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CIVIL SERVICE

HINDUSTAN TIMES, MAY 4, 2015

IAS officers face renewed fight for 'right' to top jobs

Aloke Tikku

Government wants to look outside for new blood; police, forest and railway officials say they are being overlooked for secretary-level posts. (Illustration by Abhimanyu Sinha)

The Indian Administrative Service (IAS), which mans nearly 90% of the top secretary-level posts, had managed to block a Sixth Pay Commission recommendation to introduce fresh blood into the government from outside the civil services.

But it may have to gear up again for another battle.

This time, the 4,800-strong IAS not only faces the prospect of the Modi government reviving the plan to induct expertise from the industry, academia and society but also counter stinging attacks from other non-IAS central service associations before the seventh pay commission.

At their presentations before the panel, many central services pleaded with the commission to fix the selection procedure for senior ranks at the Centre that had been rigged to give the IAS a clear edge.

This is done through the process of empanelment by a group of secretary-rank officers.

In principle, the empanelment process seeks to create a shortlist of eligible officers evaluated on the basis of their "merit" and "suitability" for serving at the Centre. In practice, it is an opaque glass ceiling.

How else can IAS officers, who account for barely 15% of officers at the director level, end up getting appointed to nearly 75% of the joint secretary posts at the Centre, asked a revenue service officer.

It is a sentiment shared by others as well, right from the two other All India Services, Indian Police Service and the Indian Forest Service as well as Central Group 'A' services including the civil accounts service, central secretariat service and the numerous railway services.

For instance, 1997 batch IAS officers have been empanelled to hold JS-level posts but forest or revenue service officers who are senior to them by seven years are not.

So it wasn't surprising that 91% of non-IAS officers surveyed in the government-commissioned civil services survey in 2010 stressed on the need to make this selection process objective. "This is a matter of serious concern to the officers from central services," the report said.

The same survey also pointed out that a majority of non-IAS officers were not against the plan to induct expertise from the private sector into the government.

"Why should we worry about losing something that we don't have," a police officer said, suggesting that the government should first use the expertise within the system before going on a fishing expedition outside.

BUSINESS LINE, MAY 1, 2015

Kapil Dev Tripathi named petroleum secretary

Kapil Dev Tripathi, an Indian Administrative Officer (IAS) officer of the Assam cadre (1980 batch), has been appointed secretary in the ministry of petroleum and natural gas. Tripathi, earlier secretary in the department of public enterprises, replaces Saurabh Chandra, an Uttar Pradesh cadre IAS officer (1978 batch).

Chandra, who retired on Thursday, was earlier though to be a contender for the post of Cabinet secretary. However, Cabinet Secretary Ajit Seth's term was extended by six months in December; he is to retire on May 12. While Seth was given a year's extension by the United Progressive Alliance government in 2013, its National Democratic Alliance counterpart gave him two extensions.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has also approved the appointment of Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, Union Territory (UT) cadre IAS officer (1980 batch), as secretary in the department of official language, ministry of home affairs. He will replace Nita Choudhury (UP cadre, 1977 batch), who has retired.

Shyam S Agarwal, a Rajasthan cadre IAS officer of the 1980 batch, has been appointed secretary, National Commission for scheduled tribes, ministry of tribal affairs. He replaces R Vijayakumar, a Tamil Nadu cadre IAS (1978 batch). Bihar cadre IAS officer

Narendra Kumar Sinha has been appointed secretary, ministry of culture, replacing Ravindra Singh, who retired on Thursday.

Both Agarwal and Sinha come from cadre postings.

Anoop Kumar Srivastava, an Assam cadre IAS officer of the 1981 batch, has been named secretary (border management), home ministry, replacing Sneh Lata Kumar, who has retired. Srivastava was special secretary, department of social justice and empowerment in the ministry of social justice and empowerment.

Arun Jha, a Bihar cadre IAS officer (1981 batch) has been appointed secretary in the tribal affairs ministry. Jha replaces Hrusikesh Panda, following his superannuation. Earlier, Jha was special secretary, department of administrative reforms and public grievances, ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions.

DISASTERS

STATESMAN, MAY 7, 2015

Disaster aid not just for experts

Robin Low

The recent earthquake in Nepal is a heartbreaking disaster that has left thousands dead and much infrastructure destroyed. There is an international outpouring of aid and funds for Nepal, where the "relief work" is really just left to experts.

I've volunteered for and been to many disaster zones and I must say that most of the calls for volunteers not to go are likely to be misleading. In many disasters, I've seen many untrained people, mainly from Christian organisations, relief organisations and foreign armies in the disaster area, struggling with poor communication between organisations. Coupled with a lack of proper training, the real reason relief efforts are ineffective - and often destructive - is that they are often directed remotely by decision-makers who are off-site, who may not grasp the situation on the ground.

In every disaster, there is always a lack of food, water, medicine and shelter, due to the collapse of infrastructure. Local governments' lack of coordination also hampers aid distribution as the aid would be left at the airport, waiting to clear Customs and immigration, and the process may take a few days, even weeks.

But individuals who go on their own and take luggage bags of supplies can get their aid into the hands of the survivors fast. That, however, has very limited impact as individuals and small groups can never carry enough supplies. In the days to come, as supplies start to roll in and as donations mount, there will be an oversupply of aid due to duplication of efforts by relief organisations. The shelters will have more food than the people can consume, often prepared by untrained volunteers, rather than local cooks.

Even then, there will be people who lack access to food as they cannot reach the shelters due to the destroyed infrastructure. The common excuse given by the relief organisations is that they do not do delivery.

When a relief organisation tells the public not to donate old clothes, it is not that old clothes are not needed on the ground; rather, the organisations do not have the capacity to sort the items. Properly sorted clothes will be used by survivors who do not have access to running water to wash their clothes.

In the aid given by foreign armies or religious organisations, I have seen many boxes of Bibles instead of food, and sometimes the wrong kind of food, for example, pork for a Muslim country.

I do not blame the relief organisations or foreign armies as the management of logistics and delivery of aid to the majority of the survivors is no simple feat. I also understand the fear of "incompetent, well-intentioned dogooders" flooding the country and slowing down aid efforts but, in my experience, aid efforts are already slow due to bureaucracy and the many levels of approval needed to get things done.

It is a myth that actual relief work is the domain of experts or specialised relief organisations. As a relief worker myself, I used to resent people who seemed to work around the boundaries of what relief workers from large organisations can do. I felt that way because I was powerless to act while waiting to clear many levels of approval before reacting to the changing conditions in the field. My eyes were opened during the Japan tsunami. I got to know an untrained Korean girl, who volunteered in my Relief 2.0 team. She paid for her own flight. Even though she could not wake up at 5.30 am to run the errands needed to redistribute fuel, she made a commendable effort to come along when she could and was willing to work in her own ways.

She found a Korean community that required aid. One of the women was pregnant and this Korean girl managed to get help to take her to a hospital. Her act eventually saved the life of the woman and her baby. Later, she connected her with a Korean reporter who, in turn, linked the Korean woman to foreign aid.

Don't get me wrong: I am not encouraging people to go to disaster areas on unplanned personal missions. I would suggest forming a team and understanding your capabilities. As long as you are selfsufficient, there are always errands to run on the ground - errands that save lives.

Sometimes, working as an independent team running the last mile of disaster relief, like Relief 2.0 does, can complement other efforts and meet unmet needs.

