srirangam Assembly constituency (in Tamil Nadu), Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), Panaji (Goa) and Mukhed (Maharashtra) will be held on February 13. The by-election in Srirangam was necessitated by the disqualification of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalithaa, who was convicted in a disproportionate assets case.

Counting for these State Assembly seats will take place on February 16. In addition, Bongaon Parliamentary constituency (West Bengal) will vote on February 13, with counting on February 16.

Delhi is the most anticipated election, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi launching the BJP's campaign at a massive public rally at Ramlila Maidan. The BJP is expected to follow the campaign strategy it adopted in the recent elections in Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir, where Modi remained the party's chief campaigner and no chief ministerial candidate was projected.

AAP is believed to have made further inroads into the Congress's traditional strongholds in Delhi — the slum clusters, Muslims, working class and poor migrants.

The Congress, a distant third in the last Delhi election, is still struggling to recover. Although the party has fielded Ajay Maken as its chief campaigner, party leaders admit the contest is essentially between the AAP and the BJP.

STATESMAN, JAN 12, 2015

nod likely for online voting by NRIS

New Delhi, 11 January: Days after extending more benefits to Persons of Indian Origin, the government is set to accept the recommendations of a committee which has favoured voting for NRIs through electronic means.

The government has already firmed up its stand on the issue of NRI voting and will tell the Supreme Court this week that it accepts the recommendations of the committee, including e-ballot for NRIs.

The issue will come up before the apex court where government has to explain its position on the issue.

A committee comprising officials from the EC, Law Ministry and the Ministry of External Affairs had taken the opinions from all sections before submitting a report to the apex court last year.

Any move to allow NRIs use proxy voting on the lines of defence personnel and e-ballot facility will require changes in the law. Under the proposal, NRIs will be sent ballot papers electronically and they will have to return it to poll authorities physically.

Chief Election Commissioner V S Sampath had said recently that the MEA was opposed to the idea of allowing NRIs to vote at embassies as it will be difficult to allow such an exercise because, in some countries, the NRI population could be equal to the local populace and it will be difficult to hold such an exercise at the embassy.

EMINENT PERSONALITIES

STATESMAN, JAN 12, 2015

Left loses Vivekananda

ARUNABHA BAGCHI

January 12 is another birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the architect of modern India. But this time there is a difference. We have for the first time a proclaimed devotee of Swami Vivekananda ruling our country. His bust was prominently visible in Mr Modi's living room when he conferred with the topmost BJP leaders at his residence in Gandhinagar right after winning absolute majority in the latest general election. He handpicked his closest officials from among the top functionaries of the New Delhi based think-tank ~ the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF). He was even present at the release of a book at VIF. It has been edited by the economist, Bibek Debroy, Dean, Centre for Economic Studies at VIF and who has just been nominated a permanent member of NITI Aayog.

VIF is part of the cultural projects of the Vivekananda Kendra with its headquarters at Kanyakumari where Swami Vivekananda ended his famous journey starting at Almora to gain first-hand knowledge of real India. The Kendra has more than 225 branches spread throughout India with the mission to actualise the "vision of Swami Vivekananda." Man-Making and nation-building are the twin objectives of the Kendra. There also exists a vast network of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrams in India set up by Swami Vivekananda himself more than a century ago to spread the teaching of his Master. These ashrams and their sister Vedanta Societies abroad, have been spreading the Swamiji's lucid interpretations of the complicated philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. We now know that our Prime Minister had the ambition of becoming a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission in his youth. During his visit early last year to the headquarter of the Mission at Belur Math, he meditated for half-an-hour in the original meditation room of Swami Vivekananda. Our new Union HRD minister also paid homage at Belur Math on her maiden visit to Kolkata after taking charge. It is obvious that our new rulers have taken over the ownership of the legacy of Swami Vivekananda in the perception of the common people of our country. When I left India in my early youth, I had the impression that Swami Vivekananda was the least controversial Indian of modern times. He stressed the country's spiritual unity that had continuity for more than five thousand years, and thereby gave indirectly the impulse to the political movement for our freedom from British rule. His life-story inspires Indians even today ~ from the remote villages in our country to obscure towns in the Caribbean. His message was for all Indians, irrespective of their political or religious persuasions. The leader of the Left wing of the Congress in the Thirties, Subhas Chandra Bose, was his ardent devotee. Why do the liberal/left politicians today avoid campaigning before the masses by using his message? They are nervous to refer to him for fear of losing their secular (read: appeasement of different religious sentiments) credentials.

I must confess that I knew embarrassingly little of his ideas before I left India, although I studied in a Ramakrishna Mission school. After I came abroad, I was fascinated by the richness and breadth of Western thinkers, and tried to read some of their works in my spare time. It was only in my late fifties that I first read the collected works of Swami Vivekananda. I re-read these books many times thereafter. It was a startling experience for me. There were so many ideas that I had never read before. I just mention three of them to facilitate the discussion below.

The first is a metaphysical one ~ the divinity of every living thing in the universe. This idea was even more universal than that of modern philosophers in the West, starting with Descartes, who moved from the external source to the internal one in search of the spirit. Swami Vivekananda has presented one corollary of this idea as follows: “What claim of superiority is there? ... The work of Advaita, therefore, is to break down all these privileges... If there is any land of privilege, it is the land that gave birth to this philosophy ~ privilege for the spiritual man as well as the man of birth.” To this has now been added the privilege of the moneyed class whose wealth grew astronomically under the aegis of neo-liberalism.

The second idea is derived from the first and is in the realm of ethics. If we realise that every person is potentially divine, it leads automatically to a sense of oneness in this universe. To quote Swami Vivekananda again, “This expression of oneness... is basis of all our ethics and morality. This is summed up in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism, Tat Tvam Asi, ‘Thou art That’. Swami Vivekananda often reiterated the obvious truth that the absolute sameness of conditions appears to be impossible, but what can be attained is elimination of privilege.

The third idea is his unwavering support for the scientific temper. Swami Vivekananda never tried to use pathetic arguments in support of astrology. He also realised the distinguishing role of experimental science in the dramatic technological progress of the 19th century. He asserted that religion must stand the test of reason as in science; otherwise the whole edifice of religion would crumble down. Swami Vivekananda said, “We should, therefore, follow reason and also sympathise with those who do not come to any sort of belief, following reason. For it is better that mankind should become atheist by following reason than blindly believe in two hundred million of gods on the authority of anybody.” In abstraction, these ideas form the core of the political philosophy of the liberal/left political parties in the West.

How do our present-day liberal/left intellectuals look to Swami Vivekananda? Here are some random unscientific samples. My first surprise was when I went through the table of contents of a book written by one of our most well-known historians with the title, *The Makers of Modern India*. It took me a while to fully grasp that Swami Vivekananda was not in his select list of Indians. Then I came across a book of our celebrity social scientist written a while ago with the title, *The Enemy Within*. This book was widely acclaimed

by our liberal/left intellectuals, as well as their counterparts in America. There the author described two streams of cultural criticism in response to colonialism, grounded in reinterpretation of our sacred texts. According to him, the second stream was “in reality dependent on core values borrowed from the colonial worldview and then legitimized according to existing concepts of sacredness.” He asserted that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was the pioneer of this stream of consciousness and then merely mentioned that Swami Vivekananda shared this consciousness and developed it further. He even claimed that Vivekananda tried to Christianise Hinduism! Finally, I was stunned to read excerpts of a book in the 21 January 2013 issue of the liberal/left weekly, Outlook, under the caption “Dharma for the State? “, where Swami Vivekananda was not ignored, or made an appendage of someone else. In this book, entitled A Restatement of Religion: Swami Vivekananda and the Making of Hindu Nationalism, the author portrayed Swami Vivekananda as a hypocrite and a Hindu supremacist!