Disaster recovery is not a sprint but a marathon. Sadly, as a disaster loses news value and attention wanes, many people and corporations lose interest in the recovery efforts. Yet these are crucial and take time. Giving food to one hungry person is instantly gratifying, but helping a village by enabling businesses to restart and offering employment to locals, takes time and dedicated effort. Economic recovery is essential; without it, survivors will

need continual support. Recovery needs to be sustainable as well. Low-quality housing, like that donated during the aftermath of earthquakes, may prove to be hazardous. Properly planned and executed disaster relief can offer an opportunity to make things better than before the disaster. However, planning for such improvements involves government and often takes years. The writer is co-founder of relief 2.0 and civil Innovation lab. He has been involved in disaster Relief and recovery after the asian tsunami, The haiti earthquake and the japan tsunami. The Straits Times/An

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

HINDU, MAY 1, 2015

Growth: the next steps to be taken

C. RANGARAJAN

The gloom over economic growth appears to have dissipated a bit after the new numbers on National Income were released at the end of January 2015. However, there is continued scepticism about the numbers as several analysts feel that they are not in accord with the ground realities. According to the advanced estimates for 2014-15, the growth rate is projected at 7.4 per cent. What are the prospects for 2015-16? We do not have the data for past years reworked on the new base and the new methodology, and without such a time series it becomes hard to forecast. Perhaps, 2015-16 will be a shade better than 2014-15, if all the positive factors mentioned later come together. However, it will fall short of the Budget expectations of eight per cent.

Favourable factors and uncertainty

What are the favourable factors that can contribute to a better performance of the economy in 2015-16? First and foremost, there is the advantage of low crude oil prices. This will not only reduce the oil import bill and impact favourably on the current account balance, but will also moderate the price increase in general because petroleum products are used in the production of almost every commodity and service. Second, the credit rating agency, Moody's decision to upgrade the outlook to "positive" may facilitate the inflow of capital. Though the recovery of the advanced economies is still tepid, the external environment as far as India is concerned may be benign. On the domestic front, there are signs of a gradual improvement in the investment "sentiment".

Still, there are several unfavourable or uncertain factors, chief among them being the uncertainty about the monsoon. We have not yet seen the full impact of the unseasonal rains of the last few months. The damage to crops has been extensive in several States and the natural consequence will be some pick up in food prices. Initial reports indicate that rainfall this time will be below normal. The impact on production will depend not only on the quantum of rainfall but also on its distribution over time and across States. Even though agriculture contributes only about 15 per cent to the GDP, any shortfall in agricultural production has serious implications. It fuels inflation and human distress is high as more than 50 per cent of the population depends on agriculture. Second, the several initiatives promised in the Budget will have the desired impact only if they are implemented speedily and effectively. For example, take the increased allocation of funds for railways and roads. Are these ministries adequately prepared to utilise these funds? Some of the initiatives such as the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund and Mudra Bank will take time to be set up and for their impact to be felt.

Role of public investment

The Economic Survey has persuasively argued for larger public investment at a time when private investment is yet to pick up. The same point was made by the Report of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister in September 2013, that said: “The focused attention that is being given to achieving the production and capacity creation targets in coal, power, road and railways should generate higher growth. In effect, the public sector would act as the driver of growth and crowd in private sector activities”. It is to be noted that capital expenditures of the Central government in the Budget are not significant. Capital expenditures are also not synonymous with investment. While capital expenditures in 2015-16 show an increase over the revised estimates of 2014-15, as a proportion of GDP, they remain the same as in the Budget estimate of 2014-15, i.e. at 1.7 per cent of GDP. In fact, the bulk of the investment has to come from public sector institutions such as Coal India and the Indian Railways. What is needed is for the government to come out with a statement regarding the quantum of investment that will be made by the various public sector institutions. This should be monitored every quarter and the actual investments made should be made public. Apart from making the government accountable, this will inspire confidence in investors.

The new initiatives

For raising the growth rate, the government relies on many of the initiatives announced in the Budget. Several of them need clarification and refinement. For example, how will the National Investment in Infrastructure Fund operate? Will it take the form of a trust or a non-banking financial company (NBFC)? The word “trust” was used in the Budget speech. The sooner the details are spelled out, the better it will be. Take another idea, of the Mudra Bank. To call the institution a “bank” will be incorrect if it is only to be a refinancing institution. Which are the last mile finance institutions which will be refinanced by this institution? Apparently, this institution will have to rely totally on Budget allocation. The idea of a refinancing institution is good but, once again, the details need to be spelled out. In fact, in this context, perhaps the best way to promote investment in the large-, medium- and small-scale sector is to go back to the days when we had development banks which provided long-term finance to large, medium and small industries. At the national level, the IDBI (Industrial Development Bank of India of that time) played a major role. At the State level, State finance corporations operated to provide long-term finance to medium and small enterprises. The development banks became universal banks and in that process we have lost out on long-term finance. Even the new initiative of allowing commercial banks to raise infrastructure bonds may not be adequate. Very soon, they will reach the limits of exposure with respect to industries and groups. And, it is also difficult to have firewalls separating short term from long-term credit. While the new ideas promoted in the Budget are welcome, it is time to think in terms of creating long-term finance institutions to provide equity and long-term loans to large and medium industries.

‘Stalled’ projects and consensus

The easiest way to achieve higher growth in the short run is to ensure that the projects that are under way are completed in time so that output will flow out of them. India’s investment rate as a proportion of GDP has come down from the peak it had reached in 2007-08. Nevertheless, it is still around 32 per cent. In normal circumstances, this should have given us a growth of 7.5 to 8 per cent. But the actual growth rate was below it. The decline in output growth is sharper than the decline in investment rate. This may be because of the delay in the completion of projects or a lack of complementary investments. In some cases, it can also be due to non-availability of critical inputs such as coal and power. The Economic Survey has examined in detail the causes behind “stalled” projects. The reasons include not only delay in clearances and permits but also decline in demand and lack of finance. The analysis also shows that clearing the top 100 projects by value will address 83 per cent of the problem of stalled projects. Focussed attention on removing the bottlenecks will give one an immediate pay off.

Strong economic growth is imperative as growth is the answer to many of our socio-economic problems. Prospects for a rise in growth rate in the immediate future appear to be bright. This depends critically on implementing, in a time-bound manner, the various initiatives announced in the Budget. Public investment is directly in the hands of the government. A continuous progress report regarding the performance in this area will go a long way in building up confidence. What is needed is a timetable of action. It is important that non-economic factors are not allowed to derail the process of economic growth. Contentious issues must be avoided and consensus building on key economic issues is very much the need of the hour.

(C. Rangarajan is former Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and former Governor, Reserve Bank of India.)

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DECCAN HERALD, MAY 2, 2015

Why must poor sacrifice?

Ashwani Mahajan,

GROWTH ONLY FOR RICH?

There are two schools of thought about development. One school of thought believes in a philosophy of development, whereby the poor is kept in the centre of policy making. A

model of development where the poor gets opportunities to grow; a production system which generates enough employment; and a distribution system where there are least inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth.

If due to some reasons, the poor lag behind or lose their employment and livelihood; then we can think of adopting strategies to reduce inequalities in income, wealth and consumption; by way of government interventions, such as employment generation schemes like the MNREGA, subsidising essential products and services including food grain, education, health, fuel, housing, etc. Amartya Sen has also been advocating these schemes. Sometimes, policy makers, failing in improving the conditions of poor and deprived sections, make use of these schemes as populist measures to garner public support.

Another philosophy of development is influenced purely by capitalist thinking. Proponents of this school of thought argue that the best way to help the poor is to increase investment, which can help increase output, employment and welfare of masses; and increase revenue, which can ultimately be used to finance infrastructure for the development of the economy. If the government has resources, it can be used to subsidise goods and services required by masses.

For those who believe in this model of development, the only measure of development is growth in real GDP. If GDP grows by 8 to 10 per cent, it is a matter of pride for them. They argue that if, in the process, the poor do not get their due share in growth, let them sacrifice today for better future. They argue that benefits of growth will automatically percolate to poor, what they call 'percolation effect'.

Basic characteristics of the economic policy and budgetary policies of the governments of various regimes have been that the burden of taxation on corporate has been gradually declining by way of concessions in corporate income tax, excise duty, custom duty etc. On the other hand, tax burden on the common man has been on the rise. Budget documents every year has a statement, namely, 'Statement of Revenue Foregone', which gives details of such concessions to business and corporate. If we leave out the tax concessions to personal income tax payers, revenue foregone to the benefit of business (mostly corporate) was nearly Rs. 5.5 lakh crore in 2014-15.

It is notable that due to tax concessions to the businesses (mostly corporate), the government is not left with sufficient resources to be spent on the welfare of the poor, the deprived and other weaker sections of the society who need the support of the government the most. This is the reason for the government's inability to raise real allocation on welfare schemes and developmental programmes. Therefore, we can say that it is the poor who are sacrificing to boost growth, whereas businessmen and corporates are enjoying the fruits of growth.

Removing controls

However, those who support economic growth even at the cost of the poor, argue that once growth takes place, its benefits will start accruing to the poor too, sooner or later, as their income, employment and consumption will also get a boost. Basic philosophy behind the model of economic growth adopted in the name of the new economic policy is the same.

This model, which is also called 'Liberalisation Privatisation, Globalisation (LPG)' model, works by way of liberalising industry of controls. Under the new scheme of things, fiscal incentives are given to businesses and companies and public sector enterprises are privatised. Imports are made free from tariff and non-tariff barriers and controls from foreign investments are lifted to facilitate free flow of foreign capital.

Though it is correct that the nation has witnessed spectacular growth in GDP in the last two decades, the benefit of the same has failed to reach the poor. During the 10th and 11th Plans, GDP grew by nearly 8 per cent annually. However, during the same period, unemployment also increased simultaneously and this growth was termed jobless growth.

According to the data published by National Sample Survey Office, during the last 10 years, employment seekers increased by nearly 12 crore, whereas we could provide employment to only 2 crore people (20 lakh annually) during this period. Between 2004-05 and 2009-10, in merely 5 years, 2.5 crore people went out of self-employment and 2.20 crore joined the army of casual labour, which hints at deterioration in quality of employment.

Deprivation of the poor has further worsened. As per Census 2001, 45 per cent of farmers belonging to scheduled tribes reported that they were working on their own land, which declined to 35 per cent in Census 2011; percentage of farmers belonging to scheduled castes working on their own land declined from 20 to 15 per cent during this period, whereas in 2001, 37 per cent workers in rural areas reported themselves to be landless agricultural labourers. In 2011, this number increased to 44.4 per cent. It is notable that pace of poverty reduction has also declined significantly after the adoption of 'LPG' policies.

One can conclude that due to the LPG policy, in the last 25 years, despite the fast rising GDP, the condition of the poor has been worsening; they are losing land and employment (and livelihood). The quality of employment is also going down gradually. Therefore, without denying the importance of GDP growth, the basic question is, why the poor should sacrifice for growth meant only for rich? Why not we make policies where the rich sacrifice for the benefit of poor?

(The writer is Associate Professor, PGDAV College, University of Delhi)

EDUCATION

INDIAN EXPRESS, MAY 7, 2015

DUTA opposes choice-based credits

CBCS is a systematic change which is being pushed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Human Resource Development Ministry without ample discussion.

Staff associations of 53 colleges had submitted their objections to DUTA, citing reasons for rejecting the proposed system.

Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Wednesday unanimously passed a resolution to oppose the introduction of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in the university as it would have "adverse consequences on the quality of teaching, learning and access to higher education".

"CBCS is a systematic change which is being pushed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Human Resource Development Ministry without ample discussion with the primary stakeholders, teachers and students, on the desirability, feasibility and long-term implications of such a change," DUTA president Nandita Narain said.

Staff associations of 53 colleges had submitted their objections to DUTA, citing reasons for rejecting the proposed system. Teachers of Lady Shri Ram College found the "cafeteria approach" in which students can serve themselves the courses they want to study, "unworkable". "With limited infrastructure and faculty strength, CBCS would remain a mere eyewash. Most institutions like ours will have to put a cap on the choice of courses actually offered, just as we had done in the four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP)," the teachers said.

Similarly, College of Vocational Studies also passed a unanimous decision rejecting CBCS on account of the system being “very similar” to the recently rolled-back FYUP and “suffering from the same drawbacks”.

“By dictating the structure and syllabi, the UGC is overstepping its statutory jurisdiction and taking away academic autonomy of universities to frame their own course curriculum and syllabi. CBCS asks universities to perform like factory outlets and teachers to teach in an environment which alienates them from their roles as intellectual mentors,” the resolution stated

TRIBUNE, MAY 5, 2015

Why is it the end of the road for UGC

The bugle has been sounded for the beginning of the end to the University Grants Commission. It remains to be seen whether it will meet the fate of the Yojana Ayog. Can we, instead, have a University Excellence Commission?

Making a difference

Our struggle for designing the universities of tomorrow appears to suffer from several structural fault lines.

We do not need more high-level committees to tell us what is wrong with the idea of universities as a modes vivendi for higher education. In fact we need to institutionalise a robust system to excel.

It requires bringing in dynamic scholar-leaders who could infuse fresh blood in 726 Indian universities. Pur varsities are widely known to lack quality that denies world-class education to the students.

If we are indeed desirous of catching up with best in the world, we need to find genuine scholars of integrity, vision and wider horizons as vice chancellors who are in their late forties. Why could the UGC could not act as a catalyst for creation of knowledge? To meet the challenges of the global digital age, people with vision and multidimensional

skills will be required. Below: A protest outside the UGC office. Innovative processes and flexible institutional structures will help to usher in a knowledge society.

THE report of the three-member University Grants Commission (UGC) Review Committee seems to have sounded the bugle for beginning of the end of UGC as it exists today. The initial reports, quickly denied by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), indicated crystallisation of the Committee's view that UGC cannot be restructured and hence it needs to be scrapped!

The fact that this committee was headed by a former UGC Chairman speaks volumes about manning the UGC without leaving a distinct legacy and still passing a verdict that the entity has not delivered. It appears, MHRD's July 30, 2014 notification did provide a rationale for what was in store. Ironically, after five decades of existence, the UGC has reached a dead-end. If it is now closed, no tears would be shed for its demise. MHRD's own control over the UGC — a statutory body — would be no less responsible than many of the people who headed UGC from time to time.

It remains to be seen if the UGC also meets the fate of the Yojana Ayong, (only to be reborn as a kind of NITI Ayog) or a new futuristic institution emerges from its ashes to meet the challenges of the decrepit Indian university system. The follow up process will not be easy since the UGC Act, 1956 will need to be replaced or amended drastically. The MHRD notification itself underscored that “UGC could have done better”!