It seems that our liberal/left social scientists are wary of giving due importance to a Hindu monk for fear of losing seats at the high table of Western secular (read: against religious beliefs) scholars. This must puzzle ordinary Indians, the vast majority of whom revere Swami Vivekananda for his religious tolerance and advocacy for the rights of the downtrodden in our society. He was also remarkably forthright in his condemnation of the treatment of our women. The rejection of Swami Vivekananda in public by our liberal/left politicians and intellectuals is one reason why many Indians, not particularly enamoured by the Hindutva ideology, are drawn to the BJP. For them “The Idea of India” is “The Idea of Vivekananda.”

The writer is former Dean and Emeritus Professor of Applied Mathematics, University of Twente, The Netherlands

EMPLOYMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES, JAN 12, 2015

Centre mulls revamp of exams conducted by SSC

Aloke Tikku

The government is considering a revamp of the examinations conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) including a plan to conduct the recruitment examination online to deal with an increasing number of complaints of irregularities in recent months.

The revamp would affect nearly 16 million candidates who take the SSC examinations to join nearly 85,000 junior jobs in the central government, ranging from stenographers to inspectors of customs.

The move follows the recommendations of a panel of experts that also called for making it mandatory for applicants to register online and end the practice of forcing candidates to repeatedly register for each exam.

The commission has been dogged by controversies over the last year or so, particularly in view of repeated numerous allegations of irregularities in its examinations that have been mentioned in the Parliament too.

Just last month, Apna Dal MP Anupriya Patel alleged in the Lok Sabha that “many candidates who were absent in Tier-II re-examination of combined graduate level exam 2013” had been declared successful by the Staff Selection Commission.

She also asked the government to respond to charges that a large number of candidates from the same city appeared to have cleared the examination. The MP also demanded that the list of those candidates who were debarred be made public. She also asked that the names of absent candidates of CGL-13 be also made public.

Former SSC chairman NK Raghupathy welcomed the revamp initiative but demanded that the department of personnel and training (DoPT) should be transparent about the panel’s exercise.

The DoPT has kept the report under wraps but only placed the recommendations made at a SSC workshop that debated the report.

Raghupathy — who headed the SSC till his retirement in 2013 — had taken several initiatives to improve transparency within the panel. For instance, he used social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook to advise candidates long before it was fashionable to do so. He continues to do so after his retirement too. Raghupathy — who had advocated a single screening test for candidates — said access to the expert group report would help understand why it was not in favour of a single test.

The panel had called for more debate before a view was taken.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

STATESMAN, JAN 8, 2015

ICICI Bank unveils 'contactless' cards

Private sector lender ICICI Bank today announced the launch of the country's first 'contactless' debit and credit cards, enabling its customers to make electronic payments by just waving the cards near the merchant terminal instead of dipping or swiping them. These cards are based on the Near Field Communication technology, which provides customers the improved convenience of speed as these cards require less time than traditional cards to complete a transaction along with enhanced security as they remain in control of the customer during the transaction process, the bank said in a Press release issued here.

ICICI Bank has initially introduced these cards in three cities ~ Gurgaon, Hyderabad and Mumbai. It has also installed over 1,200 EDC machines capable of accepting 'contactless' payments across merchants in these cities, the release said. The bank plans to extend this facility shortly to other cities as well.

ICICI Bank has launched two cards with the new technology ~ Coral 'contactless' Credit Card and Expressions Wave Debit Card ~ and they are powered by MasterCard 'contactless' and Visa payWave technologies, respectively.

Speaking at the launch, Mr Rajiv Sabharwal, executive director, ICICI Bank, said: "We expect this to be a big game-changer in the Indian payment industry."

HEALTH SERVICES

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 8, 2015

Police will send legal notice if you block an ambulance

Emergency vehicles — ambulances, fire engines and police patrol vehicles — have the overriding right of way over all motorized traffic on the extreme right lane of all major roads.

NEW DELHI: Obstructing the path of an [ambulance](#) on the city roads will now attract [legal action](#) and a fine of Rs 2,000 no less.

"All a hospital has to do is report to us the vehicle number, date and time of violation and proof, if any," special [commissioner of police \(traffic\) Muktesh Chander](#) said, after the department issued a circular on Tuesday. "We will verify the facts and issue legal notice if the charges are proved. Defaulters will have to pay a fine of Rs 2,000." Chander said he would write to all hospitals and request them to share information about errant drivers.

Emergency vehicles — ambulances, fire engines and police patrol vehicles — have the overriding right of way over all motorized traffic on the extreme right lane of all major roads. Most ambulance drivers agree that the rule is rarely followed which leads to loss of precious time in transporting critically ill patients to hospital. Several die on the way after being held up in traffic.

Chander said the department had written to the state health department and the Union health ministry to sensitize ambulance drivers on the legal provisions. "The letter was sent on September 8 last year, but we did not get any feedback. So now we have decided to contact all hospitals directly," he said.

Exactly how bad the situation is was revealed by a nugget in the data collated by the Centralised Accidents and Trauma Services ([CATS](#)) in Delhi: between May and December last year, at least 26 women had to deliver their babies in the ambulance because they could not reach hospital in time. While most deliveries went off smoothly, thanks to the paramedical staff on board, TOI came across at least one case where the child died later due to complications during birth.

"It happened on August 22. My wife was in the seventh month of her pregnancy when she complained about labour pain. We called for an ambulance around 5am to rush her to Safdarjung Hospital. But she had to delivery midway," said Ritesh Kumar, a resident of Lal Kuan near Okhla. He said the child died later at the hospital due to complications. Kumar, a tailor, said the ambulance did not have adequate equipment, including ventilator support.

JUDICIARY

HINDU, JAN 8, 2015

Watershed in judicial history

The Supreme Court of India and the High Courts, described as the most powerful judiciary in the world, are witnessing dramatic changes in their institutional structure. Pending notification, the legislature has passed the Constitution (121st Amendment) Bill, 2014 and The National Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, 2014 to regulate the procedure for recommending the appointment and transfer of the Chief Justices and Judges of these higher courts, marking a watershed in judicial history. The new law provides for the setting up of the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), a six-member panel headed by the Chief Justice of India, and includes two senior-most Supreme Court judges, the Union Minister of Law and Justice and two ‘eminent persons’ nominated by a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the CJI and the Leader of the Opposition. Although controversial, this represents a much-needed reform of the older collegium system. That system was a judge-devised practice of appointments that evolved out of the ‘three-judges cases’ (1982, 1993 and 1998) wherein the Chief Justice along with a panel of senior-most judges would make a binding recommendation to the President on the appointees. This model was a reaction to blatant favouritism by the executive that marked appointments until the Supreme Court decided to change the procedure. To avoid charges of favouritism, the collegiums relied on seniority, which only encouraged more mediocrity.