The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, has been repeatedly hammering on dismal state of our universities. In his April 10, 2015 convocation address at Mizoram University, the President has again expressed anguish that “We have less to trumpet about the quality of our institutes. None of our institutions are ranked in the top two hundred positions...a vast majority...are mired in mediocrity”. Notwithstanding this, what makes us not to wake up from “slumber” and “inertia”? Why are we facing such an ‘implosive’ situation in spite of our huge untapped potential? Why did the UGC allow the situation to degenerate over the years and could not stem the rot in the system?

Ushering in universities of tomorrow

Barring a few honourable exceptions, both in State-funded as well as private universities, our struggle for designing the universities of tomorrow appears to suffer from several structural fault lines. It has kept most of the universities bogged down to a mundane

existence. Hence, any expectation from the universities to strive for excellence or emerge as “trail blazers for ushering in a high-quality knowledge society” or dream of “attaining the repute of ancient India's citadels of higher learning like Nalanda and Takshashila”, can only remain a utopian goal.

We do not need more high-level committees to tell us what is wrong with the idea of universities as a *modus vivendi* for higher education. In fact we need to institutionalise a robust system to excel. It could include systematic long-term plans for innovative and socially relevant teaching as well as cutting-edge research efforts at individual levels, between departments of each university and through active collaborative interface between the universities. They need to be led by persons who are trail blazers as well as nurtured, valued and provided with enough space to excel.

Creating knowledge first

As the UGC logo proclaims: “Knowledge liberates.” Has UGC been able to live up to essence of its logo? Did it have leadership that strived to institutionalise a culture, structure, process and deep sense of commitment to realise the futuristic symbol? Public institutions like the UGC need to perform statutory obligations, meet expectations of the people and still remain relevant with the changing time. If not, they would be consigned to history.

Even as we await winds of change to blow across the education firmament, what does it take to make the Indian universities world class? The mantra of knowledge first must pervade in all spheres of our system to place us firmly on the long road to excellence. We not only need to learn from our past knowledge tradition but also draw from the best in the world. It would require a lot of concerted efforts over a period of time to overcome mediocrity that has set in, produce the best in a system that otherwise pays lip service to knowledge and does not celebrate scholarship *per se*.

New architecture for excellence

The change that we are seeking must start at the top of the ladder with the President and the Prime Minister taking the lead to regularly interact with scholars and thought leaders. In the past periods of oasis, a scholar-statesman, Dr Radhakrishnan, strode the national scene like a colossus, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru used to host scholars over breakfast meetings and Dr APJ Abdul Kalam challenged scholars in premier institutions

with a call as to “What would you like to be remembered for”? Thus we now need at least open access of scholars to the Prime Minister, irrespective of their location, views and affiliations. A scholarly interface with the Prime Minister would send right signals down the hierarchy to help foster an attitudinal change to respect scholars and give primacy to knowledge in all spheres of national life.

It is time to remove all cobwebs of outdated views and bottlenecks through a robust, organic and futuristic instrumentality tipped with a new National Education Policy. We need to unleash the best talent and allow best scholarly tradition in our universities to flourish. The MHRD needs to loosen control and provide higher education top priority in fund allocations (apart from secondary and tertiary education). The State not only needs to be in the vanguard for educational infrastructure in India but also promote genuine private universities to build centres of excellence across every corner of India. We need to ensure that key positions dealing with the university sector are manned by professionals bereft of political affiliations in ministries such as finance, earth, space, nuclear, energy, environment, law and science and technology.

When we seek the universities of tomorrow to stand tall in the top knowledge league, they need to be provided with genuine autonomy, excellent infrastructure and funding as well as unimpeded by any bureaucratic and political interference. Even as there is growing expansion and “massification” in the university system, we need to first strengthen the existing institutions rather than spread resources too thin.

Excellence in universities

Now it is high time too make “excellence” as our credo and institutionalise it as a top priority through a National Mission for Excellence in the universities. As a corollary, the UGC as a product of the bygone will need to pave the way for a University Excellence Commission (UEC). It will need to be statutorily ordained under a new UEC Act of the Parliament. It could comprise persons having impeccable scholarly credentials, wider horizons as well as societal concern and empathy. The tasks of grant allocation as well as regulatory aspects could be just components of UEC's larger mandate to be a vehicle for promoting excellence in the universities.

It is necessary to bring down the edifice of fossilised rules, regulations, attitudes and statistical jugglery like the API to earnestly provide a conducive environment. UEC must become a professional entity chaired by a dynamic scholar with proven credentials of

research, innovation, ideas and passion to lead by example. The blueprint for a new UEC would require a concrete roadmap for salvation of the Indian university system to play a pivotal role for ushering into a knowledge society within a period of one decade (2015-2025). This would call for reaching out to the people with vision, iconoclastic thinking, and working out innovative processes, an agile and flexible institutional structure to meet challenge of the global digital age.

Finding visionary heads of varsities

Alongside the drastic changes in role of the MHRD, crafting of a new UEC, a new education policy and national mission on excellence, the issue of stellar leadership of universities need to attain top priority. The current system and criteria for appointment of vice chancellors leaves much to be desired.

The position, the process and the outcome have been undermined to such an extent that most of the appointees end up “maintaining” the system rather than provide a strong leadership, infuse energy and bring about results through cutting-edge ideas to excel.

It requires bringing in dynamic scholar-leaders who could infuse fresh blood in 726 Indian universities that are widely known to lack quality that denies world-class education to the students. If we are indeed desirous of catching up with best in the world, we need to find genuine scholars of integrity, vision and wider horizons as vice chancellors who are in their late forties. It is high time that we inculcate a thinking culture in our system so as to promote excellence as a part of our ethos and as a way of life itself.

We need to create circumstances, razor- sharp understanding and infrastructure that could enable us to replicate knowledge traditions from some of our best ancient universities. One only hopes that closure of the UGC will herald about a new renaissance, freeing of universities from control, futuristic changes in leadership, a robust regulatory framework and approach as well as bring about excellence as our credo both in words and deed.

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TELEGRAPH, MAY 2, 2015

Teacher-job rules hit PhD holders' chances

Apex court upholds UGC's 2009 order, Centre unlikely to seek review

Basant Kumar Mohanty

New Delhi, May 1: The human resource development ministry and the University Grants Commission (UGC) are unlikely to seek review of a Supreme Court judgment validating a contentious UGC decision that debars a large number of PhD holders from teaching jobs.

At a meeting of the UGC last week, the matter came up for discussion. Two members of the commission said the representative of the HRD ministry and the UGC officials gave the impression that they may not seek any review of the court decision.

On March 16, the apex court upheld the UGC's regulations of 2009 on minimum qualification for appointment of teachers in colleges and universities. According to the regulations, the eligibility for assistant professor in a college or a university is the National Eligibility Test or the State Level Eligibility Test (SLET) qualifications. However, a candidate who has a PhD that complies with the UGC's PhD norms of 2009 would be eligible for the post even if he has not cleared NET or SLET.

The UGC had in 2009 provided for admission through entrance test and course work before working on the thesis. It also laid down that a teacher cannot guide more than eight PhD students and five MPhil students at any point in time. Before this, every university had its own PhD regulations.

The 2009 order threatened the careers of thousands of existing PhD holders who had not cleared NET/SLET. After protests, the UGC last year decided to amend its regulations to grant an exemption to the pre-2009 PhD holders. It sent the amended regulations to the HRD ministry, which has not yet granted approval.

Ruling in a case filed by a few PhD holders, the apex court held that the HRD ministry and UGC are the highest policy makers and their norms must be followed.

Since no assessment has been done to ascertain if any universities were following the UGC's 2009 norms for PhDs, it is not clear which of the pre-2009 PhD holders can be granted exemption from NET/SLET. The confusion is affecting the prospects of many aspiring teachers, including those who had earned their doctorates from universities that followed rigorous norms.

After serving as ad hoc faculty in Dyal Singh College under Delhi University for seven years, Manoj Singh was selected as assistant professor in March but his appointment has now been put on hold.

The college has sought clarification from the varsity whether it can appoint him since he does not have NET/SLET qualification. The university has not replied because there is no clarity on the issue yet.

"I have done PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). But the college is not allowing me to join as a regular teacher after selecting me," Singh said.

Out of nine candidates selected, seven have been allowed to join in this college because they had qualified NET/SLET.

College principal I.S. Bakshi could not be reached for comment despite repeated calls to his mobile phone.

At last week's meeting, the UGC members brought up the plight of the pre-2009 PhD holders.

"The UGC and government officials said that they would respect the Supreme Court direction," a member said.

Another member said the HRD ministry was not approving the amendments to the regulations on the ground that many universities have started implementing the UGC regulations. Any change would add confusion and dilute quality, he said.

Teachers' organisations feel the regulations should be amended since they cannot be implemented retrospectively. All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations general secretary Ahok Barman said the government must file a review petition. "You cannot implement a policy retrospectively. It is a big blow to thousands of PhD holders who want to become teachers," Barman said.

Former Madras University vice-chancellor S.P. Thyagarajan, who headed a committee that prepared the 2009 regulations on PhDs, hailed the Supreme Court ruling.

"Personally, I support the court order. There has to be some quality control in teacher appointment. All PhDs should not be treated equivalent to NET," he said.

INDIAN EXPRESS, MAY 1, 2015

IIT, IIM, National Law School get Ford Foundation funds

Jay Mazoomdaar

The Gujarat government says US-based non-profit Ford Foundation in India is involved in "covert activities" that violate its "stated goals of promoting communal harmony,

democratic principles and social justice.” The Centre has put it on its watchlist and restricted movement of its funds without prior approval in “national interest and security”.

But at least seven premium Central institutions run research and scholarship programmes that drew over \$2.5 million from the foundation between 2008 and 2013.

These are: IIT Bombay, IIM Ahmedabad, National Law School of India University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia, GB Pant Social Science Institute and National Academy of Legal Studies and Research.

Describing the government’s decision as “unfortunate”, R Venkata Rao, Vice Chancellor, NLSIU, said the institute does not need the government’s permission to accept funds for projects.

“We are a statutory body and our finances are subject to audit. From the founding days of this institute, Ford Foundation has funded us and remained part of the academic culture. At present, very eminent scholars, including our founding director N R Madhava Menon, are handling the Ford Foundation projects and have done great work thanks to the benevolence of the foundation,” said Rao.

The Bangalore-based NLSIU currently has two Ford Foundation-funded projects and a Ford Foundation Chair on Public Interest Litigation. A \$300,000 Ford Foundation project on capacity building and technical assistance was due to conclude in May 2014 but has been extended till December 2015.

The other project, a three-year legal training programme worth \$600,000, will conclude this July. “The Ford Foundation was generous to sanction \$600,000 but we could utilise only \$400,000,” said Professor V S Gigimon, assistant programme coordinator.

In IIT-Bombay, the Ford Foundation-funded project on affordable broadband will continue till May 2016. The three-year project was launched with a grant of \$530,000 in 2013.

According to the institute’s research and development office, another three-year Ford Foundation funded project — on the feasibility of using white spaces for wireless broadband services for the rural poor — was scheduled to run till July 2015 but was concluded before time.

“We (IITs) don’t need government’s permission (for accepting funds). Regarding the recent development, we have not received any instruction from the government on funds from the Ford Foundation,” Dr Devang Khakhar, Director, IIT Bombay, told The Indian Express.

IIM-Ahmedabad received \$164,840 and \$150,000 in 2008 and 2012 from the foundation for “impact assessment of pilot projects using wireless technology to provide Internet access to underserved rural communities in central India and to disseminate the findings”.

Details of these projects were not readily available as Rekha Jain, who led the policy advocacy studies, was travelling abroad, an IIM-A spokesperson said. Ashish Nanda, Director, IIM-A, was also travelling and could not be contacted immediately, his office said.

JNU concluded two Ford Foundation Grant programmes in 2005 and 2011. In 2010, the JNU Vice Chancellor's speech mentioned a range of MoUs with sponsoring foundations and research institutes including Ford Foundation.

According to the university's finance office, there are two "perennial endowments" from the foundation to fund a visiting professorial fellowship in the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance (CSLG), and scholarships in the Department of International Studies.

"I remember attending a Ford Foundation programme some time back. As such, we don't need the government's clearance unless foreign accounting is involved and we haven't got any specific instruction on Ford Foundation funds," said S K Sopory, Vice Chancellor, JNU.

Jamia Millia Islamia, which has a Ford Foundation endowed chair, also received \$200,000 in 2013 for research on "how the transition to digital television broadcasting affects access, openness, affordability and diversity of content and to disseminate the findings at conferences, in print and online".

"Jamia receives funds from a number of sources and Ford Foundation has been funding research activities in India for a very long time. I don't think we need government's permission for accepting funds for research etc," said Talat Ahmad, Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia.

Allahabad-based GB Pant Social Science Institute got \$200,000 in 2009 to research and document "links between heterodox religious sects and democratic empowerment of Dalit communities" in Uttar Pradesh.

Hyderabad-based NALSAR got \$330,000 in 2013 for a human rights project to build knowledge of legal remedies for enforcement of economic and social rights in India.

In an email reply to queries, the Ford Foundation said: “As a charitable foundation, everything we do is transparent and readily available on our website. As the current inquiry progresses we will continue to respond fully to official queries directed to us. At present we have not yet heard directly from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Our aim is to work closely with government partners to clarify any area of question or concern. If the government suggests methods by which we can strengthen and improve our grant-making processes, we will take swift and appropriate steps to incorporate them. We are confident in our work and compliance with law and look forward to a constructive outcome.”

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TELEGRAPH, MAY 4, 2015

In its own interest

Strategic autonomy as an Indian foreign policy option

Kanwal Sibal

In the joint statement issued during the Indian prime minister's visit to France in April, the two sides reaffirmed "their independence and strategic autonomy" in joint efforts to tackle global challenges. In the French case, as a member of Nato, it is not so clear what strategic autonomy might mean, but in our case it would essentially mean independence in making strategic foreign policy decisions, and, consequently, rejecting any alliance relationship. It would imply the freedom to choose partnerships as suits our national interest and be able to forge productive relationships with countries that may be strategic adversaries among themselves.

In practical terms, this means that India can improve relations with the United States of America and China while maintaining close ties with Russia. It can forge stronger ties with Japan and still seek a more stable relationship with China. It can forge strong ties with Israel and maintain very productive ties with the Arab world, including backing the Palestinians in the United Nations. It means that India can have strategic partnerships with several countries, as is the case at present with the US, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Russia, China, Japan, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Canada, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Iran and the like.