Although such an inter-institutional model has the potential to enhance merit and diversity in the judiciary, it is the fine print of law that raises questions. With three of the six members being judges, a decision of the Commission can be vetoed by any two members. The judicial members of the NJAC lack the preponderance in voice necessary to maintain independence. The fear is that the NJAC may encourage High Court judges to give pro-government rulings with the object of gaining eventual promotion to the Supreme Court. This problem was dealt with by the Venkatchaliah Committee, endorsed by the Vajpayee government, which suggested a panel of three judges, the Union Minister and only one ‘eminent person’, thus reducing the scope for executive interference. Having a relook at this report might have been of value. But the BJP has ignored it and instead demanded more say in the NJAC; the Opposition did not seem to have any complaints about the procedure either. With several influential lawyers criticising the law for being a political assault on judicial independence, the constitutionality of the law is about to be challenged in court. Whether this would eventually lead to a conflict between the two wings of the government, is something to be seen.

TRIBUNE, JAN 9, 2015

Cabinet papers can’t be withheld from public: CIC

New Delhi, January 8 The Central Information Commission (CIC) has directed the Law Ministry to disclose the Cabinet note about the decision to establish a National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), saying that such documents are not secret and

should thus be made public. Hearing a plea by one SN Shukla, who had sought a copy of the NJAC Bill as cleared by the Cabinet along with the Cabinet note of last year, Information Commissioner Sridhar Acharyulu said that after the central group of ministers has taken a decision, the noting cannot be withheld on the pretext that the Bill had not become an Act. Meanwhile, President Pranab Mukherjee on December 31, 2014, had given his assent to two Bills — the NJAC Bill, 2014, and the Constitution (121st Amendment) Bill, 2014. The Law Ministry has submitted to the CIC that the noting was not shared as, at the time of filing of the RTI plea, the Bill had not attained finality while, in the meantime, the government had changed. So, there was no substance in providing the same, the ministry said. Shukla countered the argument saying he was not seeking information with regard to the current form of the Bill, but the copy of the Bill which was initially presented before the Rajya Sabha and stated that he was entitled to that information as soon as the final decision was taken in that regard. The argument of the Law Ministry that the decisions of the Council of Ministers are disclosable but not the Cabinet papers, is totally untenable, he said. The NJAC Bill facilitates the setting up of a commission for appointment of judges, replacing the 20-year-old collegium system, which has been under severe criticism. — PTI

LIBRARIES

BUSINESS LINE, JAN 8, 2015

Used ebooks and the future of reselling

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Sounds a bit weird. How is a ‘used’ ebook different from a ‘new’ one?

Well, it’s a tricky situation. Technically speaking, there is no such a thing called ‘used’ ebook; the ‘leaves’ stay intact even after umpteen uses. But in legal terms, an ebook becomes ‘used’ when it’s first buyer sells it or shares it.

Can you actually resell one?

On this, the world of readers, distributors, publishers and authors are now an interestingly divided crowd. In many places consumers can resell similar digital products, such as software and games.

Anyway, come January 13, we will get some clues and clarity on how to solve the ‘used ebooks’ puzzle. This day, a Dutch court will deliver its judgement on a fiercely fought legal battle between second-hand ebooks store Tom Kabinet and the Dutch Publishing Association. The global publishing industry is eagerly waiting for the verdict.

What’s the case all about?

The publishers’ body says the online bookseller should stop selling used ebooks. It believes that Tom Kabinet has been merrily violating copyrights and intellectual property laws. Quoting its own research, the body says almost 90 per cent of the ebooks Tom Kabinet sells on its website are pirated and people are reselling books downloaded illegally.

Sounds logical.

Hold on. Tom Kabinet, a startup based in Laren in the Netherlands, says it sells only legally purchased copies and puts in its best efforts to ensure that the copies are legal. The website in fact is not a pure reseller; it says it’s a facilitator between book buyers and sellers and takes a commission when a sale is made. On its part, Tom places a watermark on the copies resold so that publishers can identify them easily. The portal fights the case anchoring on a 2012 ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union, which has the potential to influence the Dutch court’s decision.

Tell me about it.

In a dispute between software giant Oracle and Switzerland-based UsedSoft, the court ruled that the trading of ‘used’ software licences is legal in Europe. It even said the author of such software cannot oppose any resale. UsedSoft specialises in buying and

reselling used software licenses original buyers want to part with. To be fair, Oracle's license documents says it disallows resale of its software. Interestingly, most ebooks sold by almost all publishers and sellers, including Amazon and Apple, carry similar licence documents. Hence the importance of the Tom Kabinet case.

But publishers can make ebooks copy-safe, right?

Granted some ebooks are DRM-protected. DRM or digital rights management is a security technology that protects a digital content from being copied. Amazon uses this. But industry watchers feel that's only a technical issue which can be addressed. Plus, in the digital world, there are many workarounds. Curiously, Amazon seems to be cool with the idea of a market for reselling books; which means more revenues. In fact, in 2013, Amazon got a patent to set up an exchange for all sorts of digital material. It would earn a cut on each transaction.

Do authors get a cut?

Not exactly. Some say the rules of the physical world apply in the virtual market as well. That is, it's all about the contract between the author and the publisher. As things stand now, it's highly unlikely that the author gets a slice of second-hand sales.

It's getting complicated.

Well, most publishers are worried. They say: Who will buy a book at full price when a fortnight later everyone else can buy it cheaper? Their fear: Those who create content might see their work devalued, just as they did when Amazon began selling used books over a decade ago. They have reason to worry given that the global ebook market is now valued at \$14.5 billion and may reach over \$22 billion by 2017.

A weekly column that helps you ask the right questions

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated January 8, 2015)

NONRESIDENT INDIANS

STATESMAN, JAN 9, 2015

Explore the possibilities in our country, Modi tells Indian diaspora

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today rolled out the red carpet for the Indian diaspora to seize the new opportunities waiting for them in what he called a 'new' India.

Delivering the inaugural address at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) summit at the sprawling Mahatma Mandir here this afternoon, Mr Modi reminded the 4000-odd non-resident Indians (NRIs) that in earlier days Indians had travelled overseas to explore opportunities or to seek higher education.

But that is no longer the case as opportunities in India have opened up, said Mr Modi urging the diaspora to explore the possibilities which have arisen in the country of their origin.

This year's Pravasi Bharatiya Divas marks the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's return from South Africa to India following which he led the freedom struggle.

Invoking the Mahatma on the occasion, the Prime Minister said that Gandhiji's ideals have now spread all across the world.

Mr Modi added that Mahatma Gandhi's ideas are still relevant in modern times. Eulogising the Indian diaspora's tendency to remain rooted to their motherland, Mr Modi said that NRIs feel very happy if another Indian comes to stay in the neighbourhood. He, however, remained silent on the practice in his home state of creating a ruckus if a Muslim family tries to purchase a house in a posh locality.

The Prime Minister termed the Indian diaspora spread over 200 countries as an asset for their motherland. Referring to India's growing stature at the global stage, Mr Modi said that as many as 177 nations had supported the demand at the United Nations to declare a World Yoga Day.

The Prime Minister claimed that his government has fulfilled the promise of easing the travel restrictions of the People of Indian Origin (PIO) card holders who would now get life time visas to visit India. The PIOs would no longer need to visit the police stations every week, Mr Modi announced.

In his bid to rope in the Indian diaspora in cleansing the Ganga river, the Prime Minister said that the NRIs can help from multiple angles as it is linked to various aspects like growth, environment, rural development as well as reconnect to cultural roots back in their country of origin.

The chief guest at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Guyanese President Donald R Ramotar

declared his country's support to India for a permanent seat in the United Nation's Security Council (UNSC).

Other dignitaries who spoke at the inaugural function included South Africa's International Relations Minister Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and IT and Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and Gujarat Chief Minister Anandiben Patel.