It means that India can be a member of BRICS and the RIC dialogues, as well as IBSA, which exclude the West, and also forge closer political, economic and military ties with the Western countries. Our strategic autonomy is being expressed in other ways too. India is a democracy and believes that its spread favours its interests, but it is against the imposition of democracy by force on any country. If the spread of democracy is in India's strategic interest, using force to spread it is against its strategic interest too, as is shown by the use of force to bring about democratic changes in West Asia by destroying secular authoritarian regimes and replacing them with Islamic authoritarian regimes. Likewise, India believes in respect for human rights, but is against the use of the human rights agenda to further the geo-political interests of particular countries, essentially Western, on a selective basis.

For a large country like India, which has the potential of becoming a big power in the future, strategic autonomy is a compelling choice. By virtue of its demographic, geographic, economic and military size, India must lead, but does not have yet the comprehensive national power to do so. It cannot subordinate itself to the policies and interests of another country, however powerful, as its political tradition and the functioning of its democracy will not allow this. India may not be strong enough to lead, but it is sufficiently strong not to be led.

India preserved its strategic autonomy even in the face of severe technology sanctions from the West on nuclear and missile issues. It preserved it by not signing the non-proliferation treaty and continuing its missile programme. By going overtly nuclear in 1998, India once again exercised its strategic autonomy faced with attempts to close the doors permanently on its nuclear programme by the permanent extension of the NPT and the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and fissile material cutoff treaty initiatives.

In some quarters in India and abroad, the idea of strategic autonomy is contested as another manifestation of India's non-aligned mindset, its propensity to sit on the fence, and avoid taking sides and assuming responsibility for upholding the present international order as a rising power should. These critics want India to join the US camp more firmly to realize its great power ambitions. These arguments ignore the reality that while the US has been crucial to China's economic rise, China has been sitting on the fence for many years, even as a permanent member of the UN security council. Far from sacrificing its strategic autonomy, it has become a strategic challenger of the US.

To be clear, the US government has officially stated its respect for India's position on preserving its strategic autonomy, and denies any expectation that India would establish an alliance kind of relationship with it. It is looking for greater convergence in the foreign policies of the two countries, which is being realized.

During Narendra Modi's visit to the US in September, 2014, and Barack Obama's visit to India in January this year, a strategic understanding on Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean issues, encapsulated in the January 2015 joint strategic vision for the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean has emerged. This document suggests a shift in India's strategic thinking, with a more public position against Chinese maritime threat and a willingness to join the US in promoting partnerships in the region.

Modi chose a striking formulation in his joint press conference with Obama in September when he said that the US was intrinsic to our Look East and Link West policies, which would suggest a growing role for the US in our foreign policy thinking. During Obama's January visit, the joint statement noted that India's Act East policy and the US rebalance to Asia provided opportunities for India, the US and other Asia-Pacific countries to work closely to strengthen regional ties. This was the first time that India implicitly endorsed the US rebalance towards Asia and connected our Act East policy to it.

Rather than interpreting it as watering down our strategic autonomy, one can see it as strengthening it. So far, India has been hesitant to be seen drawing too close strategically to the US because of Chinese sensitivities. China watches closely what it sees are US efforts to rope India into its bid to contain China. At the same time, China continues its policies to strengthen its strategic posture in India's neighbourhood and in the Indian Ocean at India's expense, besides aggressively claiming Indian territory.

By strengthening relations with the US (which is strategically an Asian power), Japan and Vietnam, and, at the same time, seeking Chinese investments and maintaining a high-level dialogue with it, India is emulating what China does with India, which is to seek to

build overall ties as much as possible on the economic front, disavow any negative anti-India element in its policies in our neighbourhood, but pursue, simultaneously, strategic policies intended to contain India's power in its neighbourhood and delay its regional extension to Asia.

In discussing the scope of our strategic autonomy, one should recognize that the strength of US-China ties, especially economic and financial, far exceeds that of India-US ties. India has to be careful, therefore, in how far it wants to go with the US with a view to improving its bargaining power with China. The other point to consider is the US-Pakistan equation. The US has just announced \$1 billion of military aid to Pakistan; its position on the Taliban is against our strategic interests in Afghanistan; its stand on Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism against us is not robust enough.

To conclude, strategic autonomy for India means that it would like to rely as far as possible on its own judgment on international issues, balance its relations with all major countries, forge partnerships with individual powers and take foreign-policy positions based on pragmatism and self-interest, and not any alliance or group compulsion.

The author is former foreign secretary of India

LABOUR

HINDUSTAN TIMES, MAY 2, 2015

New labour law will make it easy for firms to lay off staff

In keeping with its objective of simplifying the country's archaic labour laws, the government is planning to integrate three labour laws into a single code.

In keeping with its objective of simplifying the country's archaic labour laws, the government is planning to integrate three labour laws into a single code, which will enable companies to fire their staff without any official sanction if their staff strength is up to 300.

It will also make it slightly tougher to form workers unions.

According to the draft Labour Code on Industrial Relations Bill, 2015, prepared by the labour ministry, registering a trade union will require at least 10% of the employees or 100 workers, in contrast to the current requirement of seven members, regardless of the size of the establishment.

Also, only employees will be permitted to form unions, and in the unorganised sector, two outside officials can become members of a union.

The new law will combine Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Trade Unions Act, 1926, and the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946.

The government has called a meeting with trade unions and industry representatives on May 6 to discuss proposals of the draft of the Labour Code, an official said.

Reacting to media reports that the bill was "anti-workers", the official said: "It's a misconception that this Bill is anti-workers as we have proposed to increase compensation for workers in certain cases of a job loss to 45 days' pay, from the existing provision of 15 days." The draft bill also proposes that all workers employed in industries for more than a year will get three months of notice in case there is a plan for retrenchment, but it shall not apply to an "undertaking set up for the construction of buildings, bridges, roads, canals, dams or for other construction work."

LIBRARIES

TIMES OF INDIA, MAY 1, 2015

This library is a lifeline for rural readers

[Shreya Roy Chowdhury](#)

NEW DELHI: On Saturdays, it's Majra Dabas and Ghevra villages. In the rural parts of northwest Delhi, the Delhi Public Library's mobile service provides the only option available to children and adults who want to read. It goes there on public demand.

The AAP government's rather quirky approach to budget consultation exposed an unexpected demand for public libraries in certain areas. Jaibhagwan, an Ayurveda practitioner in Majra Dabas, had written to the local MLA. He even found space for a library in front of his dispensary. "I thought it would help the village kids. The closest library is in Bawana," he says.

The 2,500-3,000 titles the bus can hold cater to three villages—Budhanpur, Majra Dabas and Salahpur Majra. "Many read... and not just kids," says Jaibhagwan. He explains that the young and the middle-aged villagers are largely literate; now the aged are too, thanks to night classes at the anganwadi centres. Consequently, the age range of the library's subscriber base is wide.

One of the first to return a book is Satyavati, 65. A retired physical training teacher, she subscribed when the library started coming to Majra Dabas. "It was a good book," she says referring to a translation of Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, "The entire collection is good." It is certainly varied. It carries books in English, Hindi and even Punjabi. "We select books according to the demand," says Mahinder Singh who handles the mobile library division of Delhi Public Library. Satyavati borrows Hazari Prasad Dwivedi's *Anamdas ka Potha*.

Readers come in ones and twos—a few teens, a girl returning a song book, several matronly women, ghunghats pulled over their heads. "They're held up getting Aadhaar cards," says Chandrapal Bharti, overseer of the service. It's a busy time in general—most villagers are farmers and it's time for reaping. "Till January, membership was for three years and free. The form cost Rs 2," says Rahisuddin, the librarian. "Now we charge a membership fee of Rs 20 and the period is five years."

"The mobile libraries started in 1958," adds Bharti, "but the service was stopped when diesel buses were banned. It took three years to get CNG ones and relaunch it". The

masterjis started bringing books back to the villages in 2010. Rahisuddin's register has 163 names; of these 41 are active members. That increased by three on Saturday—all newly school/college graduates seeking reference books to prepare for competitive exams. The rural route is one of six (the last is a Braille library); at three of the 11 locations it covers over six days, active members have dwindled to zero; Ghevra is one. The most popular, as per Rahisuddin's register, are Shahbad Dairy and Bakhtawarpur. "You'll find lines there". Numbers increase by 20% in the winter; the buses don't even have fans.

DPL is under the ministry of culture. Chairman B S Baswan feels its place is with the state. "Education is a concurrent subject. There is a case for the state government taking over," he says.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

HINDUSTAN TIMES, MAY 4, 2015

**Power struggle in Delhi: AAP, L-G Jung spar over routing of files
In this photo taken on December 28, 2013, Delhi L-G Najeeb Jung and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal share the dais during the latter's swearing-in ceremony at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi.**

Delhi lieutenant governor Najeeb Jung on Sunday instructed officials to not follow chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's order this week of sending all files to him, asking bureaucrats to not flout rules and sparking off a fresh struggle for the reins of the city government.

Jung's terse response came after Kejriwal's principal secretary wrote to all Delhi government officials on Thursday to "not bother the office of the lieutenant governor" with policy files, a demand that was termed irregular by former top bureaucrats.

"The role of the CM and the council of ministers is to aid and advise the L-G where the latter is entitled to act solely on his own discretion. All files relating to matters for which legislative assembly can make law should come to the L-G for final approval," a statement by Jung's office said, asking officers to follow the rules laid down by the Constitution.

The Delhi government, however, refused to comment on the letter that effectively overturned the CM's directive.

The power struggle between Delhi's top two began just 11 days after the Aam Aadmi Party government took over following a landslide victory.

Kejriwal wrote to the L-G asking for files related to police, public order and land to be routed through the chief minister's office. All three key departments are not under the CM.

"I am issuing necessary instructions to the home department and the land and building department to route files pertaining to matters connected with public order, police and land through chief minister's office (CMO)," Kejriwal said, citing provisions in the transaction of business of the government of NCT of Delhi rules, 1993.

The demand was flatly refused, leading to heightened tensions between two of the Capital's most powerful figures.

Jung and Kejriwal share a torrid history with the Delhi CM often accusing the L-G of siding with the BJP last year when the Capital was under President's Rule. At one point, the AAP chief even alleged Jung was turning a blind eye to the saffron party's attempts to poach legislators of his two-year-old outfit.

The two have been on a collision course since Kejriwal's first term, when Jung criticised the AAP chief for sitting on a dharna that threatened the Republic Day parade last year.

As the national capital, Delhi's government follows a complicated pattern.

Important departments such as law and order and police, in addition to crucial agencies such as the Delhi Development Authority, function under the Centre and are effectively headed by the L-G, who reports to the Union home ministry.

This has been Kejriwal's big grouse, who rode to power promising direct control of the police and stricter vigilance on law and order, but has since blamed rising crime in the city on him not having complete control of the law enforcement agencies.

But former officials don't agree with the CM and say the L-G is well within his rights to ask for all files related to policy matters – an area of responsibility delegated to him by the President.

“The principal secretary to the chief minister has no role in this. Since the CM's office is not a separate department, he doesn't have the powers to issue such a letter and this can't be treated as a government order. If such an order is to be passed, it can be done by the chief secretary not the CM's principal secretary,” said Omesh Saigal, former chief secretary of Delhi.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

STATESMAN, MAY 2, 2015

Room at the top
Amulya Ganguli

The inordinate delay in filling up the posts of the Central Information Commissioner (CIC) is not the only sign of the Narendra Modi government's curious way of functioning. The latest count suggests that several hundred posts are vacant in various academic institutions.

However, the reason for these empty slots varies from a suspicion of the government's intention to paucity in the ranks of the saffron brotherhood of persons capable of doing justice to a position requiring scholarship of a high order.

In the CIC's case, the official explanation for the delay is that although the government has shortlisted the candidates for the posts of the CIC and three information commissioners, it is awaiting clearance from the Intelligence Bureau and the Central Bureau of Investigation. The CIC's post has been vacant since August last year and the posts of the information commissioners for a year.

However, the suspicion is that the government is taking its time because of a reluctance to expose itself to the Right to Information (RTI) pleas which are heard by the commission. In the absence of the officials, the pendency of the cases before the panel now totals more than 37,000.

While these posts are bound to be filled sooner or later if only because the judiciary is looking into the matter, the same cannot be said of an estimated 600-plus posts which are lying vacant in the academic bodies apparently because the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the head of the Hindutva camp, is unable to locate people who are qualified enough for the jobs.

Needless to say, this "cultural" organization takes a more than cursory interest in such appointments presumably to ensure that the targeted outfits follow the "correct" ideological path. Another interest of the RSS is to weed out the left-liberals who were chosen for these institutions when the Congress-led governments were in power.

For the present, however, what the inability of the RSS to find suitable nominees means is that there are not enough people who, in the opinion of the RSS, subscribe to its right-wing, pro-Hindu views and also have a reputation in the world of the intelligentsia for their knowledge and organizational capabilities.

It is also possible that the RSS is not in a hurry over the selections because of the opprobrium which both it as well as the government have earned over the choice of several saffronites for important posts.

One of them was a “historian”, Y. Sudershan Rao, who now heads the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). He has been accused of not knowing the difference between history and mythology. Because of the rightist lurch which the ICHR has taken under him, a distinguished historian, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, has resigned as chief editor of the Indian Historical Review, a journal brought out by the ICHR. In Prof. Bhattacharya’s view, the government appointees tend to “fantasize about history”.

Like the choice of Rao, the nomination of Pahlaj Nihalani, known as a producer of B-grade Bollywood films, as the censor board chief following his extravagant praise of Modi has led to several embarrassing episodes for the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, including the scrapping of the censor board chief’s list of cuss words which, according to him, could not be used in the films.

According to a report in the Mumbai-based newspaper, DNA (Daily News and Analysis), the institutions with vacancies at the top include the National Council of Educational Research and Training, the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Indian Council of Philosophical Research and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

However, the failure of the RSS to select suitable candidates for these and other academic organizations simply because there are apparently not enough Right-wingers in the country is not surprising. Historically, the Rightists have rarely played an important role in colleges, universities and the academia in general. These have almost always been the preserve of the Leftists not only in West Bengal, but nearly all over the country.

The reason undoubtedly had a great deal to do with the predominance of the Congress, which always maintained a left-of-centre position with the 1955 Avadi declaration about the intention to usher in a “socialistic pattern of society” being its most prominent statement.

Even if socialism was abandoned with the opening up of the economy in 1991, the change was economic and had little to do with the Rightist positions of the RSS with its emphasis on a patriarchal, ultra-conservative, anti-minority and pro-Hindu outlook in the social sector.