Earlier, the PM inaugurated a permanent museum chronicling the life and times of Mahatma Gandhi.

POLITICAL PARTIES

INDIAN EXPRESS, JAN 13, 2015

Party planning

Written by [Gul Panag](#)

In a country where political awareness and interest levels are at new highs, there is a simple question that few, including the highly educated, have asked: How do political parties actually raise funds to fight elections?

At the root of that simple question lies the answer to many of our complex social, economic, political, governance and moral problems. Our public discourse on electoral spending, if any, is restricted to each candidate's official limit on expenditure during the campaign. Though there are problems with that limit — and it is often blatantly violated by candidates of major political parties — it deflects our attention from the more important question of electoral funding of political parties, and how those funds, both declared and undeclared, are raised.

As organisations like the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) have repeatedly shown, none of the major parties is transparent about raising funds. They have tried hard to avoid being covered by the RTI and have taken advantage of the loopholes in donor-list declaration rules to avoid scrutiny. An amount of less than Rs 20,000 received by a party does not require the identity of the donor. According to the ADR, which analysed data from contribution statements submitted by these parties to the Election Commission and their tax returns, such unnamed benefactors accounted for three-quarters of the funds collected by the Congress, BJP, BSP, NCP, CPI and CPM between 2004 and 2012.

Despite this loophole, major political parties still deal in large sums of unaccounted money in cash. According to newspaper reports, in December 2008, Rs 2.6 crore in cash was stolen from the office of the national treasurer of the BJP. In her column soon after, Tavleen Singh noted that instead of asking the police to investigate the matter, the party hired a private detective to look into the theft. The matter was soon buried and we haven't even heard about it since. Singh was disappointed by the response of then party president Rajnath Singh and party spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad. Both are senior Union cabinet ministers now.

It is not that the Congress is any better. In the run-up to the recent Maharashtra polls, a newspaper reported that a huge amount of cash, at least Rs 10 crore, which was part of the party's war chest for the Maharashtra poll campaign, was stolen from a flat in Prabhadevi. Not many observers believe the denial of the party leaders and considering that it was again unaccounted funds, there is no chance of a police complaint being filed.

Why do parties need this unaccounted cash? It is this cash that sustains the "petrol allowance" for workers, daily wages of party workers, free gifts for voters, money given to those brought to rallies and public processions, "paid news" and other undeclared electoral practices.

From my own experience as a candidate of the Aam Aadmi Party from Chandigarh during the recent Lok Sabha elections, I can vouch that it is possible to have a completely transparent election account. Before joining active politics, I also mistakenly believed that without “lots of money”, you can’t fight an election. The limit set by the EC on candidate spending, even for someone from a smaller party, is sufficient to run an honest and effective campaign. (While candidate expenditure is restricted and somewhat regulated, spending by the party in a constituency is neither regulated nor has a limit. This gives bigger and richer parties a huge advantage over others.) Further, raising campaign funds honestly and transparently is possible. My campaign was run on the money we raised openly.

Transparent fundraising is a sine qua non if we expect our representatives to remain honest during the course of their political life. Because anyone who invests all her savings or unaccounted money from “friends” in an election will eventually need to recover it for a “return on investment”. The seeds of corruption in political life are sown right there.

In an address in Mumbai last year, RBI governor Raghuram Rajan explained the vicious cycle perpetuated by this unaccounted money: “The crooked politician needs the businessman to provide the funds that allow him to supply patronage to the poor and fight elections. The corrupt businessman needs the crooked politician to get public resources and contracts cheaply. And the politician needs the votes of the poor and the underprivileged. Every constituency is tied to the other in a cycle of dependence, which ensures that the status quo prevails.” The AAP has tried to break this vicious cycle by being transparent about its fundraising. The details of every single rupee raised by the party are available in the public domain. It has also tried innovative methods, like paid seats at dinner meetings and tea with party leaders. At one such meeting last year, Arvind Kejriwal raised Rs 91 lakh from donors. When the party took this initiative to raise funds before the Lok Sabha elections, it was criticised by the Congress. Even today, instead of following this transparent model of political fundraising, other parties avoid this question altogether and seek refuge in critiquing the innovative fundraising methods used by the AAP.

The answer perhaps lies in the EC creating better institutional benchmarks. We can take a cue from the way political funding is approached in the US, for instance — where campaign strength hinges on who raises more money — but at least everyone knows the source of those funds. Whether the donation is for Rs 100 or Rs 20,000, it needs to be accounted for. Why should only donations above Rs 20,000 be entered in the books? The BJP is yet to submit its donations report for 2013-14 to the EC, despite the submission deadline being October 31, 2014. The list submitted by the Congress doesn’t have the PAN details of its donors. These parties should be penalised for blatant violation of rules.

Given the heightened public interest in our polity, the time has come to educate the voter about election spending and fundraising. Media and civil society can play a part, but the lead will have to be taken by the parties themselves. Let us hope parties will initiate this process on their own. Because if they don’t, the Indian voter will not forgive them.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

DECCAN HERALD, JAN 9, 2015

PM congratulates Sirisena on poll victory

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today called up Maithripala Sirisena to congratulate him on his victory in the Sri Lankan polls and assured him of India's continued solidarity and support to the country's peace and development.

"I spoke to Shri Maithripala Sirisena and congratulated him. I congratulate the people of Sri Lanka on the peaceful and democratic poll process," he said.

"As a close friend and neighbour, reaffirmed India's continued solidarity and support for Sri Lanka's peace, development and prosperity," the Prime Minister said.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa today conceded defeat in Sri Lanka's tightest-ever presidential race, with cumulative results showing opposition candidate Sirisena ahead. With final result yet to be declared, Sirisena is expected to be declared winner by around 4,00,000 votes.

Sri Lankans had yesterday voted in large numbers in the bitterly contested presidential election in the biggest political shake-up in over a decade.

POSTAL SERVICES

BUSINESS LINE, JAN 15, 2015

Reinventing India Post

Corporatisation can transform the postal service from a legacy institution to a modern, multi-service agency

The government has, in the past, often tended to hold India Post — the world’s largest postal network — to account on commercial performance parameters, while at the same time utilising its vast network to push its various social objectives. This is somewhat unfair, since India Post has demonstrated that, given the opportunity, it is more than capable of meeting the most exacting expectations of even global players. It has emerged as one of the leading logistics partners for India’s explosively growing e-commerce sector, while at the same time ensuring last-mile delivery of an array of government services, ranging from benefit transfers under NREGS to old age pensions and health insurance for the poor. This is why the proposed corporatisation of India Post is a welcome development, since it will provide a measure of autonomy to the commercial arms of the department. The plan envisages setting up a holding company under which five independent entities will look after different aspects of the postal department’s operations including separate companies for banking and insurance. This will enable greater focus on individual businesses. In particular, the reach and trust the postal network in India commands make it an ideal candidate for a bank licence.

But a universal bank licence, that permits a post bank to do lending operations, may not be the ideal option. For one, it will entail an infusion of a minimum Rs. 500 crore as capital followed by periodical infusions (given Basel III requirements) as the bank starts growing. This will be an unnecessary strain on an already burdened exchequer. Second, such a post bank will have to diversify and build new skills in credit appraisal and risk management, a costly and time-consuming exercise. Third, the *raison d’être* for another public sector bank in this space is not compelling — especially when some of them are struggling with existential issues. The department must instead seize the opportunity to go in for a payments bank licence. This will not involve lending, but will nevertheless help leverage its impressive network of over 1.55 lakh offices (much higher than the banking system’s 1.05 lakh offices). Most of these post offices are in rural areas and are therefore perfect vehicles to operate remittance services that are gaining traction as India’s urban migration grows. The trust, local knowledge and reach that the postman commands constitute the core competency for such a bank.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hinted at these strengths while tweeting that the “postman along with a teacher is the most respected government employee in rural areas”. Incidentally, the savings bank accounts offered by post offices already have deposits of over Rs. 6 lakh crore, second only to the State Bank of India. Financial inclusion has been the lodestar by which the government wants to steer the financial system. The commercial bank system has been pushed and stretched to its limit by mandates and incentives to take banking to the poor. It’s time to try other alternatives.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 14, 2015

Government to identify bottlenecks in good governance initiatives

A consultant would be engaged to conduct the research. The agency will complete the study within six months and come out with a final report

NEW DELHI: The [Narendra Modi government](#) has decided to conduct a study to assess impact and bottlenecks in the implementation of good governance initiatives and best practices being followed in the states and at the Centre.

A consultant would be engaged to conduct the research. The agency will complete the study within six months and come out with a final report.

The study will identify the gaps in implementation of the good governance initiatives and provide practical suggestions for its removal. It will also evaluate the sustainability, scalability and replicability of the initiatives being taken in a particular state to other parts of the country, government officials said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had in July last year launched a website 'mygov.in' to help citizens contribute in governance by giving their opinions and views on important issues like clean Ganga, clean India, skill development, job creation and girl child education among others.

The Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions has decided to engage a consultant to conduct research and evaluation study on good governance initiatives, they said.

The consultant, which can be an institution or organisation of repute, will be engaged to understand the impact, utility and user satisfaction of good governance initiatives and will assist in developing a model practice by improving the good governance initiatives and incorporating technical advancement, changed requirement of people, etc for possible replication in states, the officials said.

The selected agency will carry out a comprehensive and critical review of the good governance initiatives to analyse its tangible and intangible benefits and their overall socio-economic impact, they said.

"The agency should also have a minimum annual turnover of Rs 2 crore from research, survey, consultancy services during the last three years preceding the current financial years," said the expression of interest document issued by the Personnel Ministry.

STATESMAN, JAN 8, 2015

PM's Good Governance: I-T dept to hold public meets every Wed

New Delhi, 07 January: The Income Tax department will hold public meetings every Wednesday to resolve taxpayers grievances and tax issues as part of the 'Good Governance' initiative mooted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes, the apex policy making body of the I-T department, has issued latest instructions in this regard under which senior officials of the department across the country have been tasked to meet taxpayers between 10 am-1pm on one day in a week, without prior appointment.

“As a part of Prime Minister's 'Good Governance Day' promise to provide an open and accountable administration it has been decided that all field offices of the I-T department will observe 'public meeting day' during 10am to 1pm every Wednesday to listen to and try to resolve the grievances of the members of the public,” the CBDT wrote in its 6 December circular to all Principal Chief Commissioners and Directors General of I-T across the country.

It added that the “heads of local Income Tax offices will not fix any official meeting on Wednesday's during the hours prescribed for interaction with the public and will ensure that their staff including staff at the reception and security personnel are suitably instructed to allow the members of the public to meet the officers without prior appointment.”

The CBDT has asked the top officers of each I-T zone to also keep a record of grievances attended to and solved during these sessions and apprise the CBDT in this regard every month.

It also asked the I-T field formations to “identify the deficiencies (with regard to solving public grievances) with a view to suggesting systemic changes required to avoid recurrence of delays in redressal of grievances.”

A senior official said only those Wednesday's, on which a public holiday falls, will be exempted from this exercise as the offices remain closed on these days and the administrative staff is on leave.

BUSINESS STANDARD, JAN 8, 2015

Rachit Ranjan & Shoikat Roy: Finding a number for 'good' governance

Define good governance in the Indian context, and then build an index

Rachit Ranjan & Shoikat Roy

The recent elections saw the emergence of an aspirational class exercising their franchise in an unprecedented manner. The electorate put its faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an attempt to prevent the moral and operational decay of India's governing institutions.

Following Modi's election, political discourse has been dominated by talk of good governance. The term occupies such a hallowed position that we have christened (pun-

intended) "Good [Governance Day](#)." However, notwithstanding the wisdom of the Indian electorate, there has been something amiss amid all this rhetoric. While it is possible to meaningfully and objectively evaluate a claim of Kerala being better developed than Bihar; on what grounds can one evaluate the claim that governance in Gujarat is objectively better than governance in Maharashtra? A prerequisite to make good governance the benchmark of an effective government is a mechanism to evaluate and assess the same. Previous attempts by government agencies have resulted in incomplete or discarded projects. This shifts the onus upon [private institutions](#) and [civil society](#) organisations. India must have a system that introduces accountability and allows the public to evaluate the claims of good governance on the basis of evidence and not mere rhetoric. Given this backdrop, there is a dire need to establish a governance index for Indian states. Such a tool will create a ranking system that gives poor performance little chance to hide, while simultaneously encouraging constructive competition and empowering civil society to hold their governments to account.

The development of a governance index for Indian states is not limited to reasons of accountability alone. Tying assistance to good governance conditionalities is imperative. For example, the Millennium Challenge Corporation determines US foreign aid contributions based purely on governance improvements of poor countries, completely divorced from political compulsions. In a similar vein, a certain amount of central assistance in India could be conditioned on the governance performance of states. In this scenario, the political futures and revenue sources of leaders and governments becomes dependent on their governance performance.

Furthermore, the establishment of a comprehensive data set and index of governance will effect informed academic research and help develop more robust theory drawing links between governance and development, lack of governance and conflict and so on. It can also be used to question policy; asking how two states with similar human and natural resources end up with very different levels of security and development.

The debate over the need for a composite governance index has many parallels to the Sen-Haq debate prior to the development of the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI). [Amartya Sen](#) thought that capturing a concept as complex as human development in a single number was a "crude" and "vulgar" idea. However, Mahbub ul Haq convinced Sen of the merits of a composite index that would give policymakers the ability to fall back on a statistic that was more accessible and easier to understand and convey. The simplicity of a ranking system, in other words, is the defining characteristic that makes it a powerful tool that is easily accessed, digested, and understood by ordinary citizens to hold their governments to account. This is fundamentally the reason that ranked indices such as the HDI, Ease of Doing Business, Corruption Perceptions Index and so on gain front-page traction in media outlets in India and across the world; and thus become better tools of accountability, while World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators fail to achieve this level of outreach.

However, before quantitatively evaluating good governance, one has to conceptualise what good governance means. Some global indices measure governance by the outcomes

it produces - indicators of health, education, infrastructural development and so on. This is problematic, as it equates governance with development and thus makes the link between governance and development tautological. It also ignores, for example, the fact that the development of the health sector and the under-five mortality rate is not exclusively determined by public governance; but is often a result of a complex interplay of societal structure, citizen actions, private sector performance and public sector efforts.

Thus, there is an urgent need to focus on governance as the interplay of institutions, processes and mechanisms as opposed to development outcomes. It is necessary to think about not just what good governance achieves but particularly on how good governance works and who it works for.

While acknowledging that institutional processes and mechanisms have legitimate reason for contextual variation, governance in the Indian context must acknowledge the normative constructs that are already deeply embedded in the Indian polity - transparency, decentralisation, human rights and other normative dimensions of democracy cannot be ignored because of the intrinsic value that the Indian polity has already ascribed to them. Any effort to build a governance index must also take into account other factors unique to the Indian context - the efficiency of the bureaucracy, federalism and devolution of power through Panchayati Raj, special interest capture, autonomy and independence of institutions, minority representation and so on.

Academics, policymakers and other key stakeholders must enter into a comprehensive dialogue to debate and define governance in the Indian context before commencing a substantive home-grown project to build upon existing literature, gather data and design an index. Unless we develop a rigorous method to quantify the quality of governance and hold government and politicians to account, the clarion call for good governance is doomed to failure.

PUBLIC UTILITIES

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 12, 2015

Maharashtra government drafts law to provide time-bound services to people

MUMBAI: For time-bound delivery of [services](#) to citizens, the [Maharashtra Government](#) has drafted a [legislation](#), under which its officials could face a penalty of up to Rs 5,000 if they fail to provide services to citizens within a designated time.

The draft of the 'Right to Services Act' prepared by the state government's General Administration department (GAD), says that officials of zilla parishads, panchayat samitis and gram panchayats, municipal councils, municipal corporations, nagar panchayats, planning authorities, industrial townships will come under the purview of this Act.

"Once the Act comes into existence, it would cost government employees dearly if licences, ration cards, birth- death certificates, caste validation certificates, etc are not given to citizens within a stipulated time," a GAD official said.

It said the specified time will start from the date when the required [application](#) for a service is submitted to the designated officer or to a person subordinate to him authorised to receive the application.

The application will have to be duly acknowledged to the applicant in writing or through electronic means or [SMS](#), specifying date, time, place, unique complaint number, particulars of receiver of complaint along with stipulated disposal time frame.

"Every designated officer or his subordinate public servant who fails to deliver the citizen related services to a citizen within the stipulated time shall be liable to pay compensatory cost," the draft states.

RAILWAYS

TIMES OF INDIA, JAN 15, 2015

Railways starts first train that chugs on CNG

NEW DELHI: In significant step towards adopting green fuel, the railways have launched their first CNG train. Railway minister Suresh Prabhu flagged off the train, run on dual fuel system — diesel and CNG — on the Rewari-Rohtak section of northern zone.

An official said introduction of CNG trains will reduce greenhouse gas emission and also cut the transporter's fuel bill by reducing consumption of diesel.

The minister, who has opened a separate environment directorate in the railway board, has stressed on the use of alternative fuel, including use of solar and wind power, to reduce dependence on conventional energy.

The railways have modified the 1,400 HP engine to run on dual fuel - diesel and CNG - through fumigation technology.

The passenger train would consume over 20% of CNG, covering a distance of 81km in about two hours.

"Gradually, CNG usage will be increased to around 50%. Currently, test trials are being conducted for increased usage of CNG," said an official.

A senior official said there are plans to run more such CNG trains to reduce diesel consumption.

The move is not only a significant step towards reducing the carbon footprint of the railways, but it will also provide capacity to use a cheaper alternative fuel source in future.

The train comprising of two power cars and six car coaches has been manufactured by the Integral Coach Factory at Chennai with the CNG conversion kit being supplied by Cummins.

Development of a CNG conversion technology, which will permit utilization of over 60% CNG, is also under way, he said, adding, "Switchover to LNG technology is also being planned as that will enable higher fuel carrying capacity."

BUSINESS STANDARD, JAN 8, 2015

Railways to use stations for skill development of youth

Prabhu to meet minister concerned to develop a mechanism for implementing the plan

After crying foul for years over its social service obligations, including running uneconomical lines, the Indian [Railways](#) is trying to develop a new social face under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government.

Minister [Suresh Prabhu](#) is working on a plan to utilise unused infrastructure at the Railways' 8,000 stations across the country, to impart skill development training to unemployed youth, particularly in rural and far-flung areas. Also, the ministry plans to use the vast railway network as a tool to market products made by self-help groups and tribal people across the country.

The announcements come soon after a few customer-centric initiatives like introduction of mobile ticketing and Wi-Fi internet services, apart from a focus on cleanliness.

“Indian Railways has around 8,000 stations. The premises of some of the stations with very few trains and scanty footfall could be used for skill development activities,” Prabhu said while addressing a media gathering here, adding he would soon meet Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development Rajiv Pratap Rudy to develop a mechanism for implementing the plan.

He was speaking at a book release function also attended by Dilip Chenoy, managing director and chief executive of National Skill Development Corporation; N K Maini, deputy managing director of Small Industries Development Bank of India (Sidbi); H R Dave, deputy managing director of Nabard; and Chandrajit Banerjee, director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Indian Railways has tried to project its “public face” under different ministers in the past as well. The earlier approach, however, focused on announcing no rises in passenger fares or freight rates, introduction of new trains and expansion of metro services. The obligation to provide cheaper services — including coaching services and transportation of essential commodities below cost — has an annual impact of Rs 29,000 crore on Indian Railways.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has on several occasions laid stress on skill development as a key area of focus for his government. Referring to the Konkani cuisine restaurant “Konkan Swaad Katta”, set up recently at Konkani Railway's Ratnagiri station, Prabhu said such initiatives would encourage traditional businesses and help financially empower locals. The minister also referred to the “huge marketing potential” of the railway company, Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), and announced starting a pilot project to sell rural products through the [IRCTC](#) website, visited by 500,000 people a day.

SMOKING

STATESMAN, JAN 14, 2015

`1000 fine likely for smoking in public places

New Delhi, 13 January: Brushing aside opposition, the government today moved to amend the anti-smoking law and proposed radical changes, including ban on sale of loose cigarettes and raising the minimum age of a person buying tobacco products to 21 years from existing 18.

It has proposed raising of fine to Rs 1000 from Rs 200 on smoking in public places as well as recommending removal of designated smoking zones in hotels and restaurants.

These are some of the recommendations in the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) (Amendment) Bill 2015, which were put out by Health Ministry.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

STATESMAN, JAN 12, 2015

A different kind of socialist

Nirmalendu Bikash Rakshit

Though a monk, Swami Vivekananda was well-acquainted with the various branches of Social Science such as Economics, Political Science, History, Sociology and so on. This extensive study implanted in him a deep faith in socialism. He realised that the emancipation of the toiling masses badly required the establishment of socialism in every country.

Moreover, Ramakrishna Deva, his guru, had taught him to serve the people, because in his view service to the suffering humanity was actually service to God.

“Compassion for creatures! Thou fool! Who art you to show compassion to others! No, it cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man, recognising him to be the veritable manifestation of God,” Ramakrishna once admonished Vivekananda (Swami Tejasananda - A Short Life of Swami Vivekananda, p. 18). Again, when he prayed for 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi', his Guru sternly rebuked him for his selfishness and asked him to feel and work for the suffering masses.

It was a great lesson for the young Vivekananda who realised that mere meditation was not the job of a Sannyasin ~ his duty was to feel and work for the suffering humanity, to serve God by serving the poor people, who, as the victims of socio-economic disorder, led the most wretched lives.

After the untimely demise of his Guru, he as a monk travelled extensively throughout South India where he came across thousands of starving people. At that time he realised that abject poverty and undue plenty co-existed in the society due to an ill-organised political system (DS Sharma - The Master And The Disciple, p. 64). Whenever he found the half-fed and half-naked people, it spurred him to search for a lasting remedy. He soon realised that the existing system rested on the exploitation of the many by the few and that such inequality and injustice must be put to an end by accepting a different social order. As Dr Biman Behari Majumdar has observed, “Political democracy of the Western pattern did not appeal to him much” (Militant Nationalism In India, p. 38). Swamiji admitted that it conferred a right to vote on all ~ but this political equality was meaningless, because a gross inequality in the economic field persisted in the society. In his view, such a system presented the pre-dominance of some greedy people “who in the name of politics rob others and fatten themselves by sucking the very life-blood of the masses.”

Swamiji held that such exploitation is the ugliest curse of the prevailing system. As he wrote: “One tilled the ground, a second guarded the produce from being robbed, a third

took it to another place and a fourth bought it. The cultivators got almost nothing. He who guarded the produce took away as much of it as he could by force, the merchant who brought it to the market took the lion's share, and the buyer had to pay out of all proportion for the things and smarted under the burden! The protector came to be known as the King; he who took the commodities from one place to another was the merchant. These two did not produce anything, but still snatched away the best part of things and made themselves fat by virtually reaping most of the fruits of the cultivator's toil and labour. The poor fellow who produced all these had often to go without his meals and cry to God for help' (Complete Works, Vol. V. p. 514). He also subscribed to the Marxian view that the rich were growing richer and the poor poorer in the present system of things.

His motto that was "the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread." He exclaimed, "More bread, more opportunity for everybody." He felt that the root of all evils was the condition of the poor - "but it is they who, from the time immemorial, have been working silently, without even getting the remuneration of their labours." But, according to him, it could not continue for all times to come. In his view, we must accept socialism in order to bring about liberty, justice and equality in the socio-economic system.

Of course, it is difficult to define socialism in a simple way. As CD Burns puts it, "Socialist ideal is a sentiment so obviously common to many who are not professed Socialists and not in the programme of any socialist party". Moreover, socialism is differently described by the communists, syndicalists, guild socialists and State-Socialists. This is why CEM Joad has observed, "Socialism is like a hat which has lost its shape, because everybody wears it". But, simply speaking, it implies the ownership of the means of production by the society as a whole and an equitable distribution of the produce. As RG Gettell points out, it, in short, means that the "instruments of production should be owned and operated and their products distributed by the organised community".

Swamiji advocated socialism in this distinct sense. As Dr RC Majumder has written, Swami Vivekananda "cried for food for the hungry millions, social justice for the low classes, strength and energy for the emasculated people".

He wanted that a new India should come out of the huts of the poor weavers, barbars, peasants, workers, and fishermen. With a prophetic view, he declared that the age of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas is passing away and that according to historical law the Sudra-age would eventually come up. By Sudra-era, he meant the triumph of Socialism. He declared, "I am a socialist."

Marie Louise Burk has observed that during his stay in America, Swamiji eagerly met

with the workers and sought to know their problems. He predicted that socialism would emerge for the first time in either Russia or China.

But it must be noted that he did not regard it as the socio-economic panacea. He actually pleaded for it because “half a loaf is better than no loaf.” He candidly opined that if the wisdom of the Brahmin-age, courage of the Kshatriya-age, plenty of the Vaishya-age and labour of the Sudra-age could be combined together, it would be the best form of society., Thus, in his view socialism was the beginning, and not the end of our journey towards prosperity, justice and peace.

Secondly, he did not prescribe a particular pattern or form of socialism. In fact, he thought that it should be shaped in accordance with the culture, history and tradition of each country. In other words, while the crux would be the same, its form should obviously be different for different people.

Thirdly, communism, a form of socialism, tends to destroy personal liberty. But he was a strong supporter of freedom of mind and he firmly advocated for all-round liberty and development of the human person. In this way, he accepted an important aspect of Western Individualism.

Thus, Swamiji was a socialist thinker of a different type. He wonderfully mixed up the political concept of socialism with Indian Spiritualism which has preached divinity in man, individual’s duty towards society and eternal love for all.

The actual origins of this socialism lie in the Gita, the Upanishads and the Vedas. It is socialism preached by a benevolent monk, and not by a political scientist.

STATE SECURITY

HINDUSTAN TIMES, JAN 14, 2015

Intelligence restructuring: Govt to raise a new cadre of spies

Saikat Datta

The government is working on a concept paper to raise a new cadre of spies, the first attempt at restructuring the security architecture since 1968, when the external intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) was carved out of the Intelligence Bureau (IB).

Government sources told HT that the idea was mooted by National Security Adviser AK Doval after discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Department of Personnel and Training was initially tasked with writing the policy paper but it has now been shifted to the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) that is directly under the Prime Minister's Office.

“The work is at a preliminary stage but we are examining the feasibility of a specialist service that will feed all three intelligence agencies,” a source familiar with the draft told HT.

The idea to have a dedicated cadre has been borrowed from Western countries like the US, where the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency draw their resources directly from the open market. The Secret Intelligence Service, popularly known as the MI6, in the UK, also recruits talent from the open market. These agencies pick up recruits with special skills and expertise to ensure they have the best talent.

The government is hoping the new cadre will help deal with the challenges technology is posing to the current crop of intelligence officials. After the terrorist attack on Mumbai on 26/11 Indian intelligence agencies have been looking at ways to deal with technological challenges. From working on cyber security to analysing big data, are some of the challenges that they have grappled with to keep up with its counter terrorism efforts.

Clearly, the NSCS has its task cut out, as recruitment has been a prickly subject for the Indian intelligence community.

Ram Nath Kao created the R&AW with the support of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi to raise a new cadre of spies drawn from the government and the open market, a pool of the best talent available. His vision produced the Research and Analysis Service (RAS) that began to staff R&AW but was in constant turf battles with other services.

“It was noticed that those being drawn in from other services like the Indian Police Service (IPS) would have an option of going back to their parent cadres. But the RAS had

no such option and this created anomalies in career progression,” a former R&AW chief told HT.

IPS officers make up the top ranks of the agency, but those who are recruited directly retire at junior ranks. The last time the R&AW had a non-IPS chief was in 2003, when Vikram Sood, originally from the postal service, retired.

The move has expectedly raised eyebrows, particularly among the intelligence professionals who are from the police service, but have the support of those who joined the service directly. The IPS has traditionally enjoyed a dominant position in the Indian intelligence community. Chances are that the biggest opposition to this move is likely to come from these quarters.

“There is a significant difference between policing and intelligence and it is time we embraced a more plural character within the intelligence community,” a senior security official said.

WASTES

HINDUSTAN TIMES, JAN 14, 2015

Rs 5000 fine for throwing waste in Yamuna

In order to revive 1,376 km long Yamuna, the green tribunal on Tuesday cracked the whip and issued a slew of directions including a fine of Rs. 5,000 on those found throwing religious and other waste into the river and of Rs. 50,000 for dumping debris in the river flood plain.

A bench headed by National Green Tribunal chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar also banned any new construction of any type in the flood plain area under its “Mailey se Nirmal Yamuna Revitalization plan 2017.”

The tribunal while hearing a petition filed by Manoj Mishra of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan also asked the authorities to revisit the existing construction in the flood plain area, which has shrunk because of encroachments in the last two decades or so.

Some of the capital’s unauthorised colonies have come up in the river flood-plain of 97 sq km in Delhi and its future remains uncertain with today’s NGT order. “Only cultural and heritage structures should be allowed,” Mishra said, quoting the tribunal order read out in the court on Tuesday.

The tribunal also accepted recommendations of two panels set up by it and constituted a new panel headed by Special Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forest having representatives from different authorities in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand to monitor implementation of its order and ensure minimum flow of water to sustain aquatic life in the river.

The Central Pollution Control Board in an affidavit in Supreme Court last week had said Yamuna was as polluted as it was over a decade ago implying that hundreds of crores of rupees spent by the government has not resulted in revival of the river.

“It is indeed a comprehensive judgment and we welcome it in totality. We look forward to NGT’s Yamuna restoration plan under ‘Mailey se Nirmal Yamuna Revitalisation Plan 2017’. This judgement will have impact on other states as well. We will continue to push for implementation of this judgement,” Mishra said.

In January, 2013, NGT had banned dumping of debris including construction material into Yamuna and had directed the states of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh to remove the rubble immediately.

?In another order, the NGT pulled up the Uttar Pradesh government for failing to file a status report on its direction to ban dumping of debris on Yamuna and Hindon river flood-plains, while asking the state government to submit a report by January 30.

YOUTH

TELEGRAPH, JAN 9, 2015

Crest of a revolution

Youthful minds are the key to India's transformation

Commentarao - S.L. Rao

The world has changed dramatically in 20 years. Policymakers in all fields have to recognize the changes and their implications. Economic transformation is significant, with Europe and Russia in decline, Japan struggling, the United States of America appearing to be weathering it, China hiccuping and India unable to achieve potential. But other changes are fundamental.

Jeremy Rifkin, in *The Third Industrial Revolution*, forecasts a more self-sufficient society. Households will produce their energy requirements. There will be more collaboration globally than battles to be better. The communications revolution, declining pollution and self-sufficient local communities will be some features.

In the last 25 years the transformation in communications is akin in its effects to the impacts of the railway networks on India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They unified India and enabled national integration. Labour moved to places where better employment was available. Goods moved over long distances quickly, creating national product markets. Coalfields in Bihar fed steel plants in Visakhapatnam and power plants far away. Resources moved from resource rich to resource poor locations. Ideas also moved, breeding an "Indian" culture and ethos.

The communications revolution of recent years has made India soar to the position of having among the highest telephone densities in the world, at lower call rates than most countries. Telephones are used by all - the rich and the very poor, the illiterate and the educated, urban and rural residents, crossing barriers of age, gender, religion or caste. The internet has made information accessible easily to all. The email enables almost instant communication. Salman Rushdie wrote how his book, *The Moor's Last Sigh* was better written than his earlier books. He could move back and forth, correcting, adding and deleting while writing, without waiting for drafts from the typist. Courier services have speeded up the physical delivery of documents, packages and bulk mail.

India is also in a demographic revolution. We are among the most youthful nations. Our young people accept change in lifestyles, work, dress, food, governance, politics and in other fields. There is growing impatience with old attitudes and the slow pace of change. There is a willingness to try new ideas, policies and professions. Alongside, there is also growing extremism in religious and social beliefs.

Rapid urbanization has made economic differences overwhelm social barriers of caste. The role of women in society is changing, slowly but inexorably there is a change in the attitudes to women's place in society. Our workforce is huge, and wages lower than international standards. Our workers have the ability to learn new skills easily. A

youthful population can be a boon only with an explosion in education at all levels, with expanded faculty numbers, rising quality, and remuneration. Massive numbers of our youth must get skills development. Online education might be the next big development that will enable this to happen.

The communications revolution has spawned many new industries. These are beyond any barriers. Illiterate parents have children earning undreamt of sums in new professions like software and in old ones like medicine and engineering. Bookshops are shutting down. Circulating libraries, second-hand book sales are replacing new books. New books are increasingly bought and sold on the internet. Hard copies of books are being replaced by e-books that can be bought and read cheaply on the internet. The print media are declining in most countries, as in India now. Newspapers and magazines are losing circulation and advertising revenues. Electronic editions are mostly free, and when charged for, earn much less advertising revenue.

Expensive consumer goods, like electronics items, are chosen and ordered by customers in the comfort of their homes from e-retailers. As e-retailers become more sophisticated, their reliability regarding replacements, warranties and product demonstrations is improving. Brand new shopping malls built over the last decade in many cities and towns are losing footfalls. Their sales are declining. Naukri.com has become the biggest supplier of workers of all kinds at all levels. Team Lease is the biggest supplier of skilled workers on short contracts. Shaadi.com has become the biggest marriage broker portal. An early e-retailer, Makemytrip.com, has become the dominant player in the travel trade. Many old-fashioned travel agents find survival difficult. Even fresh vegetables and fruits, of excellent quality and at competitive prices, can now be ordered from home and delivered in a short time. Each of these e-retailers has many competitors and imitators. The consumer has choices. Retail stores will be part of this e-business.

The same technologies could liberate farmers and small handloom weavers, handicrafts persons, and those in other cottage industries from exploitation by middlemen who keep most of the profit. For example, linking Banaras silk sari weavers in different e-portals and giving them direct access to buyers, with cash payments and vast markets, could solve their hitherto major marketing challenge.

Banking is changing in fundamental ways, with electronic and phone banking. It is bringing vast new numbers of small customers into the banking system, giving them access to cheaper funds than that from money lenders and micro finance institutions. As banks get linked to the Aadhar unique identification of Indians, there can be better targeting and use of social welfare funds. Theft and waste of social expenditures can lessen and the funds' efficacy can improve. Another change is the greater use of specialists - medical practitioners, teachers at all levels in all subjects, public-spirited lawyers and so on. Telemedicine and online education will extend their reach.

Manufacturing is in the throes of a major revolution. New '3-D' technologies enable complex products to be 'copied'. This could decentralize manufacturing. Smaller factories and many locations will make for less commuting by workers. Similar technologies are in

use already for better power conservation, controlled from remote locations by 'smart grids'.

Many thousands have found lucrative local employment with distant employers in the US and elsewhere. Indians now transcribe medical data, keep accounts, find answers to legal issues and so on for these employers. The time difference between the countries is an advantage. Conferencing has become less expensive of time and money as physical presence is replaced by video and holographic images projected over many global locations. An entirely new and rapidly expanding subject for research, development and entrepreneurship, is the "internet of things", developing new internet applications and methods.

The explosion of the social media has transformed political mobilization of volunteers and funds. Narendra Modi used it in the 2014 national elections. The sudden rise of Arvind Kejriwal, the emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party, and the brief national emergence of Anna Hazare, were due to the social media. They pressed the right social buttons.

Many new revolutions are in the offing. One is the wider use of renewable energy. Technologies to store the intermittent wind and solar power exist and are becoming cost effective. Renewable energy is becoming efficient and cheaper. It can reduce dependence of rural communities on the electricity grid. Communities can manage their power generation and local distribution through 'distributed power'. Urban areas can now generate their power requirements using rooftop solar. Apartment buildings, malls, offices, could become energy self-sufficient and even contribute power to the grid. Manufacturing will become decentralized. Services can be controlled online. Public transport like metro rail could become ubiquitous. Roads can be redesigned for use by non-polluting vehicles like bicycles and electric vehicles. Cities will become much cleaner. Large-scale water harvesting could improve water availability and quality.

Policy-makers and managers (corporate, city and town) must understand the technologies and the opportunities, and new methods to distribute and market them. Entrepreneurship will become (as it has done already), the preserve of young people.

India can be transformed by 2050. It demands leaders, administrators, entrepreneurs and others to think differently.

The author is former director-general, National Council of Applied Economic Research