Ironically, there is now a dichotomy between Narendra Modi’s espousal of market-oriented policies and the backward-looking views of the RSS which have the support of the outfits affiliated to it like the protectionist Swadeshi Jagran Manch, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh and others.

It appears that while Modi is pursuing a “neo-liberal” line - to use a word favoured by the Communists - in the economic field, he has left the educational arena open for the RSS-types. But, the problem with this approach is that such segregation between the two sectors may not work in real life because Modi’s “modernism” will come into conflict with the antediluvian outlook of the RSS and even prove embarrassing for the Prime Minister.

The present failure to fill academic posts is a pointer in this direction as were the claims of several saffron “scientists” before the Indian Science Congress about the presence of aircraft in ancient India. This view was recently confirmed by the Rajasthan primary education minister who said that the children should be taught about the Pushpak Vimaans.

Evidently, the RSS has candidates for the lower educational rungs, but not for those further up as they require a modicum of acceptable scholarship.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

STATESMAN, MAY 1, 2015

When rape becomes a sacrament

Monicka Vadera and Tehseen Poonawalla

A rape is a rape regardless of the relationship between the rapist and the victim. Is it acceptable that in a civilised society a man can force a woman to satisfy his urge just because he has had consensual sex in the past with her?? This is the question confronting us when we debate Marital Rape. And every time this topic comes up, those who believe there cannot be 'rape' in a marriage bring out a passionate religious argument to support of their case.

In fact our Minister of State for Home, Haribhai Parathibhai Chaudhary, whose duty it is to uphold the Constitution that guarantees all Indians the rights to life, liberty, justice and equality used exactly the same 'marriage is sacred' and 'religious beliefs' defence in Parliament when he said his government was not going to criminalise marital rapes.

In India, we are often told “Pati Parmeshwar Hota Hai” (The husband is God) and perhaps this teaching is being used to support some men’s views that a wife cannot say "no" to her husband. After all, the husband is God and it is his divine right to "take" as and when he pleases, no matter what his wife's health or how she is feeling, or even her disagreement. And the wife, well she simply must submit.

Rape is not about sex or love. It’s about power, ego and control. And men who rape their partners have this need to dominate and maintain their authority and superiority in the relationship and they force themselves on their wives even if they are unwilling.

Most women who are victims of marital rape have great difficulty in defining it. The idea that marriage means a woman does not have a sovereign right over her own body and sexuality is very much prevalent. A wife who is raped often questions her decision to refuse sexual intercourse with her husband. In fact such is the plight of women that most cannot even discuss this subject with their own parents and even if they do, in many cases societal pressure or the future of the children or financial dependence forces the woman to continue the relationship with the abusive husband.

Research indicates that marital rape often has severe consequences. Women who are beaten up by their husbands before being raped can suffer injuries to their private organs, soreness, internal bleeding and bruising. Other consequences of marital rape could include unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages, infections and sexually transmitted diseases.

Wives who are raped by their husbands could also suffer severe psychological consequences like depression, living in fear, getting suicidal thoughts, nightmares, sleeping disorders, an inferiority complex and could end up becoming sexually dysfunctional.

Yet in India both the legislature and the judiciary have failed to recognise marital rape. While there are laws against domestic violence and dowry the most shameful act in which a husband forces himself sexually on his wife, thinking that it is his right to have sex with her even without her consent, is not considered a crime.

While we have already covered the religious arguments that are used to justify this horrible crime the legal shield that allowed men to do as they pleased with their wives can be traced back to statements made by Sir Matthew Hale, Chief Justice in 17th century England. Lord Hale wrote that “the husband cannot be guilty of rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual consent and contract the wife hath given up herself this kind unto her husband which she cannot retract”.

Isn't it a matter of shame that our country that has made so much progress in various fields is incapable of bestowing rights on our women? And what use will it be if we conquer the Moon or land on Mars, or build missiles that can hit targets across continents or launch rockets or accumulate wealth if we cannot give dignity and respect to our partner.?

Those who argue against Marital Rape laws put forward these arguments:

1) That it is almost impossible to prove marital rape. It is implied in a marriage the couple will have a sexual relationship.

Just because a crime may be difficult to prove does not justify someone committing it. Studies show that bringing in a law that recognises marital rape acts as a deterrent. Moreover having an intimate relationship out of love and consent cannot be the same as being forced against one's will.

2) That a vengeful wife may use the law to charge an innocent husband of the offence of marital rape.

If proving actual rape in a marriage is difficult, proving a fabricated charge beyond reasonable doubt will be even more difficult.

3) Marital Rape laws will destroy marriages.

Any husband who rapes his wife has already destroyed the marriage. To allow someone to get away with rape only to protect the 'institution' makes no sense.

For far too long in our country have women been treated as second-class citizens. Marriage is not a licence to have legal sex even if the wife is unwilling. There is an urgent need to change mindsets and give our women the dignity they deserve. Women have a sovereign right over their bodies and this includes their right to say no. We need to respect their sexual rights and choices and anyone violating that must be punished.

As for the Government they have taken a stand that they believe marriage is considered as a "sacrament". We truly wish our PM had thought the same way about his marriage.

The writers are, respectively, a jewellery designer and an entrepreneur.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS LINE, MAY 1, 2015

Smart city concerns

It's not too late to revisit the drawing board

The Prime Minister's signature 'smart cities' project has received a major boost with the Cabinet clearing Rs. 48,000 crore for 100 of them, and another Rs. 50,000 crore for rejuvenating 500 cities, improving their civic amenities and institutions of municipal governance so that they are ready for future IT smartness. This sum is to be spent over five years, with each 'selected' city (the States make a pitch) getting a central assistance of Rs. 100 crore each year over this period. The rest of the funds will be raised from the State governments, municipal debt, real estate investment trusts, infrastructure debt funds and the PPP vehicle. The first challenge is whether such a financial commitment will throw the government's finances or other important infrastructure expenditures, such as the Railways, out of gear. The second question is related to the failure of PPPs — will the cost of servicing infrastructure become too high for the citizens? A financial roadmap that learns from the mistakes of the past must be put together to allay these doubts. Modelled on Seoul, Singapore and Barcelona, smart cities are meant to leverage India's IT prowess to alter India's urban experience — they will be driven by clean energy, with the government working efficiently, thanks to the ICT backbone. Beyond this, however, the policy literature tells us little. What, for instance, is yet to be explained is how the use of cloud-enabled data to run a range of services will be managed for security risk. While this is a project that could take India up the technology ladder if implemented well, the government should take stakeholders into confidence at every stage, which entails being transparent on awarding large contracts and dealing with Big Data and privacy concerns.

Contrary to popular belief, small cities will be carved out of existing cities, which takes care of land acquisition concerns. The idea seems to be to create enclaves of excellence within urban India so that they rub off on other cities. For example, providing 24x7 electricity and water looks like a tall order but if water recycling and renewables are to deliver the goods, we will have a workable model. But for smart cities to become the new normal, they must take the broader socio-economic reality into account. The concept paper does not discuss affordable housing for the poor. These cities cannot work unless the gap between the digital 'haves' and 'have-nots' narrows dramatically.

The policy has not taken into account India's industrialisation drive. These model cities have been conceived as service sector hubs rather than manufacturing townships, an inexplicable bias that does not fit in with the larger policy emphasis on manufacturing. Smart cities can, instead, be created along the lines of 'SEZ townships', as in China, where the workplace (be it factory or call centre) and home are situated in proximity to each other. In sum, the Centre must revisit the drawing board: it's not too late.

